

verifiche  
rivista semestrale  
di scienze umane

Verifiche. Associazione di Studi filosofici  
Sede: via Francesco Algarotti 13/a – 35125 Padova  
Direttore responsabile: Antonella Benanzato  
Amministrazione: info@verificheonline.net  
Autorizzazione Tribunale di Padova n. 2445 del 17/09/2017  
Poste Italiane s.p.a. - Spedizione in Abb. Postale 70% - NE/PD  
Digitalandcopy sas - Vignate (MI), Via Roma 25  
Anno LII - N. 2 Luglio-Dicembre 2023  
www.verificheonline.net

PREZZO € 35,00

VERIFICHE 2023

2

verifiche

«VERIFICHE» ISSN 0391-4186

*Reason in Check.  
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

2023

ANNO LII N. 2

## Verifiche

Rivista fondata da Franco Chiereghin e Giuliano Rigoni

### *Direzione/Editors*

Luca Illetterati (Scientific Coordinator), Paolo Giuspoli (Editorial Coordinator), Francesca Menegoni.

### *Redazione/Editorial Staff*

Michela Bordignon, Francesco Campana (Final Editing), Valentina Chizzola, Luca Corti (Peer review Editor), Alberto Gaiani, Paolo Livieri, Giovanna Luciano, Armando Manchisi, Giovanna Miolli (Web Manager), Elena Nardelli (Final Editing), Antonio Nunziante, Federico Orsini, Giovanni Realdi, Barbara Santini (Reviews and Discussions Editor), Sergio Soresi, Alberto Vanzo.

### *Consiglio scientifico/Advisory Board*

Gabriel Amengual, Myriam Bienenstock, Rossella Bonito Oliva, Claudio Cesa (†), Franco Chiereghin, Ferruccio De Natale, Giannino Di Tommaso, Alfredo Ferrarin, Luca Fonnesu, Stephen Houlgate, Marco Ivaldo, Jean-François Kervégan, Claudio La Rocca, Eugenio Mazzarella, Adriaan Th. Peperzak, Michael Quante, Leonardo Samonà, Birgit Sandkaulen.

*The Journal uses a double-blind peer review procedure. Authors of articles to be considered for publication should email one copy in .doc or .rtf format, and another copy in .pdf format, to Luca Corti (redazione@verificheonline.net). Please include a short abstract in English (about 1,500 characters) and 4-8 keywords. The Journal accepts contributions in English, German, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Accepted contributions should be prepared according to the journal's guidelines. Book reviews are generally commissioned by the Editorial Staff. If you are interested in writing a book review, please contact Barbara Santini (recensioni@verificheonline.net). Books should be sent to the following address: «Verifiche», c/o Luca Illetterati, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sociologia, Pedagogia e Psicologia Applicata, Università degli Studi di Padova, Piazza Capitanato 3 - 35139 Padova, Italy.*

«Verifiche» is an international biannual, peer-reviewed Journal (ISSN: 0391-4186)

info@verificheonline.net  
www.verificheonline.net

## Verifiche

International biannual, peer-reviewed Journal (ISSN: 0391-4186)

### ABBONAMENTO/SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

Italia: privati € 55,00 (sostenitori € 65,00; studenti € 35,00); enti: € 80,00.

Europe and Mediterranean Countries: € 75,00 (students: € 55,00); institutional: € 100,00.

Other Countries: € 90,00 (students: € 70,00); institutional: € 115,00.

Spese postali incluse/Shipping charges included.

### FASCICOLI SINGOLI/SINGLE ISSUES

Italia privati: € 35,00 (fascicolo doppio: € 65,00); enti: € 45 (fascicolo doppio: € 85,00)

Europe and Mediterranean Countries: plus € 11 shipping charges (double i.: plus € 17).

Other Countries: plus € 16 shipping charges (double i.: plus € 22).

### FASCICOLI ARRETRATI/BACK ISSUES

Italia: € 40,00; Europe and Mediterranean Countries: € 40,00 (plus € 11 shipping charges).

Other Countries € 40,00 (plus € 16 shipping charges).

### MODALITÀ DI PAGAMENTO/METHOD OF PAYMENT

Con bonifico bancario intestato a/By bank transfer to:

«Verifiche. Associazione di studi filosofici»

Intesa Sanpaolo Spa - Filiale terzo settore Veneto centro, via Jappelli 13 - Padova

IBAN: IT54X0306909606100000142839

Nella causale specificare il numero o l'annata (per ordini) oppure solo l'abbonamento (in caso di abbonamento annuale). Please indicate *issue number* and *year* (for single issue) or *year* only (for yearly subscription).

Per usufruire dello sconto per studenti è necessario indicare nella casuale il numero di matricola e la sigla della sede universitaria (oppure l'indicazione dell'istituto).

For further details:

info@verificheonline.net  
www.verificheonline.net

Cover Design by Giulia Battocchia

# verifiche

Anno LII, N. 2, 2023

---

Dir. resp. Antonella Benanzato • Amministrazione: Via F. Algarotti 13/a - 35125 Padova  
Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Padova n. 2445 del 17.09.2017  
Digital And Copy S.a.s. - Vignate (MI) - Via Roma 25 - A. LII (2), 2023

---

## *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)



# THE BORDERS OF AN UNCERTAIN OBJECT. NATURE, DESIRE AND MAGIC IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

by Manuel Tangorra\*

***Abstract.** One of the essential aspects of Hegel's philosophy of spirit is the construction of religion as an inherent and necessary dimension of human freedom. The aim of this paper is to grasp the epistemic operation underlying this new scientific intelligibility capable to address the actual reality of the religious subjectivity. In that sense, it will analyze how Hegel's thought dwell in the specificity of religion by refusing its subordination to the empirical interactions of nature as well as to the moral horizons of practical reason. By situating the anthropological structure of consciousness at the core of the discourse on the believing subject, Hegel opens the possibility for a new perspective on the diversity of historical religions. The fundamental hypothesis of this work is that such an epistemic horizon requires the identification of the dysfunctional borders of the concrete existence of religions. Within the section of the Vorlesungen devoted to the 'determined religion', Hegel conceives this liminal existence of belief through the concept of magic (Zauberei), which is the first expression of a spiritual detachment from nature that nevertheless does not succeed in fixing the objectivity of the divine in a stable conscious representation. The problem that magic consciousness arises goes beyond the particular ethnological or historical reality it might denote. It brings up the question of the borders of the philosophical intelligibility of religious spiritual consciousness.*

***Keywords.** Hegel; Philosophy of Religion; History of Religions; Philosophical Anthropology; Magic*

## 1. Introduction

In his famous work *The Christian Faith*, F. Schleiermacher makes a statement that, read now, might appear quite surprising: «The term 'religion', as applied to Christianity, is quite new in our

\* Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

language»<sup>1</sup>. This quotation, dating from 1821, challenges the self-evidence of the object to which we give the name of religion. The certainty that the philosophy of religion claims to have towards the subject of its own discourse is disturbed by the inconstancy of the phenomenon it studies, as it can no longer assert to describe a given facticity. Schleiermacher's sentence is, therefore, the theoretical symptom of a profound transformation taking place at the turn of the 19th century. This shift is not, as it is often claimed, the relegation of faith in favor of reason, but the epistemic and political *construction* of religion as a social and human reality. The 'novelty' described by Schleiermacher is thus a sign of the inauguration of a scientific understanding of religious subjectivity. The result of this epistemological transformation is the consolidation of the 'sciences of religion' – autonomous vis-à-vis theology – over the course of the century, but its bases are to be found in the postulates of Classical German Philosophy.

