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The same content in two different languages? Hegel's conception of religion and philosophy and its critique by D.F. Strauss

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate on Hegel's conception of the relationship between religion and philosophy by proposing that it can be read as a division of labour between Christian religion and speculative philosophy. This reading allows us to understand better Hegel's idea that religion and philosophy have the same content in two different forms. I distinguish between the institutional and the intrapersonal dimensions of Hegel's claim of a division of labour between religion and philosophy. I then turn to a critique of Hegel's philosophy of religion by showing how David Friedrich Strauss's concluding dissertation from *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* can call our attention to some internal tensions within Hegel's conception. Although Strauss's interpretation does not present an insurmountable objection against Hegel's conception of a division of labour, it can help to illuminate to what extent Hegel oversimplified the practical implications that his conception might have for the priest's attempt to continue his instruction to the members of his community.

Hegel's conception of religion and its relation to philosophy have been an object of dispute ever since Hegel's death in 1831. Within the development of early Hegelianism the discussion of this topic led to the eventual breakup of the school into Right Hegelians and Left Hegelians.¹ While the Right Hegelians were those philosophers and theologians who favoured a religiously conservative reading of Hegel, the Left Hegelians argued to the contrary by claiming that Hegel's philosophy of religion contains a radical critique of religion which Hegel himself omitted or failed to make explicit in all its implications. Thus, for Left-Hegelian authors like David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx it is certain that Hegel's position results in the incompatibility of religion and philosophy.²

Besides the contradictory readings of Hegel's text, the political implications of this topic added fuel to the debate and pointed out the need to clarify questions concerning the legitimate foundations of the modern state.³ Due to Hegel's ambiguous remarks on religion there has been a fervid discussion as to the adequate interpretation of his text that has kept scholars working on Hegel busy till today.⁴

While the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* is part of the late Hegel's attempt to provide an integrative theory that allows for a philosophical solution and reconciliation of the theoretical and the practical conflicts of modern life,⁵ it remains a controversial issue to determine the precise role that religion plays within this account. The aim of this article is to bring into focus some of the systematic problems which are inherent in Hegel's attempt to reconcile Christianity and Enlightenment, faith and knowledge and the much-contested thesis that religion can eventually be sublated into philosophy. The main thesis of this paper is that Hegel's conception of religion and philosophy can be best understood as a *division of labour* and that this reading also helps us to better understand certain tensions involved in Hegel's claim of a possible reconciliation of religion and philosophy.

In this paper I will first provide a reconstruction of Hegel's conception of the relation between religion and philosophy as a *division of labour* and show how Hegel's later writings lend support to this exegetical claim. This reconstruction serves a twofold aim: On the one hand a close-up reading of Hegel's text allows us to retrace the reasons that Hegel himself had for *claiming* the possibility and desirability of a division of labour between religion and philosophy. On the other hand, such a reconstruction is a necessary basis for discussing the reasons that the Left Hegelians had to *question* the feasibility of such a division of labour. In my reconstruction, I will start from the diagnosis that Hegel makes use of an *institutional* division of labour as well as an *intrapersonal* division of labour between religion and philosophy. The details and presuppositions of these two kinds of division of labour between religion and philosophy will be discussed in the first and second sections of this article. In section III I will focus on a critique voiced by D. F. Strauss in *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, published in 1835–36, that can help to highlight certain intrapersonal problems of Hegel's position. In the conclusion of this paper, I will argue that Strauss's interpretation does not present an insurmountable objection to Hegel's conception of a division of labour, but that it can direct attention to *intrapersonal* tensions within Hegel's conception, by referring to the personal challenges that arise for the priest or speculative theologian who continues to instruct the people of his church after having grasped the essence of Christology. Although the Left-Hegelian critique of religion more broadly lies outside the scope of this article, I hope that the proposed distinction between institutional and intrapersonal aspects of the division of labour between religion and philosophy is not only useful for a clarification of Hegel's position, but can also contribute to a better

understanding of the different positions in the post-Hegelian debate on religion and theology.

