

# Race and Colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

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## Abstract

Scholars have paid limited attention to the crucial relationship between Hegel's racism, his support for colonialism and his views on religion. This essay offers a critical reconstruction of how race and coloniality shape the question of religion (and vice versa) throughout Hegel's attempts to critique and ultimately vindicate European modernity. Paying special attention to the seminal role of 'fetishism' in his works, I argue that Hegel's intellectual concerns are racialized from the inception of his project. I conclude by suggesting an alternative philosophical approach to the concept of the 'fetish' and 'fetishism' to resist Hegel's racist and pro-colonial tendencies.

Hegel espoused a patently ethnocentric view of history and offered a teleological justification of racial hierarchy and colonization.<sup>1</sup> In Hegel's view, non-European peoples offer no *distinctive* contributions to the further actualization of institutions which express and foster human freedom. The abstract self-representation of Spirit has been overcome in European Christianity. The historical unfolding of Spirit has been systematically comprehended by the philosophical tradition of modern Europe. Spirit knows itself as freedom, as concrete historical agency. To realize the concrete freedom of modernity, then, peoples of Asia and Africa must assimilate to European forms of life as these spread across the globe. This involves submission, often quite literally, to the 'civilizing' effect of colonialism and even chattel slavery, in Hegel's view (Stone 2020). Per Enrique Dussel, Hegelianism is the quintessential expression of 'Eurocentric Occidentalism' for which 'the entirety of prior world history appears dazzled by Eurocentrism [...] as though it had Europe at its heart' (2014: 13). It is quite clear, based on transcripts of Hegel's *Lectures on World History*, that Hegel's students understood him in just this way: although the physical sun rises in the East, the transcripts suggest, it is in the 'West' that 'the inner Sun of self-consciousness rises, shedding a higher brilliance' (*W* 12: 134).<sup>2</sup> The Hegelian iteration of this classical idealist metaphor is hardly difficult to parse.<sup>3</sup> The further one drifts from the light of the self-comprehending Absolute, the less reflexively developed are the mores and institutions and the more tightly trapped is

consciousness within self-forged prisons of abstraction. In the West, the ‘inner’ sun of the Spirit has dawned. In the ‘Orient’ or Asia, the sun’s first rays appear, if only dimly. Africa remains shrouded in ‘color of the night’—the primitive darkness of unconsciousness and sheer immediacy.

It is of course not impossible that Hegel’s students misunderstood him or that Hegel misunderstood himself. Historically, both implicit and explicit critiques of Hegel’s eurocentrism, support for colonialism and racism, have often been coupled with efforts to develop the liberatory potential of Hegelian dialectic in ways which undermine such tendencies. W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 account of the ‘two-ness’ of black subjectivity and alienation within white society was likely developed in critical conversation with Hegelian conceptions of divided consciousness and recognition (Du Bois 2007).<sup>4</sup> Aimé Césaire conceived of the *négritude* movement as emerging, in part, from Hegel’s account of the speculative unity of the universal and the particular (Melsan and Césaire 1997: 5).<sup>5</sup> Recently, Susan Buck-Morss has suggested that a post-colonial interpretation of Hegel’s thought could offer important resources for developing a non-Eurocentric vision of ‘universal history’, emphasizing ruptures and transgressions of hegemonic order (Buck-Morss 2009). Each of these explores the critical and constructive possibilities of a post-colonial, anti-racist reading of Hegelianism. Throughout the course of these and similar efforts, however, scholars have paid limited attention to the crucial relationship between Hegel’s racism and his views on religion. This is a significant gap in the literature.<sup>6</sup> To reconstruct and critically engage Hegel’s views on race and coloniality, we must pay careful attention to the question of religion as it figures within Hegel’s attempt to critique and ultimately vindicate European modernity.

