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5. The Truth of Religion

Contributions from Spinoza and Hegel

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Abstract

Modern society encompasses a cluster of features. One feature is skepticism directed at truth generally and at religion in particular. From skepticism comes the marginalization of religious practice and belief. Moderns generally look to science, not religion, as the source of truth. Is the eclipse of religion inevitable in advanced societies? Is secularism an undeniable historical reality? This article uses the philosophies of Spinoza and Hegel to challenge skepticism about truth and identify the ways that religion belongs to any society, even the most advanced. I outline differences in their approach to religion, notably Spinoza's view that for thinkers, always a minority population, philosophy replaces religion as a path to God and virtue. Spinoza and Hegel do not repudiate history. Both affirm features of modernity, such as religious liberty. But progress does not depend on a skeptical mindset. The present article identifies the defective factoring mindset that fosters skepticism. Skepticism is shaped by dogmatic prejudice; modernity is reality. A diverse and tolerant society need not be a skeptical one. Skepticism blocks our ability to understand the modern world, including religion.

Keywords: Hegel, Spinoza, religion, secular, truth, skepticism

Skepticism and Secular Societies

Skepticism is a characteristic feature of modern societies. Often skepticism challenges religious practice and knowledge of God. Hence, modern societies aptly are known as secular. Central ideals of modernity seem to clash with religious worldviews. For example, individuals cherish the liberty to choose their own paths. As lives scatter in various directions, identities rooted in family, culture, tradition, and community wane. Secularity raises questions: in advanced societies is religion a living source of experience and belief? In the future, will religion be practiced in churches and households or studied primarily by historians, like ancient languages and fables? If science supplies the sole measure of reality, what room remains for God or the spirit? In the 1800s, August Comte depicted history as passing through three stages: from religion through philosophy to science. Like a withered snakeskin, religion will peel away as history advances. "Out with the obsolete!" Presumably, religion cannot adapt to modernity and will face eventual extinction. Philosophy will hang on longer, but its future is shaky.

My focus is on religion and truth. I argue that for religion to flourish, its truth must be recognized. Religious teachings lacking truth lack substance. To sound out truth is the task of philosophy. In this way, philosophy and religion are inseparable. What is meant by secularism, and how does it pose challenges to truth? In ordinary usage, secular suggests the partial eclipse of religious sway. In developed societies, religious institutions are marginalized, belief is privatized, and adherence to rituals and creed loosens. In most households, the Sabbath is just another shopping day. Active participation in religion declines. Scripture serves less as a guide to reality than a chronicle of the movements and customs of ancient peoples. Moderns generally do not turn to scripture for knowledge about the world; neither do they worry if their ideas square with scripture. In a secular society, religions engage in public debates, but religious authorities do not determine policy or law. These trends are striking in liberal, capitalist democracies and less visible where development is underway. Secularism belongs to the trajectory of modern history. It is both a driving force and an offshoot of tectonic shifts in civil society, state, and economy. This secularization thesis is discussed by Douglas Porpora in the present volume. But the historical reality of secularism does not posit skepticism concerning God or religion as inevitable. Secularism is separable from skepticism.

The present article considers how Spinoza (1632-1677) and Hegel (1770-1830) address the relation of religion to truth. Since they primarily equate religion with Judeo-Christianity, the present article will follow suit. Neither Spinoza nor Hegel inhabits a liberal society (17th century Holland and early 19th century German states do not qualify). Both, however, admire elements of liberalism that they recognize as emerging features of modern society. Spinoza asserts:

Faith therefore allows every person the greatest liberty to think, so that they may think whatever they wish about any question whatever without doing wrong. It only condemns as heretics and schismatics those who put forward beliefs for the purpose of promoting disobedience, hatred, conflict and anger

... faith regards as faithful only those who promote justice and character as far as their reason and abilities allow (184).

The achievements of secularism include: to disestablish religion from civil authority; to remove religious requirements for citizenship, employment, teaching, and government service; to end punishment for upholding dissenting ideas or pursuing research. Liberal safeguards ensure the stability of the state. Spinoza observes:

They (sectarians) persecute all who do not think as they do as if they were enemies of God, even though they may be the most honourable of men and dedicated to true virtue while they esteem those who agree with them as the elect of God, even if they are the most violent of men. Surely nothing could be devised which is more pernicious and dangerous to the state (178-79).

Modernity regards freedom of thought as an individual's endowment, not to be restricted by institutions. Quoting Horace, Kant identifies the motto of enlightenment: "*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding!" (41). Like the abolition of slavery or the liberation of women, freedom of thought and debate are milestones in the overall advance of history. These features define secularism and are sources of hope.

Spinoza and Hegel, like other Enlightenment thinkers, recognize central features of modernity as liberating. But neither links this progress to the eclipse of religion. In their view, humans are naturally religious. Like music or poetry, religion belongs to human existence at a deep level. It is enduring and rooted in our nature. But like the arts, religion always reflects its historical setting. We find ourselves being religious in a secular, democratic, capitalist, and diverse society. To walk away from secularism is no more possible than to deny that abstraction is art or jazz is music. The reality of the present is compelling. But the historical context makes it hard for religion to fulfill its promise. Neither Spinoza nor Hegel expects religion in the modern setting to establish truth on its own. To fulfill that task belongs to philosophy.