By proposing a conceptual experimentation leading to a specifically philosophical reflection on religion, post-Kantian idealism and romanticism played an essential role in this transformation. An entire generation of thinkers was devoted to the institution of a disciplinary field, developing its methodological and hermeneutical tools. Although this trend exceeds the single figure of Hegel, the importance that the contributions made by the German philosopher, particularly in his teaching in Berlin in the 20s, is undeniable. Although in the Jena period Hegel had already made religion an intrinsic and necessary domain of the spirit, it is in the *Vorlesungen* where the systematics of this new knowledge are fully developed.

The aim of this article is to analyze the epistemic operation underlying the birth of this new sphere of knowledge that Hegel calls 'philosophy of religion' but also, from 1817 onwards, 'science of religion' (*Religionswissenschaft*)<sup>2</sup>. This epistemological inquiry does

<sup>1</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1960, p. 47; Eng. trans. by H.R. Mackintosh & J.S. Stewart, *The Christian Faith*, London-New York, T&T Clark, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion und Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes II. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien über Religionsphilosophie*



not concern the relationship of Hegel's philosophy to the validity of the theoretical postulates of belief, nor his take in the debate on the opposition between faith and reason. One of the essential aspects of the Hegelian proposal, I will argue, is the effort to understand the *actuality of belief* as a phenomenon of human freedom.

Hegel's attempt to grasp the reality of religious consciousness involves an analysis of the anthropological rooting of human freedom. Before deciding whether this abrogates divine transcendence or not, it should be noted how this perspective changes the production of the philosophical truth about religion. Within its speculative conceptualization, philosophy now involves the capacities of the subject – feeling, representation, thought –, its cultural and historical frameworks, as well as the desiring and driving structure of its activity. This paper focuses on the problem of the *anthropological genesis of religion* as a decisive issue in the construction of this new domain of philosophical knowledge and the demarcation of its elusive object.

This paper's hypothesis is that the problem of the *genesis* arises in a quite specific manner when it comes to thinking about the historical reality of representations, practices and rituals. In the section on *Determined Religion* of his *Vorlesungen*, Hegel faces the task of marking the *beginning* of belief, so as to circumscribe its actual existence. At this point, Hegel evokes and thematizes the concept of *Zauberei* as the first awakening of the spirit in its relationship to the Absolute. Below, I will argue that this category determines *the liminal form of religious subjectivity*. Rather than focusing on the eventual and highly problematic ethnological correlate of such a notion and its sources – an approach to the subject that has already been explored<sup>3</sup> – this article aims to analyze the epistemological problem

*der Sommersemester 1827 und 1831 und Sekundäre Überlieferung. Nachschriften zum Kolleg über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes des Sommersemesters 1829*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (GW, followed by volume/number), 29/2, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 2021, p. 3. All the English translations of GW 17, 29/1 and 29/2 are made by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Stewart, *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 43-47.

that this idea raises. It will propose a study of the process of delineating religion, and religiousness, as a new object of philosophical reflection.

This article will be divided into two main sections. Firstly, I will address the general transformation that Hegelian philosophy of religion entails by focusing particularly on the manifestation of God's revelation in the experience of human consciousness. The aim is to show the distance from earlier elaborations, notably those of Kantian philosophy, and to present the conceptual tools that enable religion to be addressed in its positive, institutional and social existence. The second part will specifically delve into the discourse on 'determined religion' to identify how Hegel tackles the problem of the origin of belief, and to understand the role of the concept of magical consciousness outlined therein. In doing so, I attempt to prove that Hegel's discourse opens the possibility of a meta-philosophical inquiry into the construction of intelligibility regimes of spiritual formations.

## 2. *The epistemic shift of the new science of religion*

### 2.1. The anthropological mediation of God

As I anticipated, among the fundamental transformations that shaped the new idealist elaboration on religion, there is the attempt to place the *anthropological grounding of belief* at the core of the concept of religion. In other words, for a whole generation of thinkers, to capture the truth of religion as a phenomenon of freedom it was imperative to address the structure of human *attitude* towards God. Henceforth, the possibility of knowing religion depended on identifying the driving and desiring conditions of the spiritual relationship to the Absolute. Hegel is a paradigmatic example of this orientation, insofar as he consolidates religion as a constitutive and necessary dimension of self-consciousness. As Hegel asserts in his *Vorlesungen* in Berlin – and anticipates in Jena<sup>4</sup> – the subjective

<sup>4</sup> Cf. «God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone and is only in that knowledge, and is only that knowledge itself [...]» (G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*

deployment of the believing consciousness is the absolute spirit itself, reflecting and determining itself: «God's Being requires the relation to consciousness»<sup>5</sup>. The subject's relationship with the Absolute is now inscribed at the heart of the divine's self-manifestation and, conversely, the divine exists only through its revelation in the subject's interiority. God's intimate Being and the knowledge of God are no longer two autonomous, self-sufficient entities. They configure a relationality that defines – and rules – the field of religious existence.

This transformation implies a merging of the different discourses that the Enlightenment had, by every means, sought to distinguish. Hegel's thought abolishes the straightforward opposition – characteristic of the debates of the *Aufklärer* against the anti-Enlightenment – between, on the one hand, theological discourse – concerning the Being of the divinity and the prescriptions of revelation – and, on the other, a consideration of the natural history of religious practices. Instead, Hegel constructs his philosophical project based on a dialectical relationship between God's revelation and the actual existence – anthropological, historical and social – of belief. The self-movement involved in the *revelation* (*Offenbarung*) of the Absolute is both inscribed within the intra-divine economy and at the heart of the believer's subjectivity.

This configures a double relationship that shapes the specificity of the religious experience: the believing consciousness – with its vicissitudes, crises and contradictions – is now part of the essence of the Absolute itself. The latter, likewise, only becomes *actual* through its instantiation in a concrete religious subjectivity. The epistemic key to this transformation, which ensures this mediation within the concept of religion, is the notion of representation (*Vorstellung*), which determines «the specific mode in which truth exists in religion»<sup>6</sup>. Thus, as presented in the

*des Geistes*, GW 9, ed. by W. Bonsiepen, R. Heede, Hamburg, Meiner, 1980, p. 407; Eng. trans. by M. Inwood, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 437.

<sup>5</sup> GW 29/1, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungsmanuskripte I (1816-1831)*, GW 17, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1987, p. 77.

*Vorlesungen* of 1824, representation is the element that configures the mediation between God and consciousness, a mediation that provides a specific and irreducible content for the philosophy of religion:

But God is this: not merely to be in himself, but to be just as essentially for himself. God is spirit, not finite spirit but absolute spirit. That God is spirit consists in this: that he is not only the essence that maintains itself in thought but also the essence that appears, the essence that endows itself with revelation and objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*]. Although we consider the idea of God in this way in the philosophy of religion, we at the same time also have before us the mode of God's representation. God stand before us and before itself [*er stellt sich uns vor und sich selbst*]. This is the aspect of the existence [*Dasein*] of the Absolute<sup>7</sup>.