Providing a comprehensive account of the relationship between Hegel’s philosophy of religion, race and colonialism is too great an undertaking for a single essay. Accordingly, the aims and scope of my argument are more modest. My first task is expository and polemical: I explain how we ought to understand Hegel’s racism—both what it is and what it is not—and sketch how Hegel leverages it in support of colonialism. Second, I critically engage recent literature on Hegel’s interpretation (or relative lack thereof) of the then-contemporary matter of the Haitian revolution—which Hegel seems to have attributed to the salutary impact of a European, ‘Christian ideal’ of freedom upon enslaved, diasporic peoples of West African descent. The third task is reconstructive: I examine the relationship of rationality, religion and race in Hegel’s early works to show that Hegel’s youthful interest in religion is shaped by racial anxieties and caricatures from its inception. I conclude that Hegel’s critiques of representationalism and dogmatism—as these arise from his engagement with religion and the speculative rendition of Christian theology—are expressions of an originally racialized, counter-fetishistic momentum (cf. Comay 2011: 125). In Hegel’s wake, further

interrogation of the self-image of European modernity thus demands close collaboration between philosophers of race and philosophers of religion. I conclude that such efforts would do well to focus on a re-evaluation—and perhaps revaluation—of the concepts of fetish and fetishism.<sup>7</sup>

### I. Race, universal freedom and Christianity

To explain what Hegel's racism *is* we must distinguish it from what it is not. Hegel's views are, as we should expect, somewhat different from the 'biological' models of racism and racial hierarchy that came to prominence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hegel denies that phenotypic differences between subsets of human communities correlate to immutable differences of intellectual capacity, character, aptitude or inclinations. Racial difference (*Rassenverschiedenheit*) does not, in principle, limit or enhance the capacity for reason: 'These differences are qualities because they belong to the natural soul, the mere *being* of Spirit; but the concept of Spirit, thought and freedom, is higher than mere being, and the concept in general, or more precisely rationality, is just this: not to be qualitatively determined' (*GW* 15: 225). In other words, rationality is constituted as a break with nature, the transcendence of the merely natural. Accordingly, phenotypic characteristics do not, in and of themselves, reflect anything about the abstract capacity for rationality within a given subset of the human population:

These qualities fall under the *particular* nature of humanity, or in their subjectivity, as the medium through which reason conducts itself [...] because of this, these differences do not affect rationality itself, but rather the modes of its objectivity, and therefore do not constitute an *original* difference in consideration of the freedom and right among the so-called races. (*GW* 15: 225)

But Hegel is happy to invoke outrageous caricatures of non-European peoples—even when less inflammatory accounts are certainly available to him (Bernasconi 1998). All people are, *abstractly* speaking, capable of rational freedom. *Concretely* speaking, however, matters are different, he claims:

Still, the difference [between the races], because it regards the objectification of reason, is great enough. For in order to exist rationality must be active. A purely possible rationality is not rationality at all, and all the tremendous differences between the nations and individuals reduce entirely to the manner of consciousness, that is to say, the objectification of reason. (*GW* 15: 225)

For a variety of geographical and historical reasons, Hegel believes that European peoples have been most successful in concretely objectifying reason and developing institutions and ways of life that accord with rational freedom. The peoples of Asia have managed to break with merely natural, unreflective forms of life. In so doing, however, they have submerged individual subjectivity into an abyss of substance. Only one free subject exists within what Hegel takes as the characteristically Asian spirit, namely a despotic ruler who acts as God on earth (*GW* 18: 152). The will of the despot is the substance of the individuals that live and labour under him. Despite expressing the universal in a way that ultimately occludes its reflexive comprehension as Spirit, Asian peoples still recognize universality in an abstract form and assent to its historical reality. By contrast, we find in the lectures that Sub-Saharan African peoples are ‘enslaved’ by the immediacy and repetition of nature or to other humans (*W* 12: 125–26). They have not achieved historical consciousness and agency—though they may do so through contact with Europeans, the argument goes (*W* 12: 128–29). Asia is trapped in a state of spiritual adolescence, while Africa has yet to emerge from the dark womb of nature to take its first ragged breaths in the cold, clear light of history. If Africans are like ‘children’ that must be educated by more ‘advanced’, white Europeans, then this condescending paternalism nevertheless dispenses with any tenderness of family and intergenerational responsibility. The spiritual pedagogy pursued by Europe is a harsh one. In Hegel’s lectures these ‘child-like’ races are little more than grist for the mill given their present state of development. To draw upon Hegel’s metaphor of the ‘slaughter bench of history’, the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa are destined to be violently transformed from mere nature into bearers of rational, economic value, much as animals become saleable flesh under the butcher’s knife (*GW* 18: 157). But Hegel evidently does not justify this hierarchization in terms of innate, immutable or phenotypic traits. Instead, this hierarchy appears as a function of the relative proximity of racially defined populations to the spiritual *telos* of world history, reflexively rational freedom.