Religion Prior to Enlightenment: Hegel's Account

For contrast with the Enlightenment, Hegel evokes traditional religious consciousness. Traditional consciousness was attached more to the transcendent than to the here and now. In its eyes death did not signify the end but rather passage into the afterlife. The eternal gave the temporal its meaning. History advances in many ways, but the fading of this closeness to God for Hegel registers a poignant loss:

Time was when man had a heaven, decked and fitted out with endless wealth of thoughts and pictures. The significance of all that is, lay in the thread of light by which it was attached to heaven; instead of dwelling in the present as it is here and now, the eye glanced away over the present to the Divine, away, so to say, to a present that lies beyond. The mind's gaze had to be directed under compulsion to what is earthly, and kept fixed there, and it has needed a long time to introduce that clearness, which only celestial realities had, into the crassness and confusion shrouding the sense of things earthly, and to make attention to the immediate present as such, which was called Experience, of interest and of value. Now we have apparently the opposite of all this; man's

mind and interest are so deeply rooted in the earthly that we require a like power to have them raised above that level. His spirit shows such poverty of nature that it seems to long for the mere pitiful feeling of the divine in the abstract, and to get refreshment from that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for the merest mouthful of water. But the little which can thus satisfy the needs of the human spirit we can measure the extent of its loss (1931: 5).

For believers, religion was more comforting than their immediate surroundings, the transcendent more present than the daily grind. For these ancestors, the present world is shrouded and obscure; what lies beyond is pristine and bright.

In Hegel's account, the earlier religious consciousness did not ponder God's existence or nature. It was the daily grind, not the divine, that was laden with doubt. What was ordinary pointed to a transcendence that was more certain than the work of one's hands. The present anticipated a glorious future that was already present and real. This earth extended into the eternal. For religious consciousness, paradise was the greater reality. This assuredness exceeds our imagination. Such persons would be akin to aliens.

Were these people of faith? Hegel does not link their familiarity with God to a leap of faith. No submission of will or intellect was required to arrive at divine reality. What we call faith often presupposes uncertainty about knowledge of what lies beyond experience. What our senses reveal and our intellect grasps are real. Any other realm is subject to doubt. In this traditional setting, however, religion organized life. No one awaited a call; they already were religious. It was ordinary, not heroic. Religion was identity, not faith. Charles Taylor uses Max Weber's term "enchanted" to describe how religion permeated traditional society: "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 . . . People lived in an "enchanted" world . . . It just seems so obvious that God is there, acting in the cosmos, founding and sustaining societies, acting as a bulwark against evil" (25-26).

Secularism marks this reversal of certainties and the accompanying impoverished spirit. For some moderns, little is more real than immediate experience. Whether anything lies beyond experience grows doubtful. Others like Hume and Kant raise skeptical questions about immediate sensations. Hegel connects the certainties of an enlightened, critical mind with spiritual emptiness and clutching at the "pitiful feeling of the divine." For Hegel, as for Augustine, our restless hearts seek meaning that goes beyond the here and now. When the transcendent appears murky and distant, the human spirit is diminished. Skepticism sets the transcendent beyond our grasp. An Enlightened world, in Hegel's view, triumphs at a high cost.

We may be tempted to lament the passing of old-time religion. Though a historically minded thinker, the young Hegel succumbed to nostalgia: in his early writing, he upheld Greek folk religion as a pristine ideal. In his Introduction to these essays, T. M. Knox states:

Greek religion . . . was to Hegel the religion of imagination and enthusiasm . . . Christianity appeared as the religion of Enlightenment dominated by reason. There can be no question where the sympathies of the young man lay . . . Religion . . . should not be learned from books or confined to dogma, memory, and moral rules; it should not be a theological religion. Rather it should be a

living power, flourishing in the real life of a nation, in their habits, ideals, customs, actions, and festivals . . . the young Hegel would have liked to give up his own Christian faith and go back to the days of Greek paganism (3-4).

Later this longing was repudiated: we must not yearn for what has passed. It is futile to reject history. Hegel's acceptance of civil society goes along with this. There is no returning to this enchanted world. There is a way forward for religion in a secular age, but re-enchantment, as Taylor acknowledges, is not an option.

Religion and the Totality

What Hegel learns from traditional religious consciousness is not about faith but about the desire that draws us outward to belong to others, to nature, and to God. The essence of religion for Spinoza and Hegel is yearning for what is greater. Humans are naturally religious. It is not a private relation but a dimension of human sociality. Religion draws us outward to experience our lives in the company of others. While morality in the modern era is often individualistic (my conscience, principles, judgments, happiness), religion concerns the ethical community. Our nature inclines us toward unity that is expressed in religion and experienced as love. At its core, religion reconciles nature and society, and elevates the finite to the divine. As authentic, the sacred is not separated from the world. This ideal of a living unity is glimpsed in Greek folk religion.

Spinoza's name for this living totality is nature. Hegel's term for this living totality, which moves through partial phases to completion, is spirit. James Collins describes Hegel's notion:

Although the living whole is more easily understood in terms of love . . . it is more deeply and authentically grasped in terms of spirit, which establishes how the union is realized . . . Spirit is the living whole which brings forth all the oppositions in experience, endures their antagonisms and separations to the utmost, and gathers them together into an enriched and dominating union (1967: 260).

Spirit is the philosophical enactment of the Trinity, the dynamism in which three persons unite in one God. Like science, law, and art, religion belongs to the unfolding of spirit. The truth implicit in religion is realized as spirit. This yearning for totality is the essence of religion.

