

Chapters 1 and 2, on the existence of God: a positive case for theism. Chapter 3, on evil: as both sides have difficulties, a draw. (Theism is not the only view that faces severe trouble in explaining evil; naturalism does, as well). Chapter 4: that a good God exists is the more plausible thesis. Chapters 5 and 6: Chapter 6 supplies the reasons for the theist view which the theist is unable to show in Chapter 5. The hiddenness of God offers no strong support for naturalism, but the theist position is not conclusive: so a draw. Chapter 7: the argument from natural law supports theism. Chapter 8: no decision is reached. Chapter 9: as ‘open theism’ is favoured, God’s omniscience is partly impaired. Chapters 10 and 11: substance-dualism remains a possibility, but it is also possible for a theist to hold physicalism; so the soul fails to support theism clearly. Chapter 12: re-incarnation is not an alternative or better explanation of suffering than theism; so theism is affirmed. Thus Chapters 1,2,4,7 and 12 are positively in favour of theism. No chapter rules out theism. The other chapters are either inconclusive or fail to make the case for theism sufficiently strong.

If one approves Newman’s opinion; ‘I do not see much difference between avowing that there is no God, and implying that nothing definite can be known for certain about Him’ (*The Idea of a University*, p.49) one might think that the book rather leaves one in scepticism. One does not just want to know which are the best available arguments in the field today but which are *true*, although it is also useful to know, and thus be able to take into account, the most recent arguments in case they may modify one’s view. Layman admirably enables us to do this.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO HEGEL’S LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION by Jon Stewart, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp.304, £75.00, hbk

In his impressive new volume, Jon Stewart sets out to introduce Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* within the broader context of the Enlightenment’s criticism of religion and philosophy. The book expounds Hegel’s reaction to what he perceived as the ubiquitous criticism of theology by subjectivity, embodied in thinkers such as Rousseau, Jacobi, and Schleiermacher. In this context, according to Stewart, Hegel sought to defend Christianity against the excesses of Romanticism and the Enlightenment.

The five theses that Stewart sets out to demonstrate are: (1) That much of Hegel’s agenda comes from his reaction to the Enlightenment (p. 19).

Hegel tries therein to restore dogmas of Christianity and with them the content of religion, abandoned by the Enlightenment. (2) Hegel wished to correct what he regarded as the mistaken form of religious belief of his own day. In combating the Romantics he addresses their tendency to demote faith to mere *feeling* (p. 20). (3) Hegel's historical account of religion does not end with the birth of Christianity (as appears in the *Lectures*), but rather includes the historical development of Christianity, thereby seeing in the Reformation a necessary development of Christianity. (4) A new engagement with old controversies about the proper interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of religion in general within the context of disputes between left and right Hegelians (1830s and 1840s). (5) Hegel's relevance regarding key issues in the philosophy of religion today and his insight geared towards their resolution (p. 21). The book is divided into nine further subdivided chapters: three dealing with the Enlightenment and Romanticism; three dealing with Hegel's own doctrine, method, and approach; and three dealing with additional questions, reception of Hegel and his relevance today. He also includes a helpful bibliography and indices of names and subjects.

Although known primarily as a philosopher, Hegel had theological training and was interested in religion all of his life; Stewart therefore remarks that 'his philosophy cannot be separated from his religious views' (p. 2). Hegel's attempted development of a philosophy of religion is proposed to be a 'reaction to key elements' in the well-known intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Hegel's understanding of religion was also shaped and conditioned, argues Stewart, by the tight Prussian censorship of 'demagogues' and (alleged) 'atheists' (such as Fichte suffering in the '*Atheismus Streit*') (p. 13). Here Stewart accomplishes a meticulously researched presentation of Hegel's historical circumstances and the larger context in which he lived and worked.

Within this new perspective, i.e. seeing Hegel as a *defensor fidei*, Stewart sets out to present Hegel's views on the history of Christianity, the Reformation, Islam, and Deism, drawing material from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and supporting it with additional material from other works by Hegel. Hegel evidently proposes Christianity as the most eminent religion while humbling Islam and Deism, for instance, as 'retrograde movements' (p. 15). Yet, Stewart argues that the 'empty, indeterminate, and unknown' God of Deism was actually the starting point and frame within which Hegel posits his ever-determining 'spirit' (p.29). It was precisely in giving God an inner life as a movement from unconsciousness to self-consciousness that Hegel saw the proper response to Deism.