I. The *institutional* division of labour between religion and philosophy in Hegel

The significance that religious phenomena have within Hegel's system is underlined by the fact that Hegel treats religion in its relation to philosophy quite prominently in the opening section of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Although Hegel defines the scope of philosophy by drawing comparisons to other sciences (e.g., mathematics, jurisprudence, physics, or science of history⁶), it is the suggestion of an affirmative relation between philosophy and *religion* that serves as the starting point in the encyclopaedic presentation of his philosophical system. In §1 of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel writes:

Philosophy lacks the advantage, which benefits the other sciences, of being able to presuppose their *objects* as immediately admitted to the imagination and the *method* of cognition for beginning and progression as already *assumed*. At first, it has its objects in common with religion. Both have the *truth* as their object, in the highest sense—that God is the truth and he *alone* is the truth. Both then deal further with the realm of the finite, with *nature* and the *human spirit*, their relationship to each other and to God as to their truth. Philosophy, therefore, can probably presuppose an *acquaintance* with its objects. Yes, it *must* presuppose such an acquaintance, as in any case an interest in them,—if only because for consciousness *representations* of objects are earlier than *concepts* of them, the *thinking* mind even proceeds only *through* representation and thus turns the same to conceptual thinking. (*Enc.* §1/*GW* 20: 39; my translation)⁷

In this introductory passage religion is the central point of reference for Hegel's characterization of philosophy according to which religion and philosophy share a *common universe of discourse*. The unique feature that allows for the discrimination of religion and philosophy is the *form* in which they grasp their objects, and not these objects themselves. As Hegel highlights, religion and philosophy can be distinguished by contrasting the religious form of *representation* (*Vorstellung*) with philosophy's *conceptual thinking* (*Begreifen*). In line with this, it has become commonly accepted to summarize Hegel's position regarding the relationship of religion to philosophy in terms of *an identity of content and a difference of form*.⁸ What was at issue here was not alone—and presumably not even primarily—the assumption

that religion and philosophy share the aim of trying to understand how things like God, nature and human spirit hang together, but the more controversial thesis that religion and philosophy hold the *same view* as regards the truth of God, nature and the self.⁹ Hegel advances such a claim at the end of his *Encyclopaedia* in the chapter on the absolute spirit:

The whole question turns entirely on the difference of the forms of speculative thought from the forms of mental representation and reflecting intellect. [...] It is only by an insight into the value of these forms that the true and needful conviction can be gained, that the content of religion and philosophy is the same [...]. (*Enc.* §573A/*GW* 20: 555–56)

In this paper I want to contribute to the understanding of this more controversial thesis by arguing that Hegel is committed to the idea of an *institutional* division of labour between religion and philosophy. To do so, I will first show that there is textual evidence that lends support to the general idea of such a division of labour regarding Hegel's conception of religion and philosophy (section I.i). Secondly, I will specify and confine the scope of his claim. This is necessary because of Hegel's highly ambiguous use of the word 'religion'. Depending on the context the term 'religion' can refer to (1) all kinds of faith and forms of life including particular rituals, prayers etc.; (2) reflective forms of thinking about religion and God, i.e. *theology* (see *Enc.* §564A/*GW* 20: 550 and *Enc.* §2A/*GW* 20: 41); (3) particular forms of religion, for example the *Christian* religion; and at times also (4) all forms of cultural self-understanding which to Hegel encompasses *art, religion and philosophy*. The latter meaning is pertinent when he speaks of the sphere of absolute spirit in general as '[r]eligion, as this supreme sphere may be in general designated' (*Enc.* §554A/*GW* 20: 542). In light of Hegel's ambiguous use of the word 'religion', I will show that Hegel's thesis of the *same content* of religion and philosophy is restricted only to a particular religion, namely the Christian religion (see section I.ii).

I.i The general idea of a division of labour between religion and philosophy

The general idea of a division of labour between religion and philosophy is backed by a passage from the preface to the second edition of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, where Hegel writes the following:

Religion is the way of being conscious of the truth for all men, for men of all learning; but the scientific knowledge of truth is a special way of being conscious of it, the work of which

not all, but only a few, undertake. *The content is the same*, but just as Homer says of some things that they have two names, one in the language of the gods, the other in the language of men, so there are two languages for that content, the one of feeling, of imagination, and of thought nesting in finite categories and one-sided abstractions, the other of the concrete concept. (*GW* 20: 13; my translation)

Before going into details, it is crucial to note that Hegel is not merely describing a given state of affairs but articulating a *normative expectation* that is meant to suggest that a particular organization of society is a feasible and desirable structure. The overarching theme of this passage is the question of how people can relate to the truth. According to Hegel there is more than one such possibility. Truth is available via philosophy, but also by means of religion.¹⁰ Hegel characterizes religion and philosophy as ‘two languages, one of them the language of emotions and representation, the other the language of the concrete concept’ (*GW* 20: 13; my translation). Conceptual and representational thinking are different forms of thinking which are more or less easy to employ. While conceptual thinking, the characteristic of (speculative) philosophy, is depicted as a laborious activity and therefore only undertaken by some specialists, Hegel seems to suggest that representational thinking is a form of thinking one acquires rather easily, namely through one’s religious socialization. Hegel makes it quite clear that the philosophical form of conceptual thinking is the more fitting form for grasping the truth, whereas (religious) representations are (by definition) one-sided and abstract. However, he does *not* conclude from this that religion thereby becomes superfluous or unreasonable. On the contrary, Hegel affirms that there can be the same content in two different languages. Thus, according to him it is perfectly reasonable that the life of a philosopher is only chosen by some people and not by everyone. What might be the reason for this?