Contemporary readers are apt to experience disgust at this hierarchical view of cultural and racial differences, and rightly so. But if one understands racism as a grotesque, misbegotten and deterministic naturalism that justifies apartheid, brutality and exploitation, perhaps one might be forgiven for claiming that although Hegel is arrogantly Eurocentric and espouses a demonstrably hierarchical understanding of human culture, he does not meet the basic requirements of a ‘racist’. Hegel is off the hook, it would seem, if racism is so defined. But *only* if racism is so defined. The following two presumptions are required to defend Hegel in this way: first, one must accept that a theory counts as racist if and only if it entails a commitment to a biologically deterministic anthropology which posits distinct, racially correlated aptitudes and social-behavioural characteristics to justify a hierarchization of racial groups (Bernasconi 2019). Second, one must further insist that

identifying explicitly racist commitments—of this narrowly defined sort—is the most salient task in understanding and addressing racism as it appears in philosophy. While I am, to put it mildly, not at all certain that we should willingly grant such presumptions, I am confident that they in *no way* allow us to capture what remains most troubling about the status of race in the Hegelian system. Individuals and institutions need not espouse a naturalistically or biologically grounded racism to reproduce a social order that, in placing unjust and stifling limitations on political and social life that roughly correspond to groups of people defined by shared phenotypic, heritable traits, is quite racist indeed. In this respect, Hegel's teleological conception of history fits the bill. Despite rejecting biological accounts of *Rassenverschiedenheit*, Hegel develops a hierarchical model of cultures that corresponds to distinct racial groupings and thus underwrites his support for European colonization. To claim that Hegel's rejections of naturalist, biological justifications of racial hierarchy absolve him from racism is akin to skimming a U.S. policing manual and, upon finding no approving mentions of phrenology or the inherent supremacy of the 'white race', turning away satisfied that whatever other problems U.S. policing does have, racism is surely not one of them. In just the same way, those who defend Hegel against accusations of racism by marshalling passages where he appears to reject such justifications have missed the mark (cf. Bonetto 2006). Worse still, those who claim that such rejections mean that Hegel is impervious to the accusation of racism appear to get matters *precisely* backwards (cf. McCarney 2003). In fact, that Hegel seems to reject such views is part and parcel of his *support* for racialized European colonialization, as I will show. Recognizing that for Hegel 'races cannot be historical subjects' is wholly consistent with Hegel's support of colonialism and the view that non-European races and cultures are lagging behind the unfolding of world history in virtue of their immersion in racialized or quasi-racialized self-representations. I will allow myself the liberty of being polemical on this point. In a *tu quoque* of which contemporary defenders of systemic racism would surely be proud, Hegel's view implies that the 'real racism' is to be found among those who insist that the teleological hierarchization of races is, in fact, a form of racism. Rei Terada makes much the same case: Hegel's sublation of race, she suggests, helps set the terms of the self-contradictory gesture of 'post-racialism' (in both liberal and radical political movements) whereby 'racism' is externalized and projected onto communities who assert their particularity against 'properly' historical traditions which claim to have transcended such abstract, racialized self-conceptions (Terada 2019).

In other words, Hegel's endorsement of racial hierarchy and colonization is produced from fidelity to a vision of universal freedom, not in spite of it. His is not an ordering of distinctive natural 'types' of human being, but degrees of spiritual reflexivity, concrete historical agency and freedom. They reflect a hierarchization of historically determinate forms of the *negation* of natural immediacy and its

recollection and interiorization in the self-comprehension of Spirit. It is the position of peoples relative to the *telos* of history, the reflexive comprehension of Spirit, that may (temporarily) justify the domination of one racial group by another, in Hegel's view. The parallel to Hegel's famous dialectic of lord [*Herr*] and bondsman [*Knecht*] is unmistakable, and Hegel himself invites such connections in the outline of his *Encyclopaedia*: 'The struggle for recognition and subjugation under a master is the phenomenon in which the social life [*Zusammenleben*] of a people, as the beginning of states, arises' (*GW* 13: 202). While the violence of this dialectic does not provide the ultimate justification of right (*Recht*), he continues, it is a *necessary* steppingstone in the journey of natural consciousness to the realization of the universal. Taken along with Hegel's hierarchization of racial groups, the value of colonial exploitation and slavery appears to reside precisely in their capacity to export forms of social life defined by the interests of the European bourgeoisie.