The object referred to as 'religion' is thus constructed through the introduction of a becoming, a constitutive non-identity within the concept of God, which functions as the condition of its intelligibility. As the *Phenomenology of Spirit* announced in its preface, the truth of God does not exist in its pure immediacy<sup>8</sup>. Even the proofs of God's existence – which reached their apogee in Scholastic thought – fail to capture the self-movement of the Absolute. Instead, according to Hegel, we must address the living truth of the Absolute, which is not fixed in its Being – nor in an external proof that affirms it – but is presented through the knowledge that enunciates it, through the movement by which it makes itself *known* to consciousness.

Hegel inscribes the notion of religion within the dialectical structure of consciousness. As a consequence, he has been accused of dissolving any idea of transcendence, and of rendering God's

<sup>7</sup> GW 29/1, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> «The need to represent the Absolute as subject made use of the propositions: God is the eternal, or the moral world-order, or love, and so on. In such propositions the true is only posited directly as subject, not presented as the movement of reflecting itself into itself» (GW 9, p. 20; Eng. trans., p.12).

exteriority a mere ideal presence in human's thought<sup>9</sup>. Yet, the uniqueness of the Hegelian approach consists in the delimitation of a *specific* sphere, which is neither limited to a purely naturalistic anthropological description, nor to a purely theological disquisition. I must insist in the fact that Hegel constructs a new object constituted by a genetic relationality that cannot be reduced to the determinations it brings into relation. As some important works on the subject stated<sup>10</sup>, there is no anthropological reduction, then, simply because the poles of the relationship – human consciousness and God – do not remain the same after being inscribed in the relationship that religion engages. The relationship to God will not mobilize an essence of man that is always identical, but a *determinability* of human desire and activity that gives shape to the particular manifestations of the concept of religion. Accordingly, for the first time, a form of philosophical knowledge appears that succeeds not simply in defining religion, but also in understanding religions – in all their representational, ritual and institutional diversity – on the basis of a rationality that is immanent to these differences.

<sup>9</sup> The references here would be countless. I will limit myself to saying that this reading is present, critically, within orthodox theology as well as apologetically within Marxist reception. For emblematic examples of the former cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic. Theological Logical Theory*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005, pp. 41-44; K. Barth, *Protestant Thought. From Rousseau to Ritschel*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959, pp. 301-305. Of the latter, see the famous Lectures of A. Kojève, cf. A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 312.

<sup>10</sup> In this respect, may I highlight Gerard Lebrun's seminal work on the Hegelian philosophy of religion: «The God we now speak of is no longer the distant essence designated by the 'God' of earlier, nor is it even a new version of it. The I or Man whose name we now write is no more than homonymous with the finite being that Representation understands by these words. It's not the transcendent God who, unalterably identical to himself, would also become himself by recognizing himself in his Other; nor is it the same Other who recognizes himself as a moment in the Knowledge-of-God. These *becomings* have led to the collapse of the subjects who appear to be their bearers» (G. Lebrun, *La patience du concept: essai sur le discours hégélien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 130, translation by the author).

## 2.2. From boundaries to borders

In order to better understand this movement, it is useful to compare it with Kant's procedure for framing religion within the *boundaries* (*Grenzen*) of reason. In his famous work of 1793, Kant wanted to identify the rational core of the religious, not through the theoretical capture of the Divine Being, but in the postulates of practical reason<sup>11</sup>. This was a philosophical discourse *on* religion, which conceived its truth in terms of its own convergence with the subject's horizon of autonomy. This leads Kant to establish a sharp dichotomy between a religion of reason – determined by the boundaries of practical reason – and those religions that hinder the relationship between human action and the essential ends of reason.

The *limit* is clear and conclusive<sup>12</sup>: on the one hand, there is the ideal of a rational religion based on a series of principles – providence, immortality of the soul and a future life – which are the corollary of the critical self-determination of reason<sup>13</sup>; and on the other, the whole dogmatic, pastoral and ecclesiastic diversity

<sup>11</sup> Cf. «[It is presupposed] a practical, hence free assertoric faith that needs only the idea of God, which must come inevitably to any moral and serious (and therefore faith-based) work for the good, without one's presuming to be able to secure objective reality for it through theoretical cognition». Kant's works are cited throughout the text according to the *Akademie-Ausgabe* – I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (ed. by) Bd. 1-22 Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, ab Bd. 24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Berlin 1900ff – with an indication of the volume and page number. RGV, AA 06: 164; Eng. trans. by W. Pluhar, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2009, p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> One might recall Kant's distinction between limit (*Schranke*) and boundary (*Grenze*) in the *Prolegomena*. It is precisely the 'fixed' character that belongs to the boundary, insofar as it separates two previously constituted domains (Cf. Prol, AA 04: 352.). In what follows, I will use the English words 'limit' and 'boundary' interchangeably to refer to this latter, properly metaphysical, meaning.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. RGV, AA 06: 157; Postulates that are already announced at the conclusion of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: Cf. KrV AA 02: 531-538.

formed by ‘statutory religions’. These ‘pseudo-services’ (*Afterdienst*) impose mandates that diverge from the practical norm of freedom, and overturn (*Umkehren*) the relationship between means and practical ends<sup>14</sup>. Actual religions – the revealed, positive belief that exists concretely in history – only find their truth when they *approximate* to the ‘pure rational faith’<sup>15</sup>.

Epistemologically speaking, this dualism reveals an incapacity to grasp, differentiate and compare positive religions in all their particularity: statutory religions *are all equally discarded* outside the boundaries of reason<sup>16</sup>. When they converge with practical rationality, they do so only in an external way, as an accessory pedagogical mean to communicate an already established truth. What Kant lacks is the identification of a specifically religious rationality – neither purely practical nor purely theoretical – that would enable an

<sup>14</sup> Cf. «This is the true service of the church under the dominion of the good principle; that service, however, where revelation faith is to precede religion is pseudoservice, through which the moral order is entirely reversed (*ganz umgekehrt*), and what is only means is commanded unconditionally (as if as purpose)» (RGV, AA 06: 165; Eng. trans., p. 168).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. «[...] However, since any church established on statutory laws can be the true one only insofar as it contains within itself a principle of constantly approaching the pure rational faith (as the faith which, when it is practical, properly amounts to the religion in each faith) [...]» (ivi, p. 153; Eng. trans., p. 167).

<sup>16</sup> It’s in this sense that Kant advances this type of formula, which homogenizes everything that doesn’t submit to the ideal of a rational practical religiosity: «From a Tungusic shaman to a European prelate who governs both church and state, or (if instead of the heads and leaders we wish to look only at the adherents of the faith according to their own way of conceiving) from the entirely sensual Vogul who in the morning lays a bear skin’s paw on his head with the short prayer, ‘Strike me not dead!’ to the sublimated Puritan and Independent in Connecticut, there is indeed an enormous distance in the manner [*Manier*], but not in the principle, of having faith for as regards the latter, they all belong to one and the same class, namely the class of those who posit their service of God in that which does not in itself amount to a better human being (faith in certain statutory theses, or attending to certain contingent observances)» (ivi, p. 176; Eng. trans., pp. 195-196). Precisely, as I shall argue, for Hegel, ‘manners’ are all that matter for understanding religious diversity.

understanding of the actual instantiation of religious reason in the plurality of creeds and practices.

