

HEGEL'S CRITICISM OF SCHLEIERMACHER AND THE QUESTION OF THE ORIGIN OF FAITH

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Hegel's criticism of Schleiermacher represents an important episode in his general critical campaign against Romanticism. In this article I explore his objections to Schleiermacher's theory of faith as the feeling of absolute dependency. The different statements of Schleiermacher's view in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* and *The Christian Faith* are outlined. Then an account is given of Hegel's various criticisms of this view. I wish to argue that what is ultimately at stake in the discussion is not just the nature of faith and knowing, but something more fundamental: philosophical anthropology. By focusing on intuition and immediate feeling as the locus for religious faith, Schleiermacher, according to Hegel, reduces the human to the subhuman. For Hegel, by contrast, the faculty of religious faith should not be the lowest but the highest, which in his view means speculative reason.

Keywords: Hegel – Schleiermacher – Faith – Romanticism – Feeling – Immediate intuition – Philosophical anthropology

A major intellectual trend that was relevant for Hegel's considerations of religion was German Romanticism. Hegel's time in Jena corresponded to that of Jena Romanticism, just as his time in Heidelberg corresponded to Heidelberg Romanticism, and due to this he knew personally the most famous authors of the German branch of this movement. He polemicalizes against different aspects of Romanticism in a number of different works, for example, in the sections dedicated to "the unhappy consciousness," "the beautiful soul," "virtue and the way of the world," and "the spiritual animal kingdom" from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ In § 140 of the *Philosophy of Right* he attempts to set up a typology of different forms of Romantic subjectivism.² In his *Lectures on the History*

¹ See the chapters "The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through its own Activity" and "Individuality which Takes Itself to be Real In and For Itself" from the "Reason" Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 211-262; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 271-334) and "Spirit that is Certain of Itself. Morality" from the "Spirit" Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 364-409; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 459-516). (*PhS* = *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977. *Jub.* = *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe*, vols. 1-20, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928-41.)

² Hegel, *PR*, § 140, pp. 170-184; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 205-223. (*PR* = *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. by H.B. Nisbet, ed. by Allen Wood, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1991.)

of *Philosophy*, he also treats some of the leading individual figures of the German Romantic movement.³ Perhaps his most extended critical discussion with the Romantics is in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where various forms of Romantic art are treated. Also relevant is Hegel's long book review of Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger's posthumous writings.⁴

Hegel's criticism of Schleiermacher represents an important episode in his general critical assessment of Romanticism.⁵ In this article I wish to explore his objections to Schleiermacher's theory. In the first section I will explore Schleiermacher's initial statement of his view in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Then in the second section I will examine what is often regarded as the formulation of his mature position in *The Christian Faith*. Then the final section will be dedicated to Hegel's various criticisms of Schleiermacher's view. I wish to argue that what is ultimately at stake in the discussion is philosophical anthropology. By focusing on intuition and immediate feeling as the locus for religious faith, Schleiermacher, according to Hegel, reduces the human to the subhuman. For Hegel, by contrast, the faculty of religious faith should not be the lowest but the highest, which in his view means speculative reason.

I. Schleiermacher's Account in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*

Schleiermacher was acutely aware of the criticism that the Enlightenment had issued against religion and attempted to address himself to it in his popular work, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* from 1799.⁶ Based on his discussions in Berlin with

³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 506-512; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 641-646. (*Hist. of Phil.* = *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vols. 1-3, trans. by E. S. Haldane, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner 1892-96; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1995.)

⁴ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel. Herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich von Raumer. Erster Band 780 S. mit Vorr. XVI S. Zweiter Band 784 S. Leipzig, 1826," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, Erster Artikel (March 1828), nos. 51-52, pp. 403-416, nos. 53-54, pp. 417-428; Zweiter Artikel (June 1828), nos. 105-106, pp. 838-848, nos. 107-108, pp. 849-864, nos. 109-110, pp. 865-870. In *Jub.* vol. 20, pp. 132-202. In English in *MW = Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2002, pp. 354-400.

⁵ For accounts of Hegel's view of Schleiermacher's theology, see Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 70-97. Hermann Glockner, "Hegel und Schleiermacher im Kampf um Religionsphilosophie und Glaubenslehre," in his *Beiträge zum Verständnis und zur Kritik Hegels sowie zur Umgestaltung seiner Geisteswelt*, Bonn: Bouvier 1965 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 2), pp. 246-271.