It seems then that Hegel would like to have things both ways. On the one hand, he appears committed to the idea that the current state of Asian and African cultures and institutions is one of general heteronomy: slavery to nature and tradition, sometimes including forms of institutional, even chattel, slavery. On this basis, Hegel is only too happy to heap scorn upon the peoples of Africa and African descent. On the other hand, both lecture manuscripts and transcripts of the *Lectures on World History* show that Hegel insists upon the spiritually ennobling and acculturating effect of submission to slavery—if only as a temporary institution which ought to be gradually abolished (Stone 2020: 8–11). Formulated on this basis alone, it is unclear why it is the task of *European* peoples to 'educate' these non-European populations through violent subjugation and economic exploitation. Why does Hegel appear to believe that the struggle for recognition cannot or should not be resolved spontaneously and immanently within these cultures themselves? Why is modernity so staunchly and unyieldingly singular for Hegel? From Hegel's perspective, the concrete expression of the universal within non-European cultures is *so* occlusive to the reflexive comprehension of Spirit that they require some form of preparation for rational freedom. The absolute, after all, cannot be shot 'from a pistol' through intuition or stipulation (*GW* 9: 24). It must be realized in negation and recuperation, a passage through death and the negative, the self sacrificed and regained in the auto-critical movement of Spirit. Only the pure conceptuality of philosophy brings this process into fully reflexive, speculative cognition of the whole. But before philosophy can *think* and *know* the Absolute, religion must *represent* and *believe* in it. Hegel, following the lead of Kant, sees religion as a form of representationally mediated subjectivation that aims (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) to actualize human freedom.

The example of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804)—a topic of frenzied conversation in the European press of the day—sheds some light on the intersection of race and religion in Hegel's thought. In her famous *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal*

*History* (2009), Susan Buck-Morss makes much of Hegel's 'silence' on the events unfolding in Haiti, building a deep, though purely circumstantial, case that although Hegel does not mention the violent overthrow of race-based chattel slavery by the enslaved, diasporic West African peoples of Haiti, such events must have been at the forefront of his mind as he worked out his early version of the dialectic of lord and bondsman in the *System of Ethical Life* (1802–3) (cf. Ciccariello-Mahler 2014). Hegel's silence at this juncture is certainly intriguing. However, when the subject of the Haitian revolution did arise in the context of his lectures on subjective Spirit (1830), it seems Hegel may well have commented on the matter. In the *Zusätze* of those lectures, compiled from student notes, we find an important clue that helps provide religious and theological context to Hegel's racialized vision of world-historical progress and defence of colonialism. The passage is worth quoting at length here:

Negroes [*Neger*] are to be understood as a nation of children who do not emerge from their incurious and indifferent unselfconsciousness [*Unbefangenheit*]. They are bought, and allow themselves to be bought, with no reflection as to whether this is right or not. Their religion exhibits a certain childishness. The higher being, which they sense but cannot hold on to, appears only fleetingly in their heads. They transfer this higher being into the first available stone and make this their fetish [*Fetisch*], tossing it aside if it has not helped them [...] One cannot deny that they have the capacity for culture. Not only have they, here and there, accepted Christianity with the greatest gratitude and spoken with emotion of the freedom they gained through Christianity after a long spiritual servitude [*Geistesknechtschaft*]. They have also, in Haiti, formed a state according to Christian principles. But they do not exhibit an inner drive toward culture. The most appalling despotism reigns in their homeland. There, they do not arrive at a feeling of human personality—there, their Spirit is entirely dormant, slumbering. It remains sunken within itself, making no progress, and correlates to the compact, *undifferentiated* mass of African land (*W* 10: 59–60).