For Hegel, genuine religion is healing and relational; it integrates persons and allows the energies within us to be manifest. Ideally, religion pushes back against the forces that divide. Collins describes Hegel's view of authentic religion as "a joyous affirmation of this life" (1967: 228). In Hegel's view, Christianity offers the most profound realization of the religious essence of healing and unity. In the Christian tradition, everything matters: the self, society, history, and nature. The finite matters. The infinite matters. This world matters. The transcendent matters. What is finite and the true infinite are not opposed. God is incarnate in history.

The central expression of religion is love, and love embodies reconciliation. Hegel proclaims, "Love itself pronounces no imperative. It is no universal opposed to a particular, no unity of the [abstract] concept, but a unity of spirit, divinity. To love God is to feel one's self in the 'all' of life, with no restrictions, in the infinite" (quoted in Collins 1967: 247). Love heals. It unites what was divided. Religion based on love celebrates life; it does not pass

through this world as a stranger in a strange land. Happiness and fulfillment are its goals. This religion is public-minded and communal; it expands into the world and is not fundamentally focused on individual salvation or a personal relation to the divine. Religions that embody love are worldly, not other-worldly.

Philosophy and Religion

Philosophy has been called the handmaiden of theology. The handmaiden, like the messenger, prepares the way for the greater truth which is to come. Philosophy maps fundamental features of reality known to all rational beings, and theology moves from the rational common ground to the transcendent realm of faith. In this partnership, philosophy is the junior member, whose rational terms are universal and accessible to any inquiring mind. Theology explores the higher expressions of revelation and mystery. But these disciplines are not pulled apart easily. We recite the creed:

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and
in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord . . .

The theologian ponders the Trinity and the Incarnation; the philosopher reflects on the first cause, the oneness of the cause, whether the cause possesses intellect. In many colleges, philosophy is down the hall from theology or religious studies. We are familiar with efforts to distinguish these disciplines. But ascertaining this difference is not the concern of Spinoza and Hegel. They attend to the relationship between philosophy and religion. For both thinkers, philosophy draws heavily from religion. Hegel notes that it is philosophy that depends on religion: “what is implied by all we have said so far is that there may be religion without philosophy, but there cannot be philosophy without religion, because philosophy includes religion within it” (1991: 12). For philosophy to achieve its task, their relationship is integral.

What is common to philosophy and religion? Religions are complex and include the creed, sacramental signs, and being sent forth to serve. For Spinoza, religion is limited to practical or moral truths. For Hegel, what religions uphold at every level are truths lodged in narratives, liturgy, teachings, and institutional practices. Religion gropes after deeper meanings than what lies before us. It elevates the self to what is greater or divine. It reveals the goodness of the world so all can see. Religions belong to the community in ways that philosophy will never belong. Few people ever stumble through a philosophy book. But all can be moved by the story of the Good Samaritan. The great truth of religion for Spinoza and Hegel is the centrality of love. The arguments of philosophers will never convey love as effectively to ordinary people as the practice of religion. But determining the truth of love or reconciliation is the task of philosophy.

Though their reasoning differs, both Spinoza and Hegel regard religion as inseparable from human existence. Exploring Greek folk religion helped Hegel to identify the essence of religion, which he roots in human nature. Most people are religious. Only a few have access to the narrow door that opens onto an understanding of the totality. On this point, Spinoza and Hegel differ. For Spinoza, thinkers respect religion but do not need it. Philosophy, the narrow door, supplies the ground and motivation for virtue in knowledge of God. “Spinoza’s conviction is that the highest act of human cognition yields a feelingful enjoyment of God or naturing nature, along with an understanding thereof” (Collins 1984: 71). The correct

metaphysics produces the greatest fulfillment. While “everything in Scripture is adapted to the understanding and preconceptions of the common people” (Spinoza: 186), philosophy is adapted to the enlightened few. For Hegel, religion and philosophy, along with art, constitute absolute spirit; they are the most encompassing accounts of reality. Spinoza puts religion and philosophy on parallel paths that arrive at virtue, but only one philosophy achieves the fullness of truth: “There is no interaction and no affinity between faith or theology on one side and philosophy on the other. The aim of philosophy is nothing but truth, but the aim of faith . . . is simply obedience and piety” (184). The virtues that emerge from religion have practical truth: they coincide with the virtues that philosophy uncovers through reason alone. Religion is based on obedience to authority and scripture; philosophy is rooted in understanding the sources and grounds. Spinoza boils the richness of scripture down to the moral law: “The sole aim of Scripture is to teach obedience [to the moral law] . . . both testaments are nothing but a training in such obedience” (179). Truth is to be found in religion, but it is moral truth alone.

For Hegel, philosophy cannot arrive at the absolute except by grasping the truth that is achieved in art and religion:

Both [philosophy and religion] have the *truth* in the highest sense of the word as their object . . . both hold that God and God *alone* is the truth. Both of them also go on to deal with the realm of the finite, with *nature*, and the *human spirit* (1991: 24).

Both philosophy and religion have truth as their object. For Hegel, religion is the inclusive path to truth, which all persons can take. Philosophy (scientific cognition) brings truth into self-awareness, but it is written for the few to follow. Hegel contrasts religion and philosophy in terms of two expressions of truth:

Religion is the mode, the type of consciousness, in which the truth is present for all men, or for all levels of education; but scientific cognition is a particular type of the consciousness of truth, and not everyone, indeed only a few men, undertake the labour of it. *The basic import is the same*, but just as Homer says about certain things that they have two names, one in the language of Gods, and the other on the tongues of us men, the creatures of a day, so, too, there are two tongues for that import: the tongue of feeling, of representation, and of the thinking that nests in the finite categories and one-sided abstractions of understanding, and the tongue of the concrete Concept (1991: 11).