It is only with the emergence of Post-Kantian Idealism, and with Hegel's approach in particular, that this threshold is definitively crossed: *religious difference is no longer external to the concept of religion*<sup>17</sup>. The relational movement between consciousness and the Absolute involved in representation makes it possible to construct a scientific and philosophical knowledge of the plurality of religions. This is the reason why, in the second part of his *Lectures*, Hegel reaches the 'determined' moment of the divine's self-manifestation, i.e., the moment when the concept becomes embedded in the actual realization of its social, cultural, and geographical particularities. Once again, it is the concept of manifestation – the finite becoming of the Absolute – that enables us to discern between finitudes. This is the embryonic epistemological core of any comparative science of religion. It allows to consider the diverse conditions of heterogeneous manifestations as dimensions of *one and the same* object. Difference no longer belongs to contingency; particular religions are grounded in the necessity of the concept itself<sup>18</sup>. As a result, there is a reconfiguration of the place of Christian revelation as the closing horizon of this differentiation. Christianity is no longer the religion that comes closest to a moral ideal beyond itself – the most effective 'means' for rendering intelligible the universal principles of reason, as it was in Kant<sup>19</sup> – but the instantiation of the movement of revelation itself.

As it is often the case with Hegelian thought, the fundamental device that inscribes difference and singularity at the heart of the concept – and no longer incorporates them in external ways – is history. Hegel gives rise to a procedure that captures religious heterogeneity through the *historicization* of faith and devotion. There is

<sup>17</sup> Cf. «Religion is not just this abstract determination. If it were merely an abstract determination of this sort, all further content would lie outside it» (GW 29/1, pp. 180-181).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. «It is not the work of chance, and it is absurd to see contingency here. Therefore the religions, in the way they have followed one another in history, are not determined externally but instead by the concept itself» (ivi, p. 136).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. RGV, p. 12; Eng. trans., p. 141.



a *historical turn* that determines the possibility of addressing religious actuality, and which will mark attempts to produce histories of religions throughout the 19th century. Through a gradual progression – decidedly *Christianocentric* – the religious formations succeed one another, while they participate, at the same time, in the self-development of God himself. It is the interiority of this relationship that must be retained at all costs: *the history of representation is the history of the presentation of God to consciousness*. The same structure of representation, as a crucial device of conscious experience, displays a historical temporality intrinsic to the reality of religious existence. The historical knowledge of religions is implicated in the immanent deployment of its concept:

These determinate religions are determinate stages of the consciousness and knowledge of spirit. They are necessary conditions for the emergence of the true religion, for the authentic consciousness of spirit. For this reason too, they are extant historically, and I will even draw attention to the historical mode in which they have existed, for we come to know them in these particular forms as historical religions. In the true science, in a science of spirit, in a science whose object is human being, the development of the concept of this concrete object is also its outward history and has existed in actuality<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, I disagree with W. Jaeschke, who identifies a certain inconsistency and states that «historicity cannot be inferred from the principles that Hegel proposes for the realization of the concept of religion»<sup>21</sup>. On the contrary, the passage above suggests that is the representational nature of religion that engages consciousness in a temporalization of its existence, in a standing-before-itself (*stellen vor*) that necessarily inscribes religion in a structural historicity. The very concept of revelation is linked to a temporality that the knowledge of religions must identify. In this

<sup>20</sup> GW 29/2, pp. 73-74.

<sup>21</sup> W. Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1986, p. 290 (translation by the author).

sense, I follow C. Malabou's characterization that inscribes historical temporality within the concept of religion, as a result of the *representative* performance of revelation:

To insist on the fact that the representational process is not only a moment in individual spirit but also and in the first place a movement in God, allows us to conceive the divine alienation not as evidence of something uncompleted, but as the manifestation of a temporalization<sup>22</sup>.

However – and this is the very core of this paper's argument – this objectification can only reach its epistemic efficacy by assuming a *structural uncertainty*. This means that the concept of religion does not possess a stable *limit* that allows to identify, *a priori*, what religious rationality is. Philosophy must inexorably traverse the diverse reality of the phenomenon, and follow it to the complete culmination of its truth, in order to be able to define the contours of the object 'religion'. Instead of considering religion within the frames of practical reason, Hegel has to identify a *frontier*, a *border zone*, where very singular spiritual experiences take place. These experiences express a religious relationship between the subject and the Absolute take place, but in a completely *dysfunctional* way.

On the margins of the Hegelian discourse on anthropological existence of belief – at the internal border of the sphere of religion – certain practices appear that desist from what characterizes the proper norm of the rationality of this sphere, namely the *representative form* of consciousness. This constitutes a very singular aspect of Hegelian epistemology. It is not enough to simply identify a new object and describe its dialectic. Everything happens as if the epistemic foundation of a new field of knowledge requires the grasping of a *radical alterity* at the very heart of the definition of such new object of science. There are liminal religious existences that find themselves in a structurally ambiguous status *vis-à-vis* the definition

<sup>22</sup> C. Malabou, *L'avenir de Hegel*, Paris, Vrin, 1996, p. 158; Eng. trans. by L. During, *The Future of Hegel*, London-New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 113.

of the religious domain. However, at the same time, such phenomena mark the edge of the stage on which its actual deployment takes place. In what follows, I shall exhibit how the Hegelian concept of magic functions, at the heart of determined religion, as that radical alterity which blurs the contours of this new object of knowledge that is religion.

### 3. *The magical genesis of religious consciousness*

#### 3.1. An elusive origin

In the Lectures of 1824, Hegel introduces the ‘determined’ moment of religion by asking himself about the ‘first religion’: «The question is, where should we look for the primitive locus of the presupposed spiritual element, i.e., what is the form of its existence?»<sup>23</sup>. The question is, therefore, where does religion begin in its actual reality as a structuring dimension of individual and collective lives? And most importantly, where is the scientist authorized to draw the line that circumscribes the anthropological reality of religion? Hegelian discourse is thus urged to put forward a first figure that allows the subsequent determinability of the religious formations of historical peoples. In the course of the different versions of the *Vorlesungen*<sup>24</sup>, Hegel advances the notion of the *religion of nature* (*Naturreligion*) to designate the first milestone on the path of the believing consciousness. The aim is to define an initial category that will enable the knowledge of religion to define its field of application.