To account for this, one needs to note that Hegel does not claim a general superiority of either philosophy or conceptual thinking. He conceives conceptual thinking as the superior form of consciousness but only in a certain respect, namely regarding epistemic and justificatory aims. Besides these theoretical aims there are other aims for which philosophy is less well suited or unsuited at all. For example, when Hegel distinguishes between a general (religious) and a special (philosophical) consciousness of truth he suggests that religion is superior to philosophy because the religious language with its images and narrative elements is much more accessible and intelligible for people of different educational backgrounds whereas the occupation with philosophical concepts remains reserved for a special class of people. The thesis that Hegel makes use of such a division between scientific and impersonal aims on the one hand and cultural and personal

needs on the other is backed by various remarks of Hegel's, for example in the *Encyclopaedia* by his indication of the exceptional position and the 'incomprehensibility of philosophy' ('die Unverständlichkeit der Philosophie') (*Enc.* §3/GW 20: 42; my translation), but also in the famous annotation to §270 of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* where religion is depicted as the institution in service of personal hope and consolation (see *EPR*: §270A/GW 14,1: 213 and *EPR*: §241/GW 14,1: 192) that resonates with an earlier remark from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which he strictly criticized any kind of *Erbaulichkeit* through philosophy but in no way precluded the possibility that others, theologians or poets for example, tend to such needs (see *PbG*: 14). This shows that the assumption of the exceptional epistemic position that Hegel ascribes to philosophy is by no means incompatible with the existence of other (non-scientific) functions that religion can serve better than philosophy. Rather, Hegel is far from thinking that philosophy could be able to replace the social and consolatory function of religion in any satisfactory way. Or to put it positively, Hegel's assumption is that religion and philosophy are two social practices or institutions that can complement each other in a fruitful way exactly because each institution serves aims and needs well that the other is less suited for. If there is such a division of labour, religion and philosophy must not conflict with each other.¹¹ For philosophers the truth will be of scientific interest and part of the need to provide satisfying justifications for our beliefs, whereas for the religious believer the truth is first and foremost something that has existential value in an individual life. They employ the same content, as Hegel says, and still do so in different ways.

I.ii The Absolute as spirit as the content of the Christian religion

The question that has remained unanswered so far is the question of what content exactly Hegel has in mind which is supposed to be the same in religion and in philosophy. A passage that provides information about this is the annotation to §384 from the third edition of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* from 1830 where he writes:

The Absolute is Mind (Spirit) this is the supreme definition of the Absolute. To find this definition and to grasp its meaning and burthen was, we may say, the ultimate purpose of all education and all philosophy: it was the point to which turned the impulse of all religion and science: and it is this impulse that must explain the history of the world. The word Mind (Spirit) and some glimpse¹² of its meaning was found at an early period: and the spirituality of God is the lesson of Christianity. It remains for philosophy in its own element of intelligible unity to get hold of what was thus given as a mental image, and

what implicitly is the ultimate reality; and that problem is not genuinely, and by rational methods, solved so long as liberty and intelligible unity is not the theme and the soul of philosophy. (*Enc.* §384A/*GW* 20: 382–83)

In this passage Hegel sketches a common perspective for all ‘education and all philosophy [...] all religion and science’ by claiming that all these different practices and institutions have sought for ‘the supreme definition of the Absolute’ (*Enc.* §384A/*GW* 20: 382). Hegel often uses the term ‘definition’ in a derogatory manner to criticize deficient or arbitrary ways of attributing meaning. But this negative connotation does not apply to the passage at hand because here Hegel praises the Christian religion for having grasped God (or the absolute) as something spiritual and for having done so ‘at an early period’ (*Enc.* §384A/*GW* 20: 383). In consideration of Hegel’s ambiguous use of the term ‘religion’, it is important to note that his praise is directed to the Christian religion in the broadest sense of the term, namely to the cultural and social tradition named Christianity, but *not* to Christian theology. That Hegel is far from praising the theological interpretation of Christian dogmas is supported by his repeated critique of the methodological deficits of Christian theology as lacking ‘seriousness’ (*GW* 20: 28) and being unable to provide a speculative justification for concepts like ‘God’ and ‘reason’ (see *Enc.* §564A/*GW* 20: 550).¹³ On the whole, §384 is illuminating for specifying Hegel’s rather general thesis of the identity of religion and philosophy as a claim about the identity of the *Christian* religion and Hegel’s *speculative* philosophy with regard to a specific content, namely the thesis that the Absolute needs to be grasped as something spiritual.