The truths represented in Scripture are vivid and accessible; philosophy lifts these teachings into the concept. The concept signifies knowledge that is self-aware of its grounds. Philosophy makes visible to the mind what is hidden in religious feelings and narrative: “It is thinking which first makes the soul . . . into spirit” (1991: 12).

Philosophy contributes to religion a deeper understanding. Both religion and philosophy seek truth. Philosophy supersedes religion solely in terms of conceptual explication: thinkers bring to awareness the conceptual moves lodged in religion. Concerning the close relation of religion and philosophy for Hegel, Collins observes:

To believe and to know are related as promise and fulfillment, as a groping cognition of the presence of divine actuality and a reflectively clarified and

humanely evidenced grasp of this same actuality. The act of believing is an implicit, still undeveloped kind of knowing . . . Faith testifies with all the substantial force and certitude of our mind to the reality of spirit, but it does so in the medium of imagery and symbol (1967: 262).

Philosophy uncovers the treasures encrusted in religion. It articulates what remains hidden for religion. Religion is the promise, while philosophy deciphers what is promised. Religion relates to philosophy as the implicit to the explicit. What become explicit are conceptual relations, not a way of life. For example, Christianity upholds God incarnate in human form; for philosophy, the incarnation of God occurs in the movement of reason within nature and history. Religion teaches the doctrine of the Incarnation; philosophy grasps its meaning.

This sounds arrogant, like a handmaiden trading places with the master. For Spinoza, thinkers *will* turn to philosophy not religion for their horizon and compass. Thinkers translate the notions of sin and grace into the philosophical bondage of passions and virtuous emotions. For Hegel, philosophy does not replace religion in the search for truth. Neither philosophy nor art offers a way of life. Philosophy does not specify moral content. Working out a system of philosophy does not reveal virtues. Philosophy lays out a system of knowledge that educates and transforms the mind, but does not establish a way of life.

Truth as the Totality

What is truth? This question is ancient and new. Consider what stands between us and truth. Doubt, uncertainty, skepticism. G. E. Moore raised his hand and said: I know this is a hand. This statement is free from doubt. It is certain. In short order, Wittgenstein rejects Moore's raised hand as proof that skepticism has been defeated. It is not that easy to defeat skepticism (2e-5e). Both Spinoza and Hegel locate truth in the totality, which is glimpsed by religion and sounded out in philosophy. A piecemeal view is not the truth sought by religion and achieved in philosophy. Metaphysics for Spinoza and Hegel thinks big. A system of thought, philosophy embodies truth as the totality. Not a single hypothesis, a stack of data, theories, or facts. Metaphysics is neither established nor undercut by thought experiments. Beyond the truth of mathematics or sociology, the universe or history, philosophy considers how they all fit together. Where does the world come from? Where are things going? What does it mean? What is the purpose of it all? What constitutes human existence? What are the grounds for knowledge? Versions of these questions are implicit in human desires. Religion and philosophy come from fundamental desires. We yearn for the totality, not the part. That truth that exists as totality is what religion and philosophy seek.

Hegel and Spinoza differ in their accounts of imagination. For Spinoza, religion draws from imagination and imagination distorts truth. To grasp truth we must free thought from imagination. Philosophy's task is to translate the vivid narration of scripture into rational terms. Imagination may guide action effectively, but it is an obstacle to grasping truth. While Spinoza does not split mind from world, he strictly separates imagination from reason. The human power of imagination is indispensable for practical truth. Ordinary persons imitate narratives and obey authority. The religious imagination leads us to virtuous action, but it blocks our access to reason and speculative truth.

Hegel does not undertake philosophy by way of demarcations. To distinguish religion from philosophy does not require divisions. The fideistic disjunction of faith or reason ignores the rational content of faith (Collins 1967: 261). Hegel rejects a split between imagination and reason: a continuum unites the efforts of art and religion to philosophy. Art and religion constitute reality and are sources of truth. To not acknowledge the truth of music or religion isolates us from the world just as would ignorance of science and law. Philosophy brings the truth of art and religion into explicit awareness: the task of the concept. Both philosophy and religion embody truth, but only philosophy achieves understanding. When religion constricts into dogmatic inwardness, it loses a living relation to truth. Both Spinoza and Hegel fear the consequences for philosophy when religion grows intolerant and authoritarian.

The Young Hegel and Religious Failure

As a student, Hegel grew disillusioned with his seminary training and the religious forms that had taken hold in the modern world: the turn inward to the spiritual and the turn outward to the authoritarian and legalistic. Neither achieves unity; both deform human religiosity. Where religion should seek reconciliation, modern religiosity enacts divisions. Greek folk religion embodied a living unity missing from the Lutheran Christianity of Hegel's day. Collins characterizes the young Hegel's view of religious positivity:

There is something *prima facie* wrong with the modern religious situation, insofar as it discourages a serene and joyous affirmation of this life, separates man from the natural world and temporal social projects, suppresses his natural interest and passions, and coerces assent to its own glib story of how our salvation is won (1967: 228).