In the greying gloam of intervening decades, Minerva's owl takes flight. Cleaving the evening air, she undertakes a breathtaking feat of dialectical acrobatics, announcing that the Haitian revolution was not the achievement of the enslaved peoples of African descent who staged and executed it so much as it was the expression of a uniquely *European* concept of universal freedom afforded them by the religion of the same white Europeans that captured, brutalized and enslaved them. The ideal

of universal freedom operative among the Haitians was owing to the conversion of enslaved, diasporic Africans to the Christianity of their captors and awareness of similarly inspired events in France. Only by being wrested from the darkness of Africa and placed into the harsh light of the Occidental sun was the implicit freedom of these enslaved peoples brought to consciousness. Admittedly, the *Zusätze* are of questionable philological provenance. Although Hegel's own manuscript does not make this connection explicitly, student notes on earlier versions of the lectures offer some corroboration. Immediately after noting Hegel's presentations of Asians and Africans as basically unhistorical peoples, H.G. Hotho's notes on the 1822 lectures shift to a discussion of the 'Caucasian race' as the most beautiful, noble and great of the races; the notes then further divide the Caucasian race by region and religion. On the one hand, there are those who—by dint of proximity to the 'oriental' spirit of Judaism—remain trapped in the abstract and despotic religion of 'Muhammedism'. On the other, there are those European representatives of the Caucasian race who have the benefit of Christianity—the religion of freedom which has overcome abstract universality and heteronomy and thereby attained consciousness of concrete, historical agency or universal, spiritual freedom (*GW* 25.1: 37).

Empirical distortion and outright error about Haitian culture and history notwithstanding, it ought not surprise us that various second-hand accounts of Hegel's lectures suggest that Hegel singled out Christianity as the basis for the Haitian revolution. Christianity inaugurates the idea of universal freedom, Hegel claims, by proclaiming the indwelling of the 'Spirit'. Humans win freedom through sublation: the sacrifice or negation of nature and immediacy into representations and, eventually, the resolution of representations as passing moments in the immanent, self-mediation of the Absolute Idea. The most adequately reflexive *religious* model of this process is to be found in Christianity, Hegel says. Christian scripture, theology and sacraments represent the overcoming of representation with the appeal to the spiritual presence of God. The incarnation, death and resurrection of the Christian God means that the divine is present here, now, as *Spirit*, and can in turn be systematically comprehended as the Absolute Idea unfolding in history (*GW* 13: 243–45). One need not wait for a second coming—the *Parousia* of Christ is realized in the concrete historical agency of the community. As Christianity stands to speculative comprehension of the Idea, so do other religions stand in relation to Christianity, the 'consummate' or 'absolute' religion. Christianity 'consummates' religion by rendering it reflexive, in Hegel's view. It anticipates philosophical comprehension of religion as a figurative expression of the concept, the sublation of its representational form.

In other words, Hegel sees Christianity as the historical and cultural watershed that facilitates modern idealist critiques of metaphysical 'dogmatism'. It sketches the trajectory of speculative philosophy in advance, promising a path to



overcome the formal limitations of religious representation that reproduce abstract transcendence, heteronomy and eschatological desire. Despite the formal deficiency of religious representation for expressing the Absolute Idea (the province of philosophy alone), Christianity remains an indispensable feature of modern life, for Hegel (Lewis 2011). Not everyone will become a philosopher and expound the Absolute Idea in its purely logical form. For many, authentic historical agency will only unfold in terms dictated by religious representation.

Still, it is not enough to represent and believe in one's freedom as Christian religion does. But neither is it enough to think and know it, as speculative philosophy purports to do. One must live it. The Christian idea of universal, 'spiritual' freedom must be realized in the formative processes of culture:

This consciousness [of freedom] is first in [the Christian] religion, arising from the innermost region of the Spirit. But for this principle to inform [*einzubilden*] the actual world was another task which required long, difficult labour of culture [*Bildung*] to solve and carry out. (*GW* 18: 153)

In light of the connection between the Haitian Revolution and Christianity recorded in the lecture transcripts, it is telling that Hegel follows these remarks with a discussion of slavery. He writes:

With the adoption of the Christian religion, for example, slavery did not immediately [cease]. Still less did freedom straightaway prevail in states, nor were governments and constitutions organized in a rational way, nor were these grounded in the principle of freedom. The application of this principle to actuality, the penetration and improvement [*Durchbildung*] of worldly conditions through this principle, is the long course of history itself. (*GW* 18: 153)

The concretization of universal, rational freedom is realized unevenly. In turn, the persistence of slavery reflects the lag between *representation* of universal, spiritual freedom (as it appears in the Christian imagination as *Spirit*) and its full realization in historical subjects, communities, and institutions (*GW* 18: 153).