Despite his praise for the Christian religion, Hegel also criticizes it for its deficient representation of *the Absolute as spirit*. That to Hegel the religious form is yet in deficit has to do with the fact that religion has the content (the idea of God or the Absolute as spirit) only in the form of representation and not in that of conceptual thinking. The religious form involves a narration with temporal and local reference, and it evokes images of a concrete story taking place for the presentation of its doctrines: the idea of father and son, the contrast between heaven and earth, the passion of Christ, etc. Hegel claims this form to be deficient because it is always in danger of isolating episodes from the encompassing story. Philosophy must, therefore, dispense of the formal deficits of the Christian representation of spirit, disengage with its narrative presentation and instead make explicit the logical structure it involves. Still, the needs of the Christian community can only be addressed successfully by resorting to the language of images and representations, not by the abstract language of philosophical concepts. Only when measured by the standards of philosophical justification does the form of representation become a deficit that needs to be overcome. The following table provides an

overview of Hegel’s conception of religion and philosophy in terms of their common areas of interest, their content as well as their different epistemic forms:

	Areas of interest (<i>Gegenstände</i>)	Content (<i>Inhalt</i>)	Epistemic form
Christian religion	God, nature, and human spirit	God/the Absolute as spirit	Representation (<i>Vorstellung</i>)
Speculative philosophy	God, nature, and human spirit ¹⁴	God/the Absolute as spirit	Conceptual thinking (<i>Begreifen</i>)

So far, the relationship between religion and philosophy has been explained in terms of a *specialization* of social practices and linguistic competences that answer different human needs and lead to an institutional division of labour. However, on an intrapersonal level Hegel’s ideal is not *specialization* but ‘[h]uman wholeness’ (Houlgate 2005: 211) or well-roundedness. Instead of specializing on a single form of consciousness, a good life is one that exhausts the whole range of human faculties. In the next section I explain in what way human wholeness can be understood as an *intrapersonal* division of labour among different forms of consciousness and I discuss the problems that the idea of human wholeness raises for Hegel’s philosophy of religion.

II. Human wholeness as an intrapersonal division of labour among different forms of consciousness

The focus of this section lies on the *intrapersonal* analogue to Hegel’s institutional division of labour. The aim is to show that this kind of dividing labour *within* the subject’s mental make-up serves as the foundation for Hegel’s conception of human wholeness. A first result of the last section was that religion and philosophy can be understood as two different ways of dealing with truth, which—according to Hegel—can exist side by side *qua* division of responsibilities and competences. In this section I discuss the question of whether such a *coexistence* of religion and philosophy is also convincing when we interpret it in terms of an intrapersonal division of labour. The question is whether we can read Hegel’s conception of religion and philosophy not only as a conception about different social practices, but also as a conception of complementary social roles held by one and the same person. Such a complementary reading of religion and philosophy is suggested by Stephen Houlgate:

The clearest, and thus truest, articulation of the truth is provided, according to Hegel, by philosophy. However, he recognizes that truth must not only be understood conceptually,

but must also be felt, loved and trusted, as in religion, and intuited or perceived in a sensuous or imaginative form, as in art [...]. From a historical point of view, religion is actually the most important of the three forms of absolute self-consciousness, for Hegel, because its mode of articulating the truth is the one which touches the hearts of people most closely and most readily inspires them to change their world. In art, however, the claims of our senses and our creative imagination are satisfied. Through art, truth can be *enjoyed* without the severe discipline of philosophy or the personal urgency of religion, as the fruit of our own activity. (Houlgate 2005: 211)

Houlgate discusses the three forms of Hegel's absolute spirit (art, religion and philosophy) (see *Enc.* §§553–77/*GW* 20: 542–71) by sketching their respective relations to the forms of subjective spirit that constitute them (intuition, representation, and (conceptual) thinking) (see *Enc.* §§445–68/*GW* 20: 439–65). Houlgate refers to the *specific claims* of human sensory perception, imagination and thinking. Each institution of absolute spirit (art, religion and philosophy) serves to satisfy a particular need of our psychological constitution as human beings: *Art* meets 'the claims of our senses and creative imagination' (Houlgate 2005: 211), *religion* meets our needs for narratives and symbols, and *philosophy* meets the claim of our capacity for abstract and rational 'thinking'. Each institution makes its contribution to a comprehensive self-realization of human individuals and thereby adds to '[h]uman wholeness' (Houlgate 2005: 211) in a particular and irreducible way. This form of self-realization constitutes its own, *intrapersonal* division of labour. It is a division of labour not among different individuals or institutions, but among different psychological capacities *within* a human being.