Positive religions are conventional; education is indoctrination, not opening the self to truth in all its forms. The marks of positivity are submission, coercion, duty, and obedience. Its unity is external and does not reconcile the elements. The Enlightenment says: dare to think. Positive religion replies: do not dare think. It is not the content of religion that is inherently positivistic but rather how it unfolds and degrades the mind.

The polarization in modern thought is followed in religion: intensely personal subjectivity contrasts with rigidly formal objectivity (positivity). The dissenters follow the subjective path and sink into pious faith while the orthodox ally with civil powers and impose their teachings. Hegel observes: "In the most recent times religion has contracted the cultural expanse of its content more and more, and withdrawn itself into the intensity of piety, i.e., of feeling. Often, indeed, this feeling is one that manifests a very impoverished and barren import" (1991: 11). Positivity contrasts with a piety that lacks content. But feelings, properly grasped, have content. Hegel continues:

When the religious attitude abides by its intense feeling without any expansion, and hence without any spirit, it does, of course, only know of the antithesis between its narrowed ... form of mind and the spiritual expansion of doctrine . . . the religious attitude has given itself this fine liberation from virtually all doctrines . . . it maintains itself by force on the rarefied peace of an abstract state of feeling without any content (1991: 12-13).

Genuine religion achieves freedom and life. The religions of Hegel's day did not heed this call; they had split into authoritarian orthodoxy and pious emptiness. Collins observes how Hegel clings to the Greek ideal, "those features of the religious attitude which he missed so keenly in modern religious forms. The latter were notably lacking in intimacy, friendliness, and piety toward man's everyday life" (1967: 227). The standoff between one-sided externality and one-sided inwardness marks the larger defect of Enlightenment thought for Hegel. When religion is riven and does not achieve unity, the historical task of reconciliation falls to philosophy.

Modern Philosophy and the Retreat from Truth

Many hypotheses address the marginalization of religion underway in modernity. Amid this cluster is the basic question: can humans know God? Enlightenment thinkers respond in many ways. It is incorrect to equate the Enlightenment with skepticism or to equate skepticism with non-belief. A stream of thinkers addresses the topic of God in the modern era. God is a pivotal concept in these systems. From Descartes' proofs for the existence of God to Kant's attack on these proofs, thinkers upheld the reality of God and wrestled with the question of knowledge.

In Kant, the debates underway in the Enlightenment seem to reach closure. While a devout Christian, Kant promotes the skepticism that shapes secular society. After Kant, it is widely held that sensible intuition and science set the bounds for what is knowable. God cannot be sensed or observed by humans. Thus any account of God's essence or existence falls outside the bounds of knowledge. For this ascendant view, it is by faith, not knowledge, that humans encounter God. While we speak of "the God of my understanding," we actually mean "the God of my volition and desire." Humans cannot understand God. But persons are free and able to believe what cannot be known.

Fideism and skepticism converge in rejecting metaphysical or theological knowledge of God. Though skepticism often is identified with atheism or agnosticism, this is an error. Some skeptics, like Hume, reject God and criticize religion; others, like Pascal, are devout Christians. Kant is skeptical about metaphysics but puts forth the necessity of postulating the existence of God to make sense of morality's demands on us. Both sides express doubt whether humans can grasp truth. Behind skepticism about knowledge of God lies a broad skepticism about whether humans can achieve truth. Skepticism about truth is the common denominator that links atheism and fideism.

One Source of Modern Skepticism: Factoring Philosophy

Behind doubts concerning God or religion lies skepticism about truth. A major source of this skepticism is to presuppose the separation of mind from the world. Kant exemplifies the "factoring" philosophy that first isolates the purely objective from the purely subjective before synthesizing these factors of experience and knowledge. Thus, Kant posits two sources of knowledge: categories and forms of sensibility innate in mind and sensations received from things. To acquire knowledge requires both concepts and perceptions. Categories are purely subjective while sensations arise from the purely objective thing-in-itself. From this initial division between inner and outer – the purely subjective and purely objective – Kant concludes that knowledge filtered through a priori syntheses is limited to sensory appearances and does not grasp the thing itself. In short, the workings of subjectivity shape our understanding and

set limits to knowledge. Thus, truth is qualified as relative to the human mind or true “for us.” The content or truth of the world “in-itself” lies beyond human cognition.

Factoring philosophy leads to skepticism about God and religion. Factoring insists that in order to know, humans must perceive. Since we cannot sense God, the soul, or freedom, they all remain unknowable. We cannot know whether God exists or what constitutes God’s essence. But human knowledge does not measure the extent of reality. Kant, a Christian, limits knowledge to make way for faith. Because knowledge is limited to appearances, not all reality lies within our grasp. Hence, we must posit a God whom we neither can comprehend nor deny. Fideism – faith alone – emerges from skepticism about the human capacity to achieve truth. Reflective persons are drawn to fideism as the form of faith that is compatible with factoring presuppositions. Modern skepticism underlies both fideism and rejection of truth. The separation of mind from world breeds persistent doubts concerning knowledge of God’s existence and essence.

Philosophy and Religion: Spinoza’s and Hegel’s Approaches

The present article considers how Spinoza and Hegel address the relation of religion and philosophy to truth. Separated by over 100 years, these thinkers share similar objectives. Both challenge the assumptions that put metaphysics, religion, and God beyond the reach of knowledge. Neither denies knowledge to make room for faith. Neither posits mind as separable from world. Neither doubts whether humans can arrive at knowledge of God or the absolute. As Hume awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber, so reading Spinoza encouraged the young Hegel to reestablish metaphysics in the aftermath of Kant’s critical attacks. Hegel esteemed Spinoza and defended him from criticisms of atheism or pantheism. Both thinkers open up possibilities within modernity to approach God and religion in non-skeptical ways.