The Enlightenment's critique of the Bible was addressed by Hegel along Lessing's line, namely that faith should be pinned not on the Bible – as a text devised by human beings and therefore intrinsically flawed – but rather on Christianity as 'idea'. (p. 58). Kant is tackled by Hegel with the argument that it is the philosopher's task to make sense of the

ubiquitous presence of stories and ideas about the divine (p. 73), something he considered to be lacking in Kant's approach. The core of Hegel's critique is Kant's pervasive dualism between thought and being (p. 74). In Hegel's ultimate analysis, Kant's idea of the divine remains abstract – this for him is 'an impoverished sphere' and a 'poor truth' (p. 76).

Hegel's critique of Romanticism (which itself was somewhat a 'natural continuation' of the Enlightenment (p.79)) focused on religion as 'intuition' (*Anschauung*) and 'subjective feeling', as proposed by Schleiermacher. Hegel confronts this with the rebuttal that religion should find firm footing 'in the highest human faculty and not the lowest' (p. 102). A proper conception of faith should always recognize some external objective doctrine. Hegel successfully applies his dialectical resolution when he defines faith not only as 'merely subjective state of belief' or the '*credo*, the confession of faith' that does not touch the innermost self of man, but as a 'unity of both these meanings' (p. 102). Hegel thus allocates objective and subjective sides to faith.

In his treatment of Hegel's interpretation of Christianity, Stewart elaborates that Hegel's account is closely tied to his 'anthropology' and is dialectical in nature, characterized by a demand for reconciliation, itself a product of alienation and separation (p. 155). Christianity presents the pinnacle of an overcoming of nature, specifically in the person of Christ. In a nutshell, the death of God represents the overcoming of the negation of otherness: by assuming 'death' into God himself, God overcomes otherness and there is subsequently no 'outside of God, not otherness' that can 'hinder unity with God' (p. 164).

Along his peculiar interpretation of Christ's place in history, Hegel utilizes the Christian mystery of the Trinity in order to answer the exaggerations of his contemporaries and 'restore Christianity'. The Trinity bespeaks not a static God but a God as 'dynamic process and development' (p. 170). For Hegel, the Protestant Reformation plays a key role in the history of Christianity, due to its insistence on freedom and 'individual conscience' (p. 175). The corruption of the Church – which the Reformation purportedly addressed – was for Hegel not an 'anomaly' but rather 'fundamental and endemic to the system' (of the Church). The Church fundamentally had a mistaken idea of The Divine, namely that the Deity was 'sensual' (p. 176). This error is exemplified by a 'slavish deference to authority', a 'childish belief in miracles', 'lust of power', 'riotous debauchery', 'hypocrisy', and 'deception'. This all culminates in Hegel's unambiguous praise of Luther and the Reformation (p. 180). Thus one of the central features of Hegel's attack on philosophical currents, as Stewart underlines, was his goal to 'rescue Christianity' (p.229).

As a welcome addition, Stewart brings Hegel into conversation with writers like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and even the unlikely Neil deGrasse Tyson as modern representatives of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. After pointing out time-related shortcomings (the insensitivity of language, etc.) in Hegel's writings, Stewart presents Hegel as a

'modern' tolerant religious pluralist, not only due to the fact that Hegel (unlike Schelling or Fichte) actually dealt with the enormous material about Asian and Islamic culture, but also because his method resembles that of Comparative Theology, and thus allows for a fresh look at the philosophy of religion.

Stewart's book is a well-researched, well-crafted, lucid, and structured manual for those wanting to acquaint themselves with Hegel's idea of religion. The informed and competent presentation reads gracefully and is packed to the brim with citations and points of historical context. Some questions however, surrounding the main thesis, Hegel as *defensor fidei*, remain unanswered. For instance: What does Hegel understand by *Christianity*, if his concept of Christianity was historically determined to be primarily *Protestantism*? What about the ontological entanglement of evil in the godhead (according to Hegel due to the fact that evil stems from knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), as proposed by the *Genesis* story of the Fall of Adam and Eve), as studied by von Stockhausen and Mancuso? Furthermore, the proverbial elephant in the room remains unaddressed: Hegel's structural and historical closeness with *Gnosticism*. The monumental studies by O'Regan are featured in the bibliography but the topic remains unaddressed. Magee, O'Regan, Rossbach, and Voegelin shed light on this even darker 'secret' of Hegel and would complete the reader's understanding of his position, yet their extensive research remains here uncommented. Looking at Hegel's concept of religion without seeing the historical (J. Böhme) and structural vicinity to Gnostic speculation, leaves blurred spots unexplained.

Furthermore, Hegel is somewhat 'dissolved' into his sources and historical context. While Stewart's thorough presentation of the historical context is a boon to the book, in terms of understanding Hegel's inspiration and environment, at times the reader is tempted to think of Hegel as merely reacting to his contemporaries, lacking creativity and insight, an opinion hardly defensible for such a monumental figure.

All in all, the volume presents a solid introduction and will doubtlessly be well-received and studied in years and decades to come.

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