However, these remarks allow for two different readings. They leave open whether within the framework of such an intrapersonal division of labour the contribution is ultimately made (a) by the three forms of the *subjective spirit* (intuition, representation¹⁵ and thinking) or (b) by the three forms of the *absolute spirit*, namely by a certain form of art, a certain form of religion (the Christian religion) and a particular form of philosophy (namely Hegel's speculative philosophy).

Those who advocate reading (a) make a much more modest claim as they merely demand that human beings realize their different subjective potentials in one way or another by immersing themselves in different forms of consciousness and thus adding to the richness of human self-realization. According to this reading, the subjective capacities could be sufficiently satisfied, for example, through visits to a museum (intuition), the membership in a reading circle on the modern English novel (imagination and representation) and the private reading of philosophical classics (conceptual thinking). This reading finds support in Hegel's

Psychology where he introduces intuition, representation and (conceptual) thinking as three forms of subjective spirit and argues that true satisfaction needs to be found in the ‘totality’ of these forms:

But the *true satisfaction*, it is admitted, is only afforded by an intuition permeated by intellect and mind, by rational conception, by products of imagination which are permeated by reason and exhibit ideas—in a word, by *cognitive* intuition, cognitive conception, etc. The truth ascribed to such satisfaction lies in this, that intuition, conception, etc. are not isolated, and exist only as ‘moments’ in the totality of cognition itself. (*Enc.* §445A/*GW* 20: 442)

Reading (b), however, makes a much more ambitious claim. It implies that human self-realization must take place in very specific ways, namely through the participation in a particular form of art, by belief and participation in the *Christian* religion and by the occupation with speculative philosophy. Textual evidence in support of the claim that Hegel is committed to this more ambitious reading is provided within the context of his doctrine of absolute spirit. It shows that Hegel is interested in the contributions of a particular form of art, religion and philosophy, namely ‘the *Ideal*’ (*Enc.* §556) and ‘the beauty of *classical art*’ (*Enc.* §561), the Christian dogmatics of the so called ‘revealed religion’ (*Enc.* §564) and ‘speculative’ philosophy (*Enc.* §573A). In the conclusion of the section on absolute spirit Hegel emphasizes that philosophical ‘cognition of the necessity’ is restricted to these ‘two forms’ (*Enc.* §573), i.e. the said forms of classical art and Christian religion. Furthermore, the adequacy of reading (b) is underlined by Hegel’s preferential treatment of the ‘Protestant conscience’ (*Enc.* §552A) within the section on objective spirit.

From a contemporary point of view reading (a) might present itself as the more attractive approach. Besides being the less demanding approach, it leaves room for a reasonable variety of individual self-realization as long as subjective faculties are not neglected at the cost of others (for example by leading a life in an overly intellectualistic manner). The general idea that a flourishing life is a life committed to human wholeness can be found in the works of Friedrich Schiller who argued for the unity of duty and inclination in *On Grace and Dignity*, and it is also discernible in the writings of Left Hegelian authors like Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx. For example, the lion’s share of Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* is meant to account for the full range of human qualities that are mistakenly projected onto an infinite being in religion, but are meant to be retrieved by mankind for its harmonious self-realization. According to Feuerbach this is due to the fact that ‘[t]o a complete man belong the power of thought, the power of will, the power of affection’ (*EC*: 3). A similar idea is presupposed by Marx in his conception of the universal actualization of human species-being in the *Economic and Philosophic*

Manuscripts from 1844.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the evidence yielded by Hegel's doctrine of absolute spirit suggests that Hegel would not have been satisfied with just *any* kind of self-realization. For the reasons mentioned above reading (b) provides a more adequate reconstruction of his position on self-realization. However, if Hegel is committed to reading (b) he is also confronted with difficulties that might arise from the individual's attempt to reconcile the belief in Christian representations with the knowledge of speculative philosophy. Strauss's critique can serve as an example for the Left Hegelians' departure from Hegel and his confident belief in a reconciliation of religion and philosophy. Moreover, Strauss has provided one of the most convincing internal critiques of the tensions inherent to the idea of a speculative elevation of religion, to which Hegel himself can be said to have paid insufficient attention. Strauss's critical considerations are the topic of the next section.