For both Spinoza and Hegel, philosophy and religion seek truth. Both take truth in the widest and most fundamental meaning: truth of the totality. Both identify the totality with God. For Spinoza, religion achieves the practical truth of virtue. So religion and philosophy offer two paths to virtue. Religious teaching and rituals lay out a wide path available to all. Being religious is a primary source of identity. Jewish and Christian teachings have practical truth: they foster love and justice.

The fundamentals of the intent of the whole of Scripture . . . all tend towards this: that there exists a supreme being who loves justice and charity, and that, to be saved, all people must obey and venerate Him by practising justice and charity toward their neighbor. From this principle all the specific points are readily derived, and there are no others beside these (Spinoza: 182).

Believers learn how to live, but the grounds of the virtues remain hidden. The same virtues – love and justice – arise from philosophy but are rooted in understanding. Religions depend upon authority and obedience; a pious believer submits to tradition, institutions, scripture, and clerical teaching. The mind of a religious believer brims with images, stories, and feelings. For scholars, the study of religion offers a fruitful lens onto cultures, customs, psychology, and languages. Theology, in Spinoza’s view, functions as a branch of social science: it outlines the customs of ancient peoples. Religion has access to practical truth: it shows us how to live

rightly. But religion lacks truth in its widest sense; it does not achieve an accurate understanding of God.

While their philosophies share speculative features, the differences between Spinoza and Hegel are significant and suggest diverging paths going forward. For Spinoza, religion is not needed to acquire the highest truths. Thinkers need not pass through religion to arrive at philosophy. Spinoza's great work, *The Ethics*, arrives at the highest form of human existence through reason alone. No immersion in tradition, scripture, or faith is required to grasp the truth of God. Scripture, liturgy, and religious practices present objects for critical analysis but not prerequisites for the blessed state. On the contrary, many aspects of religion obscure the truth. Richard Popkin emphasizes Spinoza's dismissive view of the truth of revealed religion:

Spinoza did not merely doubt the truth claims of Scripture, he denied them except for a moral message. In this denial, it no longer made sense to consider the contentions of revealed religion as being either true or false. They are outside the realm where proof and doubt apply (238).

Spinoza divides practical truth from speculative or theoretical truth. Religion achieves solely "a moral message." Religion is limited to practical truths. Spinoza lays out two paths: religion serves the masses; philosophy serves the elect. If philosophy were required, most people would never find happiness. They acquire virtues through obedience to religious authority. Pure reason brings the thinking remnant to the same virtues. For both religion and philosophy, virtuous practice is the goal.

Hegel does not lay out two paths nor does he single thinkers out from the rest of humanity. Philosophy is not *sui generis* or uniquely independent from ordinary human practices. On the contrary, philosophy requires serious engagement with religion to arrive at a complete account of truth. Religions embody truth in great measure. For Hegel, philosophy must pass through the religious embodiments to arrive at the full measure of the Absolute. With its focus on concepts, philosophy does not have the expansive range of religion. Among its tasks, religion shows us how to live in this world. For Spinoza, this task is accomplished by philosophy in a superior way. For Hegel, philosophy does not address this dimension directly. He does not develop a doctrine of happiness reliant on philosophy. The most comprehensive philosophy cannot replace religion any more than it could replace poetry or music.

Spinoza's account of happiness is rooted in knowledge of God and nature. From this foundation, *The Ethics* moves on to distinguish unruly passions, useful virtues, and the serenity that unites the contemplative thinker to the whole of nature. The three forms of happiness reflect three stages of knowing: passive sensing, active understanding, and the intuitive grasp of the totality. For Spinoza, ways of knowing correspond to ways of living. To link philosophy to a transformed mode of existence puts Spinoza in league with Hellenistic thought – stoicism, skepticism, and Epicureanism. In these schools, philosophy applies its "medicine" to the sick human spirit. Within this wisdom tradition, philosophy is more than critique, concepts, or knowledge. Like the stoic sage, Spinoza maps the thought and actions of the highest form of human existence.

One feature of wisdom thought is how thinkers – the elect – contrast with ordinary, unenlightened humans. Spinoza's writings have stoked intense interest in recent years. One

stream of the secular endeavors to liberate spirituality from the shackles of traditional religion. For contemporary discourse, Spinoza anticipates how spiritual realities are entirely independent of religious grounds. A philosophy that is independent of religion seems akin to being “spiritual, but not religious.”

In Spinoza’s project, metaphysics serves as the religion for thinkers. Most people learn how to believe and act in the world from church teachings. Religions are suited to the capacities of the mainstream. For Spinoza, imagination is the predominant faculty of the ordinary mind; it shapes persons through the stories and persons of Scripture. Fear and love motivate virtue. The few capable of rational determination have no need for religious authority. They are never motivated by fear. A path unfolds from reason with more clarity than any religious teachings. Only philosophy achieves knowledge of God, but religion supplies lessons on how to live. Religion derives virtues from authority and tradition; philosophy derives virtues from grasping the nature of God. Like parallel tracks, religion guides ordinary person and philosophy answers the concerns of the elect. The paths converge on virtuous practice.