The term ‘religion of nature’ is nevertheless already semantically charged, and Hegel is well aware of it. The philosopher’s analysis takes part in a widespread historical discussion regarding the *origin* of religion (*Ursprung der Religion*), or the *original* religion (*ursprüngliche Religion*), a debate that prevails in the construction of scientific disciplines that are beginning to

<sup>23</sup> GW 29/1, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> With the exception of the first version of the lectures (1821), where the topic of the religion of nature is not explicitly addressed.

address religious phenomena. Hegel therefore firstly hurry to distinguish this concept from what the German *Aufklärung* had called *natural religion* (*natürliche Religion*), i.e. the idea of a set of metaphysical principles that could be deduced from the rational structure of thought, accessible to every individual spirit according to the ‘light’ of its intelligence, and beyond any historical and positive institution of religions. According to Hegel, such a notion is part of the formalist pretension of the understanding that makes a one-sided separation between the objective divine concept and the consciousness of the latter in particular religions<sup>25</sup>. On the one hand, it is clear that this concerns Hegel’s critique of the Enlightenment’s notion of *natural reason*, «an erroneous expression»<sup>26</sup>. But Hegel identifies a similar mistake on the other side of the intellectual landscape, namely in the Romantic investigations into original religion. Whereas for rationalist thinkers the idea of natural light fell on the side of understanding and the metaphysical principles of deism, for the Romantics nature is on the side of the first and original revelation (*erste und ursprüngliche Offenbarung*)<sup>27</sup>. On several occasions, Hegel criticizes this romantic idea of origin, which postulates the existence of a first spiritual people, a pure and immaculate beginning, which would have no other development than in the form of decadence and corruption<sup>28</sup>. What both the *Aufklärer* and their romantic opponents share is the need to capture the origin of religion in a ‘nature’ that is always identical to itself, whether given in the presence of the intellect or lost in the mists of time.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. «Natural religion [*natürliche Religion*], as the term has been employed in more recent times, has also referred to mere metaphysical religion, where ‘metaphysics’ has had the sense of understandable thought. That is the modern religion of the understanding, or what is called ‘deism’, a result of the Enlightenment, the knowledge of God as an abstraction» (GW 29/2, p. 75).

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ivi, p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. for example GW 29/2, p. 244, as well as the *Vorlesungen* on the Philosophy of World History, cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816-1831)*, GW 18, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1995, p. 142.

In contrast to these two tendencies – and paradoxically as it may seem – the concept of ‘religions of nature’ enables Hegel to disengage religion from the realm of nature. On this detachment relies the inaugural step of anthropological knowledge of belief, by defining the latter based on a *positive* movement of freedom, and consequently situating it as a spiritual phenomenon. As a result, Hegel challenges the fundamental assumption of the ‘natural history of religions’ that had been consolidated in the 17th and 18th centuries. Within these approaches, *fear* was taken as the origin of belief. From Hobbes<sup>29</sup> to Hume<sup>30</sup> fear appeared as the fundamental passion, or emotion, that explained the birth of religious veneration from its earliest cultural and historical forms. For Hegel, however, to consider fear (*Furcht*) as the anthropological basis of religious consciousness amounts to transferring the genesis of religion outside its own sphere, and to relegate it to human’s natural – instinctive and mechanical – relationship with his finitude. Any possibility of a *human science* of religion is grounded in the refusal of such a subordination to the natural life of the individual. This relative autonomy makes it possible to delineate a specificity to the religious field, irreducible to causal explanations of sensible interactions. The *actual* genesis of religion – that is the *Dasein* of the beginning of belief – cannot be found in a reaction to purely external factors. On the contrary, the *genesis* must be understood in terms of the spirit’s own free activity:

Human beings may be afraid of the sun, of thunder and lightning, and so on, but the fear of these natural powers is not the religious aspect [*of the human relation to them*]. For the

<sup>29</sup> Cf. «And this fear of things invisible, is the natural seed of that, which every one called religion; and in them that worship or fear that power otherwise than they do, superstition» (T. Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civil*, London, Bohn, 1839, p. 93).

<sup>30</sup> «The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind» (D. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, Charlottesville, InteLex, 1995, p. 352).

abode of religion is essentially in the realm of freedom, and nowhere else [...] <sup>31</sup>.

This divergence is key to the epistemological definition of religious existence as an object of knowledge: *the liminal phase* of religion cannot be formed by a mere external, mechanical and animal nature, which would remain at work in human action. On the contrary, it has its abode in the sphere of freedom, and it is within this domain that we must find its beginning. But why then, despite this, does Hegel refer to this first moment as ‘religions of nature’? It is not because the phenomenon *belongs* to the world of Nature, but because of the *form* of its manifestation. In other words, ‘nature’ here does not designate a given reality distinct from the spirit, but the first hesitating rise of the spirit in its *naturalness* <sup>32</sup>. The difference is not a nuance. Understanding the anthropological roots of religions cannot be reduced to identifying a remanent element of the sensitive interaction already known by the natural sciences, but to recognize an active movement of freedom embodied in the natural modality of its immediacy. This is the reason why the source of the birth of faith and worship it is not *fear* – the passive sign of the finitude of consciousness –, but human *desire*, that is, the positive appropriation of finitude.

This shift radically transforms the way of producing knowledge about religions, determining the scientific production over the following century <sup>33</sup>. From this moment on, its subject of

<sup>31</sup> GW 29/1, p. 233.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ivi*, p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> In this shift of the focus from fear to desire, it is possible to see the anticipation of the founding gesture of sociology of religion. For example, in Durkheim’s seminal work, the possibility of constructing religion as a ‘social fact’ involves precisely this shift. «The first religious notions have often been attributed to a feeling of weakness and dependence [...]. We have just shown that the first religions have a wholly different origin. [...] The impressions produced in us by the physical world cannot, by definition, contain nothing that surpasses this world. Out of the sensible, only the sensible can be made» (E. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, PUF, 2013, pp. 320-321; Eng. trans. by J.W. Swain, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1964, pp. 223-225, translation modified).

study are the particular forms of representations and practices, i.e. finite, historical forms, as generated by the drive of the spirit and not as the result of an external influence. By linking anthropological difference to desire, Hegel is able to conceive the singularity of manifestations in their specificity, and to chart their own functioning and logic. In the same sense, it the function assigned to desire that enables Hegel to address the ambiguity of the beginning of religion. Within the 'religions of nature' there is a first phenomenon that manifests the drive and desire of the spirit, but in its most immediate form. This primary appearance of desire engages an entirely new perspective on the question of the origin while enabling the possibility to leave the naturalistic explanation of fear behind: «Neither is the fear of natural powers or violence that constitutes the beginning of nature religion. This beginning occurs rather in the opposite of all that can appear as fear»<sup>34</sup>. That meaning, in magic (*Zauberei*).

### 3.2. The dysfunctional desire

Magic as the first form of the believing consciousness is necessarily equivocal. Even the term 'religion' suits it only partially<sup>35</sup>, and yet Hegel includes it as what inaugurates this dimension of the spirit. Magic is characterized by its structurally ambiguous status rather than by a substantive and conclusive definition. On the one hand, magic presupposes an initial spiritual movement beyond natural determinations, which elevates freedom to a position of power (*Macht*)<sup>36</sup> and mastery (*Beherrschung*)<sup>37</sup> over the sensible world. Yet, on the other hand, magical consciousness displays a dysfunctional manifestation of desire, which has its ground in the individual will, in «the singular and contingent consciousness»<sup>38</sup>. It is indeed a spiritual movement, where «man knows himself to be superior to

<sup>34</sup> GW 29/1, p. 233.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ivi*, p. 236; GW 29/2, p. 84; *ivi*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. GW 29/1, p. 235; GW 29/2, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. GW 29/1, p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 235 and GW 29/2, p. 85.

nature»<sup>39</sup>, but where «the spiritual is not yet present as spirit» (*dieß Geistige ist noch nicht als Geist*)<sup>40</sup>.