Christian religion stands in stark contrast to African fetishism, for Hegel. Hegel's view of fetishism is, in its historical context, quite conventional. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, we find that the infantile 'stage' [*Stufe*] of African culture is clearly expressed in the form which religious life assumes among African peoples (*W* 12: 122ff). Sub-Saharan African religions, which the lectures lump together under the all-embracing rubric of fetishism, are constituted by little more than capricious, *ad hoc* attachment to whatever sensuous, material object might provide magical (*zauberisch*) advantage in attaining a desired outcome.

For Hegel, we might say that the significance of the fetish object is phantasmatic. In the fetish object, the fetishist externalizes desire: as a representation of the ‘power’ of its user, the fetish appears as an objective condition whereby the gap between is and ought might close. But just as easily as any object may be selected for use as fetish—‘an animal, a tree, a stone, a figure of wood’—it may be cast aside if it fails to deliver. The fetish worshipper, in Hegel’s view, fails to comprehend the conceptual nexus which underlies this process, does not grasp that the religious significance and power of the object is *only* as an expression of their own desires. In other words, Hegel sees Sub-Saharan religion as a form of magical thinking without self-consciousness. As an infantile will to omnipotence, this magical thinking produces an endless series of discarded fetishes, the refuse of an abortive freedom.

In Buck-Morss’s view, passages such as these must be distinguished from Hegel’s earlier writings as a young professor in Jena. Hegel, she claims, was likely compelled to remain silent regarding the impact of the Haitian Revolution on his dialectic of lord and bondsman for fear of racist reprisals that would tank his precarious academic career. Because Hegel was interested to know *more* about Africans and people of African descent, he slowly imbibed the racist attitudes that were prevalent in the scholarship on African and diasporic cultures during his day (Buck-Morss 2009: 59–74). Buck-Morss’s case for this view of Hegel’s development on the question of race is wholly circumstantial and conjectural. There is not, to my knowledge, any direct textual evidence that supports it. There is, however, evidence which speaks against it.

In his *Vodou Cosmology and the Haitian Revolution in the Enlightenment Ideals of Kant and Hegel* (2018), Vivaldi Jean-Marie suggests that Buck-Morss has misunderstood the crucial role of theology in Hegel’s apparent lack of interest in Haiti. As a result, she has drawn the wrong conclusion. While agreeing that events in Haiti likely influenced Hegel’s writings, he does not concur with Buck-Morss as to why Hegel remained silent on the matter. He writes: ‘I propose that Hegel deliberately excluded any explicit discussion of the intricacies of the Haitian Revolution because his Protestant biased philosophical constructs against Africans and African religious reality confined him to viewing Africans and people of African descent in Saint-Domingue as inherently unfit to undertake such a large-scale revolt’ (Jean-Marie 2018: 43).

For his part, Jean-Marie rightly identifies the importance of Christianity for Hegel’s philosophical method, as well as his failure to appreciate Vodou as a contribution of diasporic peoples to African Enlightenment. The ‘religious basis’ of Hegel’s philosophy of history, he notes, is the concept of ‘providence’ (*Vorsehung*). To articulate a philosophy of history means to discover the presence of rationality within the apparent contingency and chaos of historical events—much akin to the believer who seeks the inscrutable, yet steadfastly provident

will of God amidst the wreckage of an unfortunate life. But Hegel is not seeking otherworldly or eschatological recompense for losses and hurts in a ‘time’ beyond time. Rather, he is seeking redemption through the *comprehension* of history in the fullness of historically continuous time itself. Hegel’s philosophy of history seeks to reconstruct the immanent logical necessity of events, to show that reason (*Vernunft*) rules the world—even through the horrendous sacrifices made upon the ‘slaughter bench’ of history. Hegel provisionally justifies the enslavement of ‘Negroes’ at the hands of Europeans in this way. Although in the *abstract* slavery must be understood as irrational and unjust, he argues that it can work for good in the *concrete* realization of freedom in history. It is this educative dimension which distinguishes the historical value of the enslavement of Africans by Europeans, rather than by other Africans. Spiritual freedom requires a process of maturation which the ‘childlike’ Africans have not, and evidently cannot, attain on their own. As Hegel puts matters, chillingly, ‘slavery has [...] awakened more humanity among the Negroes’ (Jean-Marie 2018: 49).