For some readers, Hegel’s legacy is reconciliation or acceptance of defining historical realities. This reading distorts Hegel’s critical view of history. The mere existence of modern civil society does not certify its rationality. Reason must be recovered from history through reflection. Regarding Hegel as resigned forces him to address Kant’s second critical question: what ought I to do? Spinoza does answer this question. With Spinoza, reason sets out a way of being human. For Hegel, this question of how I am to live in this world draws from various sources, such as religion, society, family, law, and conscience. Hegel develops no system of virtues. Philosophy does not instruct us whether to love our enemies, to spurn pity, or distinguish pride from arrogance. The practice of philosophy liberates the mind from skepticism and dogmatism, but philosophy is not a vehicle of salvation or a guide to genuine fulfillment. It does not set forth a path to happiness. Thinkers who track spirit through its forms are not distinguished by a particular way of life.

Hegel’s philosophy maps the ethical and religious dimensions of human existence. For Hegel, philosophy is a form of knowledge; its task is theoretical and focuses on the concepts in play, including the concepts embedded in practice. As systematic knowledge, philosophy unearths conceptual defects, works through the totality of claims, and broadens our experience of the world. Phenomenological education is transforming, and the result is a form of intellectual freedom: one is prepared to undertake comprehensive philosophical inquiry. In the structure of absolute spirit, religion abuts the realm of philosophy; we do not grasp the work of philosophy except by sounding out the objectives of religion. Both religion and philosophy address the whole of human existence. But one is no substitute for the other. When a society’s religion is deeply out of joint, and philosophy has grown disillusioned with the world, it undertakes the task of spinning its own web of wisdom. The endeavors of wisdom thinkers to chart a way of life measures their retreat from history and reality.

For Hegel, it is not the task of philosophy to take up the daily challenges of being human. Philosophy is not religion for thinkers. But philosophy’s contribution to social progress is real. Human liberation involves advances in thought. Philosophy examines the truth and the limits of religion to arrive at the encompassing truths of philosophy. Philosophy is not pursued by

most people; it does not represent a way of being human, let alone a superior way of being human. Both Spinoza and Hegel uphold the importance of religion, but Spinoza's thinker has no need for religion, while Hegel's philosophy presupposes the contributions of religion.

For Hegel, the culmination of human experience is absolute spirit. Art, religion, and philosophy constitute the most encompassing expressions of truth. Since religion precedes philosophy in the exposition of the absolute, does Hegel, like Spinoza, privilege philosophy over religion? The relation of religion to philosophy for each thinker is distinctive. For Hegel, philosophy develops out of the forms of religion. Religion involves a way of life; philosophy yields a system of thought. Philosophy does not produce forms of reason from within; it recovers reason from the world. To arrive at the abstract expression of the absolute in thought, philosophy depends upon the embodiments of the absolute in religion. For Spinoza, the objective of religion and philosophy are one: to achieve virtues, but along separate paths. For Hegel, the path to the absolute progresses through and remains in all embodiments of truth; the conceptual task of philosophy emerges from the real embodiments of the absolute in religion. A person is not counted wise who has no need for the communal expression of religious life. But Hegel notes that in history when religions ossify, the task of recovering the absolute falls to philosophy.

Conclusion: Healing the Demarcations – Revolution in Philosophy

Skepticism has its roots in ancient thought and runs throughout history. But new forms of doubt are inseparable from the emergence of secularity. Secular societies foster doubt about truth in general and religious truth in particular. I identified factoring between the purely subjective and purely objective as a source of modern skepticism. There are others sources. Consider how the European conquest of the globe gradually displaces established forms of consciousness. The formation of society around capitalist ends erodes traditions of all kinds. Marx and Engels famously note how “All that is solid melts into air; all that is holy is profaned” (161-62). Under the pressure of commercial life, shared beliefs and substantive purposes thin out. Whoever controls the flow of money gains power and status. With trade and empires come encounters with diverse cultures, religions, and world views. Recognizing multiple voices, hierarchies, forms of oppression and privilege are among the achievements of secularism.

Awareness of pluralism opens new possibilities for our understanding of justice and other ideals. But a deepened awareness of differences can leave us ambivalent and uncertain. Respect for diversity complicates things. Is the search for truth just code for Eurocentrism, patriarchy, or intolerance? Are religious or political critics of modernity the remaining champions of truth? Can we achieve tolerance without losing touch with the power of truth? As stated earlier, skepticism should not be equated with atheism or agnosticism. Like Pascal, fervent believers are often skeptics about knowledge. In various ways, secularism and skepticism are linked. A secular society is skeptical about whether humans can attain truth. It is my contention that the drift toward skepticism is propelled by defective notions.

If modern people become generally skeptical, then doubts about the specific truth of religion will certainly mushroom. Does religion turn on geography, like our mother tongue, where French is no more correct than Farsi, and scripture is no more real than folk stories? Without truth, religion can still play some role in society. It can foster community, be a source

of consolation, instill good values, resist the banality of consumer culture, and struggle for justice in the name of the common good. These achievements are weighty and important. But is religion true? If religion contributes to our search for truth, then these achievements of religion are not good enough. Without truth, something important about being human is lost. Truth must be secured in philosophy for it to be embodied in religion.

Is modern philosophy in any position to recover truth that eludes modern religion? What is called reason is also diminished. By Hegel's day, philosophy had largely abandoned metaphysics. Kant arrived at this critical conclusion that metaphysics is pseudo-knowledge. There is no knowledge of the totality. Such knowledge lies beyond the limits of human reason. We can ask questions about God or the soul, but we cannot answer them. To recover truth in philosophy requires a revolution; Spinoza and Hegel undertake this revolution. Spinoza writes long before Kant, but both Spinoza and Hegel reconceive metaphysics to heal the understanding and articulate truth as the totality.