It is therefore a very special relationship between spirit and nature at work in this first religious self-consciousness. In the initial anthropological determinations of the concept of religion, one might expect the religion of nature to be a veneration of natural objects. However, this is not the case. According to Hegel, the worship of Nature as such does not define any specific religious principle<sup>41</sup>. Hegel calls for abandoning the idea of «a religion in which external, physical objects are taken to be God and are revered as God»<sup>42</sup>. Consequently, and contrary to the interpretation of some commentators<sup>43</sup>, nature religions in general – and magic

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> If anything, this type of veneration may constitute a specific sub-type within Religions of Nature, under which a process of transferring spiritual power to the natural object ‘seems’ to take place: «What comes next is a relationship to objects that seem to be capable rather of being viewed as independent, so that power here appears to human beings as something other, something that is no longer under their control, a power that is not free power, empirical self-consciousness. Examples of such independent, natural things are the sun, moon, sky, sea-great elemental objects that are powers which appear to confront humanity purely as independent and autonomous» (GW 29/1, p. 244). One might be tempted to see this as a first – albeit insufficient – rational objectification of religious consciousness. Yet it is not the content of the object that determines magic, but rather the type of relationship to the object: «[...] but the attitude that the consciousness which is still at the standpoint of natural unity, for which the unchanging is of no interest, takes to such natural objects is governed solely by its contingent wishes, needs, and interests, or [it is related] to them only to the extent that their mode of operation appears as singular, as contingent» (ivi, pp. 244-245).

<sup>42</sup> GW 29/2, p. 82. Hegel expands on this idea in the 1831 Lectures: «By natural religion as the most basic form of religion what is commonly understood is a religion in which natural objects-sun, moon, mountains, rivers, etc.-are worshiped. But this is false. – Even at the earliest stage of self-consciousness, human beings experience the spiritual (i.e., themselves) as something higher vis-a-vis nature; for religion has a place only in the realm of spirit» (ivi, p. 245).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. H. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, in B. Labuschagne and T. Slootweg (eds.), *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012, p. 3.



in particular – are not religious practices that make Nature their object *in the same manner* as revealed religions conceive their God. Here, the natural is not the referent of veneration, but the mode of relationship between singular consciousness and the Absolute. It is a manifestation of belief that, while positively engendered by freedom in its affirmation over nature, remains affected by the naturalness of its contingent location: «The spiritual is not yet present in its universality»<sup>44</sup>. In other words, there is a superiority of spirit over nature, but a superiority that remains paradoxically natural. What is referred to as ‘natural’ here is neither the content nor the reference of magic, but the modality of its operation, which results in an unbridled, *uninhibited* movement. The borders of religion are not the remnants of nature, but the «crudest»<sup>45</sup>, «barbaric»<sup>46</sup> and «savage»<sup>47</sup> manifestations of the spiritual principle of desiring subjectivity.

In every passage where Hegel presents the idea of magical consciousness, he identifies a series of non-European religions, to be found in particular among African peoples<sup>48</sup>, but also among Amerindians<sup>49</sup>, Inuits<sup>50</sup> and certain Asian nations<sup>51</sup>. In this analysis, these practices and cosmovisions are seen as inferior, a perspective that is articulated to the narrative of European colonial-imperial expansion and, more specifically, to the ethnographic discourse of missionaries in their evangelizing practice. But the aim of my analysis goes beyond the certainly biased view that Hegel projects and

<sup>44</sup> GW 29/2, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> GW 29/1, p. 236.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ivi, pp. 237-240, 249-253 and GW 29/2, pp. 87-88, 245-246.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. GW 29/1, p. 239.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. ivi, p. 236 and GW 29/2, pp. 87, 245.

<sup>51</sup> More specifically, Hegel examines the *Zauberei* of the Tungus peoples, cf. GW 29/1, p. 238 and GW 29/2, pp. 87-88, 245. In the 1824 and 1827 Lectures, Hegel also considers the traditional religion of the Chinese empire as the last form of magic practice, but also as an anticipation of the transition to religions such as Buddhism. In the lectures of 1831, this religious formation shifts to the second moment, and joins the religions of spiritual quietude. Cf. ivi, p. 249.

reproduces. This paper seeks to analyze is the epistemic function of the notion of *Zauberei* in the construction of religious knowledge within 19th-century Western rationality. The notion of magic not only serves to denote – and to degrade – certain specific religious formations, it also operates as a frontier, as a liminal notion that makes the anthropological roots of religion intelligible.

The Hegelian epistemological project is not based then on constructing of a rational *boundary*, but of an anthropological *border* of religion. A border which, while announcing the beginning of the religious sphere, is necessarily both external and internal to it. Magic constitutes the opening of the existential and determined path of the consciousness of the Absolute, and yet, at the same time, it contradicts what Hegel himself identifies as the immanent rationality of religion. Magic is then a *dysfunctional threshold* in the field of religious existence, where the principle of spiritual superiority is affirmed – «no matter how bad it may seem, magic is something superior to natural dependence and fear»<sup>52</sup> –, but manifests itself in an unstable, compulsive, pathological way.

Where does the *dysfunction* of the magic spirit lie? The answer is related to the mode of objectification of religious consciousness. It lies in the way subjectivity posits the object of its reverence as a reality separated from its contingent will. In magic, the position of the supremacy of freedom is capricious and arbitrary, and entangled with the dictates of unmediated desire. As we already know from the *Phenomenology*, a dysfunctional desire is one that does not manage to stabilize its object and that therefore cannot follow the dialectical development of its negativity<sup>53</sup>. By a similar compulsive movement, magic fails to produce the separation that ensures divinity's true objectivity, constancy and fixity as the reference pole of a socially shared belief.

I define magic as a *dysfunctional* belief drawing on Hegel's own definition of the pathologies of the driving condition of consciousness. When presenting the sentimental and desiring emergence of the soul in the *Encyclopedia* – and in the associated Lectures – he

<sup>52</sup> GW 29/1, p. 239.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. GW 9, p. 107.

analyzes a series of psycho-somatic disturbances (*Verrücktheit*) that manifest the disordered drifts of desire in its relationship to the object. Such disturbances are not simply contingent interruptions to the self-transparent reflexive activity. They lie at the very genesis of consciousness which manifests an always latent disturbance in the desiring emergence of the subject. It is no coincidence that in this context Hegel considers the range of attitudes in which the soul fails to fix the object beyond itself as part of a ‘magical relationship’ (*magischen Verhältniß*)<sup>54</sup>. The dysfunction – which, in the most drastic cases, leads to mental illness – does not arise from an external or natural obstacle to the spirit’s freedom, but on the contrary from the failure of the desiring subject to be able to posit reality as a pole that *resists* the immediate tendency of the drive. It is precisely this lack of resistance (*widerstandslose*)<sup>55</sup> that characterizes the pathology of desire and what constitutes, in the field of religion, magic as a belief that prevents the emancipation of the divine Absolute.

The paradigmatic example of this failing religious objectification is fetishism, which Hegel characterizes as a derivation of magical consciousness and which meets the same fate as the consumerist consciousness of *Phenomenology*: Fetishism manifests the enshrining of an arbitrarily chosen object, which can ultimately be substituted by another, according to the immediate will of the subjectivity that reveres it<sup>56</sup>. The deified entity is not yet detached and

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), GW 20, with the collaboration of U. Rameil, ed. by W. Bonsiepen, H.-C. Lucas, Hamburg, Meiner, 1992, p. 404. While it is true that Hegel mostly uses the term of *Magie* in the context of the *Encyclopedia*, the specific term of *Zauberei* reappears in the *Vorlesungen* as linked to the same immediate relationship of the soul with the object, cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Subjektiven Geistes. Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1827/28 und Sekundäre Überlieferung*, GW 25/2, ed. by C.J. Bauer, Hamburg, Meiner, 2011, pp. 1010-1011.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. GW 20, p. 403.