Jean-Marie has taken an important first step in explicating the role of religion in the Hegelian construction of race. That said, he underplays the historical and systematic role Hegel affords Christianity by describing this as a ‘bias’ (Jean-Marie 2018: 43). Hegelian Christianity is many things, but it is not that—at least in so far as we take this to mean something like an unexamined assumption which rigs the game. Rig the game it well may. Yet Hegel’s Christianity is far from an unexamined or smuggled-in assumption or preference. *Pace* Jean-Marie, the speculative interpretation of religion (in general) and Christianity (in particular) is a deliberate and decisive feature of Hegel’s intellectual development. *Pace* Buck-Morss, the religious nexus from which the speculative system emerges is racialized from the outset.

## II. Modern religion and fetishism

Mature expressions of Hegel’s racism, such as I have explored above, should be viewed in light of Hegel’s developing views on religion in the years leading up to his speculative breakthrough in Jena. From start to finish—no matter how the systematic stakes might have shifted—Hegel gestures toward the religious traditions of groups that he understands as non-European to illustrate failed, abortive, and confused attempts to realize true, modern, rational religion. Unflattering caricatures of non-Europeans thus become a recurring foil in Hegel’s understanding of the stakes and pitfalls of European Enlightenment. Appreciating this, it is possible to begin sketching the racialized context of Hegel’s speculative rehabilitation of Christianity and critique of the representational standpoint. A complete historical and systematic reconstruction of the religious and philosophical problems to

which Hegel's racial anxieties and animus provide context is not possible within the space of a single essay. In what follows, I will offer an overview of some select examples. These should suffice to give a sense of how deeply entangled Hegel's accounts of reason, religion and race are from the outset.

As a young seminarian in Tübingen (ca. 1793), Hegel argues—not unlike Kant—that modern religion should be an education in rational freedom.<sup>8</sup> The essential, rational aims of religion should be to spread Enlightenment, concretize practical reason, support republican political institutions and thus help overcome the moral and psychological fragmentation of modern life. To achieve this, Hegel believed that religion must express rational ideals within a 'sensual husk' and, thus, help people 'learn to feel' their rational freedom and realize their historical agency (*GW* 1: 96). Theology—what Hegel calls 'objective religion' in these fragments—clarifies the principles on which a religion is founded and traces the systematic relationships between them. But objective religion only engages the understanding (*Verstand*). To have a salutary effect on social life, the young Hegel believed, modern religion must strike a balance between public and private, sensual and rational. While it should foster *rational* agency in its adherents, it can only do so by emotionally enlivening them through *sensual* gestures and representations. It must transform individual *subjects*, but it must do so in such a way as it integrates religion and religious conduct with all facets of *public* life, rather than placing them in tension (*GW* 1: 103–106). In other words, modern religion should be a balancing act which mediates between these various antitheses through the sensual representation (*Vorstellung*) of shared cultural touchstones.

This is a delicate balancing act. Because religion must make use of 'sensual husks' to inculcate rational truths, there is an ever-present danger of cleaving to the mere 'letter' of religion and missing the 'spirit' entirely. Hegel describes this danger as 'fetish faith' (*Fetischglaube*). The notions of fetish and fetishism also play an important role in Hegel's lectures on Africa many years later (*GW* 1: 99–100). The overarching danger of fetish faith is that it leads away from pure, rational religion and inclines adherents toward a pathological attachment to empirical particularity, sensuality and materiality. Hegel explains this danger in two ways. First, fetish faith is not morally motivated: rather than seeking rationally reflexive freedom, fetish faith seeks to secure divine favours linked to specific, empirically determined purposes. Second, Hegel describes fetish faith as a clinging to the 'letter' of tradition. For the young Hegel, the danger of the fetish emblemizes the stubborn material remainder that appears in the attempt to synthesize two abstract standpoints on the nature and form of religious life. Negotiating the fetishistic remains of religious critique, the material traces of concrete historical life, becomes the central conceptual dilemma of the text:

It is not really possible that a public religion should be established which removed every possibility of reviving fetish faith from it; the question then arises as to how a folk religion must be set up in order (a) negatively, to give us as little occasion as possible for cleaving to the letter and the ceremonial observance and (b) positively—that the people may be led to rational religion and be receptive to it. (*GW* 1: 100)