III. Strauss's interpretation of Christology and his critique of Hegel

The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined by David Friedrich Strauss is a critical examination of the Gospels that is meant to reveal their mythological character. Although the greater part of the book is concerned with a detailed analysis of the historical credibility of the Gospels and their view of Jesus Christ, the *Life of Jesus* quickened the interest not only of contemporary theologians, but also of non-theologians like Friedrich Engels and Arnold Ruge as well as of lay readers (see Linstrum 2010: 597–604). Strauss's book was thus able to provoke a discussion that went beyond an exclusively theological readership.¹⁷

In his preface to the first German edition Strauss sketches the general aim of his investigation by considering and criticizing two alternative approaches to the life of Jesus that according to him have become 'antiquated' (*LoJ*: xxix): On the one hand he opposes the *supernatural* interpretation of the biblical texts for it too readily accepts the descriptions of supernatural events and is thus unable to meet modern standards of interpretation. On the other hand he rejects the *naturalist* (or rationalist) approach in its attempt to explain the miracles by means of natural causes as it also misses the point of the Gospels when it reads them as primarily historical (see *LoJ*: xxix). Strauss himself aims at what he identifies as the 'mythical point of view' (*LoJ*: 39).¹⁸ While he openly concedes that he is not the first to have adopted this point of view, he deems himself to be the first to make use of it as a general approach to the evangelical texts: The mythical theory 'has long been applied to particular parts of that history, and is here only extended to its entire tenor' (*LoJ*: xxix). Within Strauss's approach the Gospel histories are read less as descriptions of historical events, than as collective expressions of the early Christian church (see Toews 1985: 261f.). It is due to this that an adequate inquiry into the Gospels must

thus distinguish the *literal* from the *spiritual* meaning of the biblical texts. It is by reference to this distinction that Strauss also tries to clarify his scientific intentions and forestall critics who might suspect him of a subversion of Christian faith:

The author is aware that the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts. The certainty of this can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism, and distinguish it from the naturalistic criticism of the last century, the design of which was, with the historical fact, to subvert also the religious truth, and which thus necessarily became frivolous. A dissertation at the close of the work will show that the dogmatic significance of the life of Jesus remains inviolate. (*Lof*: xxx)

The concluding dissertation of his extensive investigation is famous for Strauss's eventual considerations of the practical consequences that follow from his mythological analysis as regards the professional exercise of priesthood. While Strauss does not deny that the biblical narratives have a true content, he holds that they do express their truth in the wrong form, namely in the form of representations and stories, and he assumes that this is the reason why these stories became myths. So, even though it is true to say that the concluding dissertation is no direct or explicit critique of Hegel's philosophy of religion, there is clear evidence that Strauss uses Hegel's distinction between the *form* and *content* of religious belief to structure his interpretation of Christology. This allows us to relate Strauss's discussion to Hegel's conception of a division of labour between religion and philosophy. In §151 of the concluding dissertation, for example, Strauss draws on the distinction between the historical and spiritual form of Christology:

The phenomenal history of the individual, says Hegel, is only a starting point for the mind. Faith, in her early stages, is governed by the senses [...]; what she holds to be true is the external, ordinary event [...]. But mind having once taken occasion by this external fact, to bring under its consciousness the idea of humanity as one with God, sees in the history only the presentation of that idea; the object of faith is completely changed; instead of a sensible, empirical fact, it has become a spiritual and divine idea, which has its confirmation no longer in history but in philosophy. (*Lof*: 780f.)

The aim of my remaining reflections is to show to what extent Strauss's comments pose a challenge when related to Hegel's attempt to reconcile religion and philosophy.

In §152, the final section of *The Life of Jesus*, Strauss discusses the ‘Relation of the critical and speculative theology to the church’ (LJ: 781). In this section he identifies different options open to the critical (or speculative) theologian when he seriously considers the conflict between Strauss’s speculative theology and the exoteric doctrine of the Church. According to Strauss there are four options available to the critical theologian.

As a *first* option he could try ‘to elevate the church to his own point of view, and for it, also, to resolve the historical into the ideal’ (LJ: 782). Parallel to Hegel’s sublation of religion into philosophy this would mean to reduce all religious representations to their speculative conclusions about God as spirit. According to Strauss this is ‘an attempt which must necessarily fail, because to the Church all those premises are wanting on which the theologian rests his speculative conclusions’ (LJ: 782). As already seen in Hegel, these speculative conclusions about God and the Absolute are far too abstract (in the non-Hegelian meaning of the word), not to mention unintelligible to non-philosophical members of the church. If the philosophical truth of the religious representation ‘can be possessed only by a few’ (LJ: 781), as Strauss emphasizes, the first option is not a real option. The speculative truth is of no avail when measured by the needs of an ordinary member of the Church.