<sup>56</sup> «It is an objectification [*Objectivierung*], an unknown power that they [the Africans magicians] have made themselves. And if something does not work out or some unhappiness befalls them, then they throw this fetish away and get themselves another» (GW 29/2, p. 90). For similar descriptions, cf. 29/1, pp.

emancipated from the believer's singular consciousness. It is not yet an objective god in-and-for-itself, as a self-subsistent reality of the absolute spirit<sup>57</sup>. Fetishism thus presupposes a type of desiring attachment to the venerated object in which the latter remains subordinated to the desire that exalts it. What characterizes the inner rationality of religion is precisely the sublimation of this desire in a divinity that stands for itself, or – to use the terms of Hegel's speculative logic – the absorption of the immediate origin of belief in a self-subsistent objectivity.

### 3.3. The double beginning of religion

This calls for a supplementary progression that Hegelian anthropology of religion is compelled to engage. It is only through the «inhibition» (*Hemmung*)<sup>58</sup> of this first arbitrary drive of consciousness that the religious subject manages to move beyond the sphere of magic. The spirit thus leaves behind the «sphere of individual desire»<sup>59</sup> and the compulsive relationship to the object, and succeeds in fixing the divinity in a subsistent objectivity. Within the history of determined religions, and still under the category of 'religions of nature', this is only achieved with Eastern religions such

247-248; 29/2, p. 246 and G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1824/25*, GW 27/2, ed. by W. Jaeschke, R. Paimann, Hamburg, Meiner, 2019, pp. 519-520; Id., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1826/27*, GW 27/3, with the collaboration of C.J. Bauer, C. Hackel, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 2019, p. 840; Id., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Nachschrift zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1830/31*, GW 27/4, with the collaboration of C.J. Bauer, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 2020, p. 1224; GW 25/2, p. 958.

<sup>57</sup> In this respect, the analogy drawn by R. Williamson between magic and the sensitive certainty of phenomenology, due to the inconstancy of language's reference, is highly relevant. Cf. R. Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1984, pp. 128-129.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. «Similarly, even the will in them is not yet theoretical; there is not yet this *rupture* in them, nor any *inhibition* [*Hemmung*] toward themselves» (GW 29/2, p. 84).

<sup>59</sup> GW 29/1, pp. 244-245.

as Taoism, Buddhism or Lamaism, and Hinduism. It is only at this point that, for the first time, consciousness achieves the intuition of a principle or a substantial entity, present in a stable manner in the face of the tribulations of believing subjectivity. Although insufficient and abstract – as well as destined to be sublated – these religions entail a qualitative distance from magic, for despite their unilaterality, they are already in possession of the *objectal form* of rational belief. From now on, representations can change their content and move towards the achievement of religious consciousness in Christian revelation. But what is acquired through inhibition is crucial, namely the elementary structure of the representative relationship, which presupposes a gap between the subject and the divine entity. The inhibition of immediate desire allows the believer to let go the divine in its own substantiality, and only then «does free reverence begin» (*hier beginnt freie Verehrung*)<sup>60</sup>.

This hiatus between an early religious form and the history of devotions and veneration raises the epistemological problem addressed in this paper. The anthropological frontier of religious phenomena has a depth and opacity of its own. Magic is the first movement of belief, but it is only with the fixation and quietude of the «being-within-self» (*In-sich-sein*)<sup>61</sup> that emerges the «first true divine determination» (*erst wahrhaft göttliche Bestimmung*)<sup>62</sup>. By positing a kind of *double birth* of belief, the Hegelian discourse on anthropological reality assumes the problematic nature of the limits of religious existence. The concept of magic does not simply denote a certain reality catalogued in an empirical ethnology. On the contrary, the notion has a fundamental epistemic function: to situate the dysfunctional border that defines religious existence in its anthropological modifications. In this, I follow P. Purtschert's insightful analysis, according to which magic is a «liminal figure» (*Grenzfigur*), or a desiring genesis that is not stabilized in its objective

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 260.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, p. 258.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

product: «it is a version of the beginning of reflection, which nevertheless remains beginning»<sup>63</sup>.

When confronted with the concept of magic, some commentators have sought to dissolve the ambiguity by forcing the phenomenon to fit one side or the other of a clear-cut limit. As I have shown, readings such as that of H. Kimmerle seek to assimilate magic to the objectal form of the religious representation of God<sup>64</sup>. In this view, magic is simply another variation of the reference of belief, and therefore an intelligible practice in the same terms as any historical faith. In the opposite position, R. Leuze completely excludes magic from the concept of religion itself, on the grounds of its non-conformity with the norm of representational objectification<sup>65</sup>. Yet, despite their opposition, both readings consider Hegel to have a clear limit that allows us to delineate religion as a field of knowledge. From my perspective, the liminal dimension of magic is neither occasional nor the result of an inaccuracy. It indicates a *threshold of dysfunction* of the believing consciousness that the philosophical knowledge has to evoke in order to define, by contrast, the immanent rationality of religious existence.

The *uncertainty* – which Kimmerle concedes<sup>66</sup> – in the notion of magic doesn't just belong to this particular reality, it is, on the contrary, an uncertainty that runs through the demarcation of the field of historical and anthropological existence of religions. In other words, the Hegelian concept of religion is not in immediate possession of the rational form of its object and its limits. On the contrary, Hegelian discourse displays a *border zone* that opens up the knowledge of religions to an otherness that is not a just a difference among others within the rational progression of religions, but a

<sup>63</sup> P. Purtschert, *Grenzfiguren. Kultur, Geschlecht und Subjekt bei Hegel und Nietzsche*, Frankfurt-New York, Campus Verlag, 2006, p. 71 (translation by the author).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. R. Leuze, *Die außerchristlichen Religionen bei Hegel*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975, pp. 9-11.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, p. 6.

radical, dysfunctional and pathological alterity that calls into question the very objectal form that ensures the intelligibility of religious difference.

From an epistemological point of view, this makes the Hegelian discourse a very special case in the birth of the sciences of religion at the beginning of the 19th century. The object of 'religion' is defined by a frontier that exposes the intelligibility of the phenomenon to the problematic character of its actuality. In other words, magic appears as the symptom of a philosophical consciousness facing the porosity of the object it aims to understand. It is not simply a distinct reality that, because of its difference from Christian revelation, is incomprehensible to the European scientific mentality. The science of religion touches on a radical alterity that confronts it with the crisis of its own rationality.

Therefore, the Christian-centrism or Eurocentrism at work in the history of religions is not just a question of Christianity's position as the achievement of divine self-revelation, and the inferiority attributed to non-Christian and non-European beliefs. There is a more fundamental act of epistemic mastery, which consists in constructing a *stage of religious difference*. Hegelian thought thus establishes an objectal form of representation and worship, which, within the religious realm, indicates the *general syntax* that enables knowledge to capture the anthropological existence of belief. The concept of magic necessarily designates the troubling background of the religious subject's desiring rootedness. It highlights the fact that the progressive dialectics of desire is not immediately operative. On the margins of the religious sphere, there is a pathological existence of the spirit that troubles the *mise-en-scène* of differences.