⁶ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger 1799. (English translation: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by Richard Crouter, New York: Cambridge University Press 1988.) For secondary literature, see Karl Barth, "Schleiermacher" in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press 2001, pp. 411-459. Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*. Jack Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism*, Missoula: Scholars Press 1977. B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984. Martin Redeker, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. by John Wallhauser, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1973.

the leading figures of the German Romantic movement, this work attempts to defend religion against its Enlightenment critics. Inspired by his friends Friedrich von Schlegel and August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Schleiermacher saw in the Romantics' emphasis on emotion and feeling a possible line of defense for religion that he spent a lifetime developing.

For Schleiermacher, it was a mistake to try to argue with the Enlightenment thinkers about the rationality of religious belief. This kind of argumentation always seemed doomed to failure since religion could never hope to match up to the same demanding requirements of natural scientific demonstration. So instead of trying to defend the rationality of religious belief in this way, Schleiermacher shifted the discussion entirely: he argued religion is not ultimately about reason or the rational faculty but rather about intuition (*Anschauung*) and feeling. With a single claim, Schleiermacher had removed religion from the usual critical discussions with the sciences. The religious feeling was not something that science could attack since it was not some external object in the world that could be examined, compared, quantified and accepted or rejected based on scientific criteria. Instead, it dwelled in the inward sphere of the human mind, safely immune from the criticisms.

In the "Second Speech" Schleiermacher argues that religion is often confused with two different fields, metaphysics and morality. While he grants that these "both have the same object as religion, namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it,"⁷ he claims it would be a mistake to confuse these spheres. He thus quickly attempts to delineate the proper task and province of each of these areas. Metaphysics "classifies the universe and divides it into this being and that, seeks out the reasons for what exists, and deduces the necessity of what is real while spinning the reality of the world and its laws out of itself."⁸ Since we tend to think that questions about God, immortality and human freedom are also general questions about the universe, it would seem that metaphysics overlaps in part with religion. But Schleiermacher is adamant that religion is something fundamentally different from metaphysics and from the concepts of God, immortality and freedom, which are all in some way secondary to what is truly religious.

Morality, by contrast, "develops a system of duties out of human nature and our relation to the universe; it commands and forbids actions with unlimited authority."⁹ We often take morality to be associated with religion to the extent that the commands of morality issue from God; as Kant noted, an important aspect of morality concerns the idea that there is a divine justice that rules the moral world. But once again, for Schleiermacher, this is all something secondary to religion. He concludes,

In order to take possession of its own domain, religion renounces herewith all claims to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced

⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 19. *Über die Religion*, p. 41.

⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 20. *Über die Religion*, p. 42.

⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 20. *Über die Religion*, p. 43.

upon it. It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.¹⁰

Here Schleiermacher introduces his famous claim that "intuition and feeling" are the fundamental faculties of religion.

He echoes Kant's division between theoretical or speculative reason (metaphysics) and practical reason (ethics). As is well known, Kant argues that questions about God and immortality cannot be treated by theoretical reason since they transcend the objects of possible experience. Kant's conclusion is that they can, however, be treated in the other sphere of reason, namely, practical reason. Schleiermacher seems initially to accept Kant's division, but instead of following Kant's line of reasoning from the theoretical to the practical, he denies that religion can be treated in either of these and attempts to carve out a third separate domain:

Thus religion maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and character of speculation as well as from that of praxis. Only when it places itself next to both of them is the common ground perfectly filled out and human nature completed from this dimension. Religion shows itself to you as the necessary and indispensable third next to those two, as their natural counterpart, not slighter in worth and splendor than you wish of them.¹¹

Contrary to Kant, Schleiermacher insists that a third sphere exists which offers a solution to the problem of the objects of religion. Immediate intuition and feeling are what provides us with access to the religious.

But by "feeling" here Schleiermacher does not mean just any whim, humor or subjective notion that we happen to have. He speaks specifically about the way in which our senses are affected by individual things in the universe:

The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, everfruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.¹²

This is what he refers to as the "intuition of the universe."¹³ He thus comes to this very idiosyncratic definition of religion. While some might grant that feeling plays a role in

¹⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 22. *Über die Religion*, p. 50.

¹¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 23. *Über die Religion*, p. 52.

¹² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 25. *Über die Religion*, p. 56.