According to Strauss, ‘[t]he second and opposite measure would be, to transport himself to the point of view of the church, and for the sake of imparting edification ecclesiastically, to descend from the sphere of the ideal into the region of the popular conception’ (LJ: 782). However, conflicts are likely to arise from the fact that the theologian would have to preach religion ‘under the form of a history’, although he does ‘not believe in the reality of that event as a single sensible fact’ (LJ: 782):

[A]nd if it come to discover that the theologian has not this conviction, and yet preaches on the resurrection, he must appear in the eyes of the church a hypocrite, and thus the entire relation between the theologian and the church would be virtually cancelled. (LJ: 783)

Moreover, the theologian would not only lose his credibility in the eyes of his church. It is quite likely that he will also suffer a loss of personal integrity, that is he will ‘appear a hypocrite to himself also’ (LJ: 783), for only pretending to believe in the resurrection as a historical fact.¹⁹

From this follows a *third* and more radical option, namely the ‘desperate course, of forsaking the ministerial office’ (LJ: 783). According to Strauss, this option could be actualized quite easily: ‘he [the critical theologian] has only to descend from the pulpit, and mount the professor’s chair, where he will not be under the necessity of withholding his scientific opinions from such as are destined to science’ (LJ: 783). Although it might be a possible solution for some theologians

to resign their spiritual office in order to focus on philosophical questions, Strauss argues that it would not be desirable as a general solution. This is because ‘it could not be held good for the church, that all those who pursue criticism and speculation to the results above presented, should depart from their position as teachers’ (L α J: 783).

Instead of recommending to ‘abandon theology’ (L α J: 783), Strauss proposes a *fourth* option to the critical theologian ‘which offers a positive mode of reconciling the two extremes, the consciousness of the theologian, and that of the church’:

In his discourses to the church, he will indeed adhere to the forms of the popular conception, but on every opportunity he will exhibit their spiritual significance, which to him constitutes their sole truth, and thus prepare—though such a result is only to be thought of as an unending progress—the resolution of those forms into their original ideas in the consciousness of the church also. (L α J: 783)

According to this fourth option the biblical history might step by step become less important than the truths derived from it, but as Strauss states also this solution cannot overcome the problem that the theologian might in the end be seen as a hypocrite who is dishonest about what he really thinks about the historical events the Bible refers to (see L α J: 784). So eventually the fourth option is not a viable option to provide a reconciliation of religion and philosophy either.²⁰ Instead, as Strauss himself suggests, the adequate conceptualization of religion remains an open question: ‘we have shown that our age has not arrived at a certain decision on this subject’ (L α J: 784).

Strauss’s particular contribution to the elucidation of the division of labour in Hegel’s philosophy of religion is his systematic exploration of the social role of the theologian in relation towards his church. Although Strauss has not shown that Hegel has actually ‘misconstruct[ed]’ (L α J: 783) the theologian’s role within his conception of a division of labour between religion and philosophy, the reflections in his concluding dissertation can help to uncover that the (proper) interpretation of the social role of the theologian is actually a blind spot in Hegel’s account which would have deserved more attention on the part of Hegel.

IV. Conclusion

This paper was intended to offer a philosophical reconstruction of Hegel’s conception of religion and philosophy as a *division of labour*. As it turned out, the division of labour can be said to have two sides that allow us to distinguish institutional and intrapersonal dimensions involved in Hegel’s philosophy of religion. Moreover,

this interpretation proved to be helpful for the reconstruction of Strauss's position about religion. As I tried to show, Strauss pays particular attention to the *intrapersonal* tensions suffered by the critical theologian who tries to solve the conflict between speculative theology and the exoteric doctrine of the Church. Furthermore, I argued that Strauss's systematic exploration of the social role of the theologian can contribute to a critical discussion of the division of labour in Hegel's philosophy of religion by showing that a closer examination of this role yields a blind spot in Hegel's conception. Although the tensions that Strauss has identified must not necessarily amount to an insurmountable problem for the plausibility of Hegel's conception of a division of labour, they can help to show that due to the premises of Hegel's philosophy of religion the role of the theologian is burdened with numerous conflicting expectations and that their intrapersonal reconcilability poses a problem of its own. How this problem could be solved Strauss does not tell us either. Yet, what he can show is that there is a desideratum to not only think about Hegel's idea of a division of labour between religion and *philosophy*, but also about the division of labour between religion and *priesthood*, because the latter is much more difficult to account for in the Hegelian framework than the former.