#### 4. *Final remarks*

This article explored the complexities of the anthropological embodiment of religion. The idealist approach to religion proceeds by pointing out that the human reality of belief cannot be reduced either to the transcendental functions of practical reason nor to the impact of the sensible interaction with the natural world. However, it is not just a matter of describing a new object. By re-defining

religion, philosophical rationality also transforms itself. ‘Religion’ as subject of idealist discourse in the 19th century shaped at the same time the functioning of the new scientific intelligence of Western modernity. The rise of a whole range of sciences of religion during the course of the century was based on the construction of an anthropological, social and psychological object whose truth was immanent to the diversity of its manifestations. Belief became a key phenomenon for the scientists who founded the new disciplines, in which the truth of the Absolute became entangled with the existential concreteness of the human being. Paradoxically, it is through the production of religion as a site of truth that modern knowledge is able to consolidate its grip on the diversity of reality.

Hegelian discourse is thus exemplary of the dawning of this shift in the scientific approach to religious phenomena and of a new relationship between philosophy and religion that some commentators have recently described as ‘specular’<sup>67</sup>. The theoretical construction of religious reality on the basis of the representative consciousness gives birth to a new philosophical sense of speculation. The latter defines itself as a capacity to know, and thereby to sublimate, the social and historical reality of belief. The idealist discourse thus elaborates a *field of intelligibility* that allows deciphering the constitutive non-identity of spirit, and in particular, the extreme heterogeneity and diversity that characterize what modernity defines as religion. It is not merely a question of widening the framework of rationality that Kant established, to make it more inclusive and flexible towards cultural difference. The gesture goes much deeper. It involves incorporating the anthropological determinability into the development of the Absolute, i.e., inscribing it into *the unfolding of truth itself*. Thus, the hermeneutics of religious differences, their comparison, the concatenation of spiritual transitions, depends on a *historicity of truth* that lies at the heart of the new Hegelian philosophical rationality.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. M. Maesschalck, *Penser la religion. De Fichte et Schelling à Agamben*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2022, pp. 45-62.



However, the ‘specular’ relation between religion and philosophy is yet to be relativized<sup>68</sup>: the surface of the ‘mirror’ is not uniform. The concept of magic appears within the anthropology of religion to remind us that this historicity is not *immediately functional*. In order to ensure the rationality of the historical and logical self-movement, it is not enough to merely declare that religion belongs *generically* to the history of spiritual formations. This raises a very important meta-philosophical issue for any theoretical reflection on religion: there is a *supplementary operation* to be carried out consisting in identifying the border, not of an identity, but of a regime of differentiation. Of course, within Hegel’s thought this border of the rational temporality of the spirit is not just palpable in the context of religion. One might recall how, in the Berliner Lectures, non-European peoples – Africans, indigenous American, and Asians – are in fact considered spiritual formations, beyond biological and animal nature, while they are not yet understood as full participants of world history. In such cases, modern discourse is in the need to point to a radical alterity that is not a *substantive moment* within the dialectical progression of freedom. In this sense, the uncertainty of the concept of magic establishes a kind of fundamental disorder in the capacity of modern rationality to produce the figures of the history of religions. The essential categories that organize the field of religious diversity, such as monotheism and polytheism, are rendered impotent when it comes to defining magic. The reason for this is that, in this first expression of belief, the *primary code of representational objectality* – which guarantees the particle ‘-theism’ – is disrupted.

The structural uncertainty implied by magical consciousness takes this concept beyond its regional application, which consists in being the descriptor of an ethnological particularity. Of course, Hegel points out specific human collectives. Yet, magic displays a manifestation of human drive that is rooted, as a possibility, in the desiring structure of the subject as such. Thus, the dysfunctional drift of belief into a compulsive attitude towards an inconstant object is not definitively assignable to a particular cultural or

<sup>68</sup> Like Fichte’s and Schelling’s, Hegel’s thought also goes beyond ‘mirror stage’ described by Maesschalck, cf. *ivi*, pp. 62-67.

geographical context. The concept's own ambiguity dislocates its uses and posits the notion as a pathological threshold that haunts *every* subject's desiring relationship with the venerated object. Insofar as magic functions as the border of the history of religions – and not of *a* singular religion – it cannot be fixed in the distant horizon of *a* determined religion. It emerges instead, as a risk of disruption, in any representative performance of consciousness. As T. Lewis stated, this ubiquity affects the notion's epistemic performance: «This form or moment of determinate religion (*magic*) cannot be identified with any one of its instantiations»<sup>69</sup>. The elusive character of *Zauberei* prevents the fixed assignment of the phenomenon to a particular spiritual formation:

For magic is something that has been present among all peoples and in all periods, and religion too is seated in the representations of each people, in the popular view of things, which contains the most inconsistent notions side by side<sup>70</sup>. [...]

This relationship, this mediated magic, is extremely widespread, and it is difficult to define its limits and determine what, properly speaking, lies beyond them<sup>71</sup>.

This turns magic into a *sui generis* alterity. The figure of other religious formations can be traced and located within world history with absolute certainty. The historical intelligibility of Hegelian discourse is perfectly capable of determining, for example, the aesthetic religion of the Greeks, its spiritual structure, its rise and fall, that is, where it begins and ends as a determined moment of consciousness. Magic seems to indicate *a different kind of difference*. One that cannot be completely distinguished in its own figure. This implies that even the historical fulfillment of religion in Christian

<sup>69</sup> T.A. Lewis, *Hegel's Determinate Religion Today: Foreign yet Not So Far Away*, in *Religion und Religionen im deutschen Idealismus: Schleiermacher-Hegel-Schelling*, ed. by F. Hermanni, B. Nonnenmacher and F. Schick, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, pp. 211-231.

<sup>70</sup> GW 29/1, p. 241.

<sup>71</sup> Ivi, p. 242.

revelation is not immune to the drifts of the desiring core of the subject that inescapably inhabits it: «Magic continues to insinuate itself deeply into other, higher religions in a secondary way, for instance the practice of witchcraft in Christendom, and of invoking devils»<sup>72</sup>. One could also think of other ‘intra-Christian’ phenomena – such as *exaltation* (*Schwärmerei*) or *mysticism* – that also manifest not an *external difference*, but a threshold of dysfunction, a pathological drift from the principle of spiritual freedom.

The Hegelian discourse on religion thus introduces a much larger problem, namely that of constructing a scientific and philosophical intelligibility of human reality. The result is that the anthropological inscription of the Absolute in no way offers comfort in the peaceful figure of an ‘epistemic humanism’, confident of an essence of man that is always constant in the background of differences. On the contrary, the rooting of the religious truth of the Absolute in the folds of desire raises a latent danger of the crisis of scientific rationality, which philosophy must assume if its discourse is to be effective. If religion is the mirror-object that modernity postulates to demarcate its own scientific performance, then its uncertain borders constantly confront us with a trouble lodged in the desiring heart of philosophical rationality.

<sup>72</sup> GW 29/2, pp. 86-87.