¹³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 24. *Über die Religion*, p. 55.

religion, Schleiermacher's claim is much more radical. He says that this perception of the universe and its objects is what *constitutes* religion. This claim strikes us as counterintuitive since we are accustomed to associating religion with God, immortality and other key dogmas. But, for Schleiermacher, these things are secondary. Moreover, his claim is striking since this immediate experience of the universe could in principle be conceived as entirely secular since it is primarily about perceiving the universe and its objects, or, put differently, it is about the effects that the universe and its objects make on our senses.

But Schleiermacher argues that this fundamental or primordial relation to the universe is the basis for what we understand as religion. He insists on holding fast to the primary individual aspect of the experience and not allowing it to develop into thoughts and ideas. Religion is about this primary experience, and when people go beyond it and begin to reflect and develop concepts and theories, then they have left the sphere of religion.¹⁴ The characteristic of sense perception is particularity; each perception is a unique particular thing. By contrast, the characteristic of thought and ideas is universality; ideas such as the True and the Good are general concepts and not specific things. Schleiermacher's claim is thus that religion is about holding firmly to the original experience of the world in all its manifoldness and particularly. We should revel in this and resist the impulse to explain, theorize and categorize, for as soon as we do this, we depart from the sphere of religion.

An important advantage of this view, for Schleiermacher, is that it allows us to be tolerant with respect to religion. He explains,

Each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own, and that from other elements of religion intuitions and feelings flow, the sense for which he may be completely lacking.¹⁵

This awareness of our own feelings makes us sensitive to the religious feeling of others and allows us to respect it, even though it may be very different from ours. In this way Schleiermacher can agree with the Enlightenment critics, such as for example Voltaire, that all of the abuses and atrocities that happen in the name of religion should be stopped and avoided. But at the same time he is able to deflect the criticism by saying that such things ultimately have nothing to do with religion itself since religion is about an immediate feeling and not about thought (as in dogmatic disputes) or action (as in wars, persecutions, etc.): "What is it in religion over which men have argued, taken sides, and ignited wars? Sometimes over morals and always over metaphysics, and neither of these belongs to it."¹⁶ The criticism of the Enlightenment is off-target, he claims, when it tries to hold

¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 26. *Über die Religion*, p. 58.

¹⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 27. *Über die Religion*, pp. 62f.

¹⁶ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28. *Über die Religion*, p. 63.

religion responsible for these abuses. The Enlightenment thus sets up a mistaken conception of religion and proceeds to criticize and condemn it, but its original definition of religion is based on a fundamental misconception.

II. Schleiermacher's Account in The Christian Faith

In *The Christian Faith* from 1821-22,¹⁷ Schleiermacher continues where he left off in *On Religion* by claiming that religion or faith, which is now replaced by the word “piety,” is not a matter of knowing or doing. It is instead a third thing, namely, a “feeling.”¹⁸ Schleiermacher explains that by this he means a fundamental form of immediate self-consciousness. This then gets developed more specifically to “the feeling of absolute dependency.”¹⁹ Schleiermacher argues that there are always two separate elements or dimensions of human self-consciousness. We are always aware of ourselves, on the one hand, as a unity, but, on the other hand, as a plurality of changing determinations, i.e., perceptions, ideas, actions, etc. The latter is clearly the active side of self-consciousness, that is, the side that it itself produces and is responsible for. From this we have a feeling of freedom. The former, however, represents the passive or receptive side; it “presupposes for every self-consciousness another factor beside the ego, a factor which is the source of the particular determination, and without which the self-consciousness would not be precisely what it is.”²⁰ Through this we realize that we can only partially determine ourselves. We become aware that we are dependent on something greater beyond ourselves.

When we weigh these two feelings, that of freedom and that of dependency, we realize that the active part of the self is always dependent on a number of things over which it has no control. Therefore, this feeling of freedom is limited, and there is “no such thing as a feeling of absolute freedom.”²¹ By contrast, the feeling of dependence is absolute. We could not act in the world if our being or consciousness were not given ahead of time. But over this we have no control. He writes,

But the self-consciousness which accompanies all our activity, and therefore...accompanies our whole existence, and negates absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependence; for it is the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us in just the same sense in which

¹⁷ Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange*, vols. 1-2, Berlin: G. Reimer 1821-22. (English translation: *The Christian Faith*, trans. by H.R. Macintosh and J.S. Stewart, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark 1999. Note that the English translation is based on the expanded and more influential second edition, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange*, vols. 1-2, Berlin: G. Reimer 1830-31. It is this second edition that is referred to in the following references.)