In these fragments, Hegel is not directly describing *fetishism* in the sense that he accords to the traditions of Africa some three decades later. He is, rather, using the concept of fetishism to critique European traditions of his day. The immediate source for this gesture is almost certainly Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*. That work, in which Kant pursues similar questions, appeared mere months before the composition of these fragments. And in those texts, Kant articulates a critical concept of *Fetischismus* and *Fetischmachen* that Hegel tracks here almost precisely: for Kant, as for Hegel, fetishism is fundamentally constituted by an attachment to external observances at the expense of moral content, or the desire to accrue some benefit through religious observance (Kant 1914: 178–80, 198). Though Hegel clearly deploys 'fetishism' in conversation with Kant's philosophy of religion, it is unlikely that Hegel would not have also had African culture in mind. In the Middle Ages, the Portuguese word *feitico* referred to magical charms used by the uneducated and superstitious and, during the colonial age, was used by sailors to describe the religious practices of West Africans they encountered on trading and slaving voyages (Pietz 1985). But the concept of 'fetishism' as such only enters wider use across Europe with the appearance of Charles de Brosses's 1760 treatise *Du culte des dieux fétiches ou Parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie*. Kant read Brosses and appropriates the term 'fetishism' for his own purposes in the *Religion* (Morris and Leonard 2017: 167–79). Hegel follows Kant in adapting this racialized term to represent the perpetual danger of any religious tradition to slide into unthinking darkness, superstition and moral depravity. This characteristically 'African' religious form is represented as a perpetual threat of conceptual degeneracy for European religion.

To be sure, Hegel's immediate targets were closer to home. Hegel's task of critically re-interpreting religion in accordance with the values of Enlightenment ran counter to his Pietistic upbringing and was diametrically opposed to the theology of his teacher at the *Sijß*, Gottlob Storr (Pinkard 2001: 35). Hegel's insistence, following Kant, that legalism represents a fetishizing tendency resonates with the theological polemic—as old as Christianity itself—which castigates Judaism as a submissive, unspiritual, almost mechanical observance of the mere 'letter' of the law. Still, without appreciating the colonial and racial resonance of *fetishism*, we can hardly make sense of Hegel's use of it at all. The force of the term

resides precisely in its ability to communicate an unfavourable comparison. It suggests that confused, superstitious European Christians are *hardly better than* the wild, superstitious Africans who are held captive in the cruel and febrile grip of nature, or the cold, calculating, legalistic Jews who renounce the world for the unconditional demands of a despotic, ‘Oriental’ deity. These represent the bottom of a slippery slope upon which European religion and culture must take care to tread lightly. In other words, we should understand Hegel’s description of the persistent danger of ‘fetish faith’ as a reflection of theologically informed, racialized anxiety. The context of that anxiety is Hegel’s concern for the actualization of rationality and the liberation of Europe from the vestiges of *Ancien Régime* politics, culture and religion. The media of this anxiety are anti-African and anti-Jewish caricatures which serve as threat and cautionary tale. Furthermore, we find an intriguing parallel between the conceptual position Hegel provides to the fetish as unassimilable material remainder and the historical emergence of the idea of fetish and fetishism within the cross-cultural exchange of European merchants and the peoples of West Africa. As William Pietz has it:

the fetish could originate only in conjunction with the emergent articulation of the ideology of the commodity form that defined itself within and against the social values and religious ideologies of two radically different types of noncapitalist society, as they encountered each other in an ongoing cross-cultural situation. (Pietz 1985: 7)

For Hegel, the fetish arises as the ineliminable material remainder which appears in the attempt to synthesize two putatively incommensurable *abstractions*. Indeed, the very origins of Hegelian thought seem to betray what Sarah Hammerschlag has penetratingly described as

the perverse logic of colonialism: the conqueror finds in the encounter with those he exploits ‘bad’ or ‘childish’ versions of its own mode of worship and thought. The move is then replicated when it becomes a philosophical tool for prescribing the relation between philosophical abstraction and its concrete manifestation in religious traditions, providing a means to differentiate modes of religious understanding that function symbolically—e.g., Christianity—from those predicated on a materialist ‘