Spinoza grappled with the dualism of Descartes that separates mind from body and left lingering doubts in his wake. The dominant model of reason in the Enlightenment involves demarcation; everything is relegated to own sector. Divisions are embedded in knowledge and culture. There is the division of public and private, knowledge and morality, nature and history, individual and society. These demarcations shut down access to grasping the totality. At the core of these divisions is the separation of reason from the world. Religion often is a source of divisions and alienation. Spinoza turns to philosophy for healing, as Collins observes: "the average person is estranged from himself and has lost sight of his real nature. The only way to change the situation is through a systematic healing of his understanding, to the point where it will become conscious of the real union existing between the mind and the whole of nature" (1959: 71). Philosophy accomplishes the healing that eludes religion.

Collins notes that for Hegel, "the master cleavage is between the subjective and objective in various modes" (1967: 231). This "master cleavage" is what I call factoring philosophy. It holds that what is subjective is purely subjective and isolated from the objective. What is objective is independent of mind and is tainted by any contact with it. Factoring philosophy yields the skeptical mindset pervasive in modernity. Kant concludes that we find order in nature because the human understanding puts order there. Outside the forms imposed by humans is the formless, the abyss. Factoring posits standoffs: form is separated from content; the active from the passive, the inner from the outer, fact from value, finite from infinite, persons from nature. This logic constitutes the modern world: splitting up what belongs together. In particular, mind is separated from the world.

These purist splits characterize the predominant ways of thinking in secular society. Skepticism is entrenched, and a quest for truth sounds pointless or naive. The only face we run into is our own, so don't waste your time looking for God's. Karl Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XV, asserted that "Man now operates only within his own shell; the intensification of his methods of observation has not led him to become liberated from himself and to press on to the foundation of things, but has made him instead the prisoner of his own methods, of himself" (18). Awareness of subjective involvement swallows up the world. While religion is granted space in the private sphere, this worldview is profoundly hostile to religion. Religion conveys opinions, customs, personal assurances, or dogmatic pronouncements. Faith is so

subjective, so personal, that it does not make its way back into the world. Rather than finding God or divine order, the mainstream Enlightenment account devolves into nihilism.

Purist habits are hard to break. One error is to confuse demarcation with differences. Aristotle recognized differences between praxis and contemplation. These differences did not exclude commonality, such as the intellectual virtues. Kant established a dualism of theoretical and practical reason. Theoretical and practical objectives are completely divided. The demarcations inherent in mainstream secular thinking make it impossible to sound out real differences and piece them together so the totality comes into view. Demarcations separate faith and reason. A sounder view finds reason active in the experience of faith.

Central to the thought of Spinoza and Hegel is unity. Spinoza shows all reality flowing continually from God and sustained by God's immanent power. To recognize God in all things brings the surest happiness. For Hegel, reality signifies a spiritual striving that unites nature, society, and consciousness. This unity that has disappeared from religion must be recovered through philosophy. The revolution in philosophy is required. Concerning Hegel's project, Collins observes:

Hegel calls for a silent but deep-going revolution which will discover the human treasures men have buried away and lost sight of, during centuries of alienation from nature and from their own reality. The metaphysical discovery of the significance of human reality in the world is a fresh birth of meaning which transforms all the traditional elements in the theory of being, as well as in the religious conviction about sharing in divine spiritual life (1967: 255).

In revealed religion the movement of spirit is manifest in Scripture, liturgy, and creed. Religion interprets reality and philosophy grounds this interpretation. For both Spinoza and Hegel, truth is central to the task of philosophy and religion. The fideistic disjunction – either faith or reason – suggests that belief lacks truth. This misses the point. Religion reveals the world. Like other human endeavors, religion is inseparable from truth.

Hegel insists that philosophy depends on religion. Also religion depends on philosophy. Their fortunes are linked. Vibrant religion depends on truth. When mainstream philosophy casts doubt on truth, the prospects for faith are diminished. Religions that absorb the skepticism of modernity and retreat from teaching and creed to communal experience or personal spirituality occupy a precarious place. Through their provocative approaches to truth in relation to the totality, Spinoza and Hegel open up possibilities for recognizing the truth of religion.

There is danger in viewing revolution in philosophy as the condition for religion to thrive. Philosophy faces considerable doubts of its own, especially the metaphysics that thinks big. We must take care to avoid the error of thinkers who divide humans into the elect few and the many unenlightened. In Spinoza, enlightenment frees thinkers from the need for religion. Enlightenment frees thinkers to rule the unenlightened in Plato's *Republic*. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor takes this two-tier approach to humanity, where the elect remain free while the masses are deceived and captive, like timid sheep trailing the shepherd. But there are not two kinds of people. Being enlightened does not set one group above the rest. Understanding the truth of religion should not free us from being religious any more than understanding color

frees us from seeing the world as colored. Philosophy is a form of knowledge, not a way of life. It secures an understanding of truth that supports the ongoing vitality of religion in secular societies. Most people do not study philosophy. But most people never learn much about physics. Still we agree that neutrons exist. We do not have to read Spinoza or Hegel to be confident that what we believe on religious grounds can be ratified as knowledge. For religion to achieve a living unity, its truth matters.

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