¹⁸ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 3, pp. 5-12. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 3, pp. 7-16.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, pp. 12-18. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 16-24.

²⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 13. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 17.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 15. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 20f.

anything towards which we should have a feeling of absolute freedom must have proceeded entirely from ourselves.²²

According to Schleiermacher, every human being has the profound and fundamental sense of being dependent on some higher power. We become ill, suffer and die; many things happen to us in the course of our lives that are not in our control. This gives rise to a deep sense of the contingency of our existence. This produces in us a sense of absolute dependency.

For Schleiermacher, it is then just a short step to call the origin of this feeling of absolute dependency "God." He claims, "the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word 'God,' and that...is for us the really original signification of that word."²³ For this reason, he claims, the feeling of absolute dependency is the same as being aware of or related to God. This is, according to his view, an absolutely fundamental and universal human experience. But this is not to imply that we have some prior cognitive knowledge of the divine; rather, this is a precognitive feeling that indicates an inescapable relation to the divine. Humans have therefore an immediate self-consciousness of God. Schleiermacher readily admits that this is to make God and a feeling synonymous: "in the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state [sc. of absolute dependency]; and any further content of the idea must be developed out of this fundamental import assigned it."²⁴ Here Schleiermacher seems to acknowledge a key point that will be relevant for Hegel's polemic with him, namely, that this original feeling has, at least in the first instance, no determinate content, and therefore the conception of God that it implies likewise has no content.

In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher then tries to derive the key Christian dogmas from this basic premise of the feeling of absolute dependency. The appeal to feeling is clearly conceived as an attempt to sidestep the criticisms of the Enlightenment. If faith is a primordial feeling deeply rooted in human consciousness, then it is difficult to see how it could be subject to the kind of scientific refutation that the followers of the Enlightenment revel in. The question is whether or not it preserves the key elements of Christian doctrine that are desired. Hegel believes that, despite Schleiermacher's best efforts, it does not.

III. Hegel's Criticism

Hegel is critical of Schleiermacher's view on different scores. First, it appeals to what is transitory and not what is lasting. Clearly, we have many different kinds of feelings that come and go, but surely our belief in the divine cannot be based on something so ephemeral, insignificant and trivial. To Hegel's mind, the goal should rather be to try to find a firm footing for faith in the highest human faculty and not in the lowest.

In his foreword to a work by one of his former students from Heidelberg, Hermann

²² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 16. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 21f.

²³ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 16. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 22.

²⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 17. *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 23.

Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs,²⁵ Hegel argues that if we base religion on feeling, then “a dog would be the best Christian for it possesses this [sc. feeling of dependency] in the highest degree and lives mainly in this feeling.”²⁶ Dogs have no rational faculty but live in the realm of immediate appetite and natural impulse. The point is obviously that only humans have religion; therefore, the cognitive faculty that is at work in religious belief must be one that is unique to human beings. To understand faith as feeling means devaluing the concept and reducing it to a base level.

The reference to the dog is not merely a polemical quip but is in fact grounded in Hegel’s convictions about the nature of human beings. Here we can see clearly the relevance of philosophical anthropology for the discussion. Only humans have religion and culture, not animals, and so it follows that there must be some faculty that belongs only to humans that makes this possible.²⁷ It would seem to follow from Schleiermacher’s claim that a dog would be a great Christian since a dog is always immediately in the sphere of feeling, and this feeling is not diluted or impaired by reason, which is the province of humans. In this passage Hegel challenges the notion of a pure feeling as such; feelings and thoughts are always related to one another in our complex cognitive life, and it is impossible to isolate something as a pure feeling with no content of thought. Moreover, while Hegel acknowledges the role that feeling has to play in the heart of the religious believer, he thinks that it would be absurd to base all religion on this since such an attempt can only end in absurdity. The goal is to unify these feelings with speculative truths, and thus to show how speculation can in fact function as a defender of religious feeling, but unlike the latter, speculation can demonstrate its lasting truth with the strict necessity of reason. What is required is a conception of Christianity that is dignified and worthy of human beings, and such a conception cannot be based on feeling.

Hegel claims instead that the proper conception of faith is one that recognizes some objective external doctrine. He explains:

For I understand by faith neither the merely subjective state of belief which is restricted to the form of certainty, leaving untouched the nature of the content...of belief, nor on the other hand only the *credo*, the church’s confession of faith which can be recited and learned by rote without communicating itself to man’s innermost self... I hold that faith...is a unity of both these meanings.²⁸

Ever the dialectician, Hegel sees faith as containing two aspects – an objective and a subjective side. First, it should be a doctrine that contains an objective content that is agreed upon. This is in a sense the principle of traditional belief systems, but these are mistaken

²⁵ Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs, *Die Religion im inneren Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft*, Heidelberg: Karl Groos 1822. Hegel’s foreword appears on pp. i-xxviii of Hinrichs’ text. (Hegel’s text appears in English in *MW*, pp. 332-353.)

²⁶ Hegel, *MW*, pp. 347f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 19.

²⁷ Hegel, *EL*, § 2; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 42f. (*EL* = *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. by T.F. Gerats, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett 1991.)

²⁸ Hegel, *MW*, p. 338; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 4.

when they try tyrannically to impose themselves on individuals with no recognition of their individuality. Second, faith therefore involves the assent of the individual believer. This is the principle of the modern world that recognizes and respects the right of the individual to make decisions in such matters. Both of these elements must be present for the correct understanding of belief, and any absolute insistence on either the one side or the other leads to misunderstandings. Traditional belief was mistaken when it tried to declare its truth independently of the assent of the individual. The modern conception, to which Schleiermacher falls victim, is mistaken when it tries to insist on the truth of the subjective view of the individual, independent of any rational content. For Hegel, the goal is to unify these two sides by means of proper education and the cultivation of the human mind. The individual thus comes to recognize the inherent rationality of the general doctrine and freely grants his assent to it. The conflict is thereby avoided. But Hegel argues that it is an absurdity to believe that the solution lies in simply eliminating the content of belief and focusing exclusively on the truth of feeling or subjective conviction.

Second, Hegel believes that Schleiermacher's views lead to a form of relativism. There is no objective standard for truth or knowledge of the divine according to this conception since the locus of truth is found in the heart of each individual. Schleiermacher's view seems to reduce God to being just a feeling, which is something subjective.²⁹ Since this knowledge is immediate, it gives the individual a special and irreplaceable role:

This universal idea, which is now a matter of assumption, contains this essential principle – namely, that the highest, the religious content shows itself in the spirit itself, that Spirit manifests itself in Spirit, and in fact *in this my spirit*, that this faith has its source, its root in my deepest personal being, and that it is what is most peculiarly my own, and as such is inseparable from the consciousness of pure spirit.³⁰

But as a result there is no external objective truth or standard. For Hegel, this view reduces to a form of subjective irrationality. Schleiermacher opens himself up to this charge in his discussion of religious tolerance, which he believes his view promotes. He wishes to resist the “mania for system” that he believes distorts and confuses the true nature of religion.³¹ A system, be it philosophical or theological, is always based on certain fundamental principles. It organizes things as best it can based on these principles. But it is obliged to reject and criticize those things that stand in contradiction to them. By contrast, Schleiermacher argues, there is no contradiction in the infinite particularly of religious feeling. All of these can peacefully coexist alongside one another with no contradiction arising.³²

²⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 42; *Jub.*, vol. 15, p. 59. (*Phil. of Religion* = *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols. 1-3, trans. by E.B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: The Humanities Press 1962, 1968, 1972.)

³⁰ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 43; *Jub.*, vol. 15, p. 60.

³¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28. *Über die Religion*, p. 64.

³² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28. *Über die Religion*, p. 64.

Hegel believes that if no objective content of faith is recognized, then the inevitable result is that the content is merely filled in by the individual in an arbitrary manner. He explains,

Further, it is equally correct to infer that if feeling is made into a principle that determines a content, all that has to be done is to leave it to the individual which feelings he will have; it is an absolute indefiniteness that constitutes the standard and authority, i.e., the caprice and inclination of the individual, to be and to do what pleases him and to make himself the oracle for what shall be accepted as true as regards religion, duty, right, and what is fine and noble.³³

This then leads to “conceit” and “egotism” since it is the individual himself who is given the right to decide on everything based on his own caprice and arbitrary whim.³⁴

Third, since this view tends to be subjective, it seems to dismiss the church and all forms of organized religion. The church appears to be arbitrary and oppressive of the truth of the individual. Hegel argues,

In as much as this knowledge exists immediately in myself, all external authority, all foreign attestation is cast aside; what is to be of value to me must have its verification in my own spirit, and in order that I may believe I must have the witness of my spirit. It may indeed come to me from without, but any such external origin is a matter of indifference; if it is to be valid, this validity can only build itself up upon the foundation of all truth, in the *witness of the Spirit*.³⁵

In this sense Schleiermacher’s view ends up in agreement with the Enlightenment critics of religion, who invariably regarded the Church as a corrupt and oppressive force that was antithetical to any sense of true piety. Hegel’s charge here is in some ways ironic in the sense that one of the goals of Schleiermacher’s theology was to establish a foundation for the church and to unite the different Protestant confessions. But, alas, subjectivity does not provide a stable foundation since it will always vary from individual to individual.

While Schleiermacher attempts to develop a view that will escape the criticisms of the Enlightenment, his cure is, in Hegel’s eyes, far worse than the disease. Religion cannot be saved by reducing it to feeling or immediate intuition. On the contrary, this spells the end of any meaningful confession whatsoever. For Hegel, if one wants to defend religion or Christianity specifically, then one must hold firmly to the traditional dogmas and doctrines and make them the first line of defense. If one capitulates on these at the start, then one has already surrendered the battle to the followers of the Enlightenment. One must therefore maintain the specific content of Christianity and argue for its truth.³⁶

³³ Hegel, *MW*, pp. 348f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 21.

³⁴ Hegel, *MW*, p. 349; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 21f.

³⁵ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 43; *Jub.*, vol. 15, p. 60.

³⁶ Hegel, *MW*, p. 350; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 23: “But as regards what is needed at the present time, the need common to religion and philosophy is a *substantial objective content for truth*.”

There is no objective standard for truth or knowledge of the divine, according to Schleiermacher's conception, since the locus of truth is found in the heart of each individual. Hegel explains, "For with the thought that all objective determinateness has converged in the inwardness of subjectivity, the conviction is bound up that God gives revelation in an immediate way to man; that religion consists just in this, that man has immediate knowledge of God."³⁷ Since this knowledge is immediate, it gives the individual a special and irreplaceable role.³⁸ According to Hegel, the consent of the individual and individual conscience is a key feature of the modern world. In ancient cultures the individual was not recognized as being valid with respect to questions of morals, laws, customs, etc. Instead it was the established objective sphere of such things which ruled with an iron hand. If accepted custom or law dictated that one do something, then one did it, and one's own wishes and desires played no role in the situation.

For Hegel, it is a great breakthrough in the development of spirit that in the modern world the validity of the individual has come to be recognized. The individual is now thought to be able to evaluate a given law, custom or belief and grant his assent if it is rational. For Hegel, this means that there is an objective content external to the individual that one must take a stand on. With education and proper upbringing, one naturally comes to see the truth and rationality of this objective sphere, and when one reaches the age of reflection and contemplates such things for oneself, then one gives one's assent to them and complies with them. In this sense the right of the individual is recognized. But the conception of individuality and conscience that one finds in the Romantics is quite different from this. They do not recognize that preexisting sphere of customs and ethics; instead, they place the entire focus on the individual's will and free choice. But this is empty of content and leads to arbitrariness. Instead of taking its truth from the objective sphere outside itself, the individual props itself up as the standard for truth and objectivity. For Hegel, this is a perversion of the modern principle of subjective freedom. Moreover, he believes that a mistaken anthropology underlies the Romantic view. Our relation to God should represent what is highest in human beings. By reducing this relation to a feeling, Schleiermacher in effect regards humans from their lowest faculty. For Hegel, God wants to make a demand on free human beings and not animals subject to nature.

There can be no doubt that Hegel's conception of faith is to be understood in the context of his general approach to the philosophy of religion and specifically as a part of his agenda to defend Christianity. This leaves open the question of whether this conception can still be relevant today in a multicultural context, where there are many different forms of religion and conceptions of faith. Hegel's view has the advantage of being dialectical in nature, recognizing both a subjective and an objective element of faith. In this way, he is able to locate many different concepts of faith in his scheme and understand their strengths and weaknesses accordingly. This can also be used as a critical tool in our understanding of different religious traditions today. However, many critics have re-

³⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 42; *Jub.*, vol. 15, p. 59.

³⁸ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 43; *Jub.*, vol. 15, p. 60.

mained sympathetic to a general conception of faith that can be seen as motivated by the spirit of Schleiermacher. They feel that Hegel's conceptual understanding of faith undermines what they regard as a deeper realm of religious feeling. Hegel would presumably regard this as another sad sign of the times, where people have become self-indulgent and overly fixated on the subjective side of things. But yet, he too acknowledges the important inward side of religion. The open question is whether his theory is able to capture this adequately.

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