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Notes

¹ The designation of 'Left' and 'Right' Hegelianism was coined by D.F. Strauss in his *Streitschriften* where he distinguishes 'verschiedene Richtungen innerhalb der Hegel'schen Schule in Betreff der Christologie' (*Streitschriften*: 95). See also Jaeschke (1983: 6f.) and Toews (1985: 112ff.). Although the terms 'Left' and 'Young Hegelian' as well as 'Right' and 'Old Hegelian' are sometimes used synonymously, in this paper I will only use the distinction between 'Left' and 'Right' Hegelians which refers to a particular theologico-philosophical dispute over the adequate interpretation of Christology. For a discussion of this see also Renault (2018: 43–59).

² On the splits in the Hegelian School (including a Hegelian Centre) in relation to a range of religious debates see Stewart (2011: 66–95). See also Quante (2010: 197–237) and Toews (1985: 141–99).

³ The political implications of Hegel's conception of religion and philosophy are discussed in Siep (2015: 9–27).

⁴ See for example Löwith (1964), Jaeschke (2000), Lewis (2014), Mooren (2018) or Halbig (2021).

⁵ The motive of reconciliation and its significance for the later writings of Hegel is addressed by Rózsa (2005).

⁶ See for example *Enc.* §16A/*GW* 20: 57–58.

⁷ Abbreviations used:

- EC* = Feuerbach, Ludwig (1841), *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. M. Evans (London: Trübner & Co., 1881)/*Das Wesen des Christentums* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005).
- Enc* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*, ed. W. Bonsiepen and H. C. Lucas, *Gesammelte Werke* 20 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992).
- EPR* = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)/*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. K. Grotzsch and E. Weisser-Lohmann, *Gesammelte Werke* 14,1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2009).
- LdJ* = Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1902)/*Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1836).
- PbG* = Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. W. Bonsiepen and R. Heede, *Gesammelte Werke* 9 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980).
- Rel* = Hegel, *Religions-Philosophie. Vorlesungsmanuskripte I (1816–1831)*, ed. W. Jaeschke, *Gesammelte Werke* 17 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1987).
- Streitschriften* = Strauss, *Streitschriften zur Verteidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie*. 3. Heft (Tübingen: Osiander, 1837).

⁸ See Jaeschke (1986: 396); Lewis (2014: 159) and Halbig (2021).

⁹ See Jaeschke (2010: 505–9).

¹⁰ Hegel mentions art as a *third* form of consciousness of truth at the end of his *Encyclopaedia* in the section on the absolute spirit, see *Enc.* §§556/*GW* 20: 543.

¹¹ The linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions of this division of labour are discussed in more detail in Mooren (2018: 139–204).

¹² In Wallace’s translation Hegel’s praise sounds much more restrained than in the original. According to Wallace the Christian religion articulated only ‘some glimpse’ of the true meaning of the Absolute. According to Hegel’s original text the respective sentence does not mention any qualifications. It says: ‘Das Wort und die *Vorstellung* des Geistes ist früh gefunden, und der Inhalt der christlichen Religion ist, Gott als Geist zu erkennen zu geben’ (*Enc.* §384A/*GW* 20: 383).

¹³ For a detailed reconstruction of this critique see Mooren (2018: 204–14).

¹⁴ For the speculative philosopher the interest in human spirit includes an interest in legal and cultural phenomena which to him are genuine products of human spirit.

¹⁵ In §3 of his *Encyclopaedia* Hegel refers to ‘representations as such’ (*Vorstellungen überhaupt*) (GW 20: 42). This implies that the form of representation is not reserved for religion only but also encompasses non-religious instances of representative consciousness.

¹⁶ Among contemporary philosophers Thomas Hurka has specified the idea of human wholeness as a kind of ‘balanced variety’ (2011: 167). By way of an example Hurka has emphasized that ‘[i]n Marx’s utopia each person would be able ‘to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as [he has] a mind’ (2011: 167).

¹⁷ Dating back to the year 1839 there was even a shortened and simplified version of the *Life of Jesus* explicitly prepared for ‘Thinking Readers of Every Estate’. Without Strauss’s knowledge this version was prepared by an anonymous theologian, see Linstrum (2010: 602).

¹⁸ See also Toews (1985: 261).

¹⁹ Hegel distinguishes between the historical and spiritual dimension of Christian dogmatics, too. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from 1821 he advises against reducing questions of truth and validity to questions of historical evidence. Instead, he wants us to keep apart ‘two questions: α) Is it true that God has a son, that he sends him into the world, or has sent him—? β) Is this individual, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee, the son of a carpenter, the Christ?’ (Rel: 282; my translation).

²⁰ On the possibilities available to the speculative theologian, see also Toews (1985: 267–68) and Mohseni (2015: 57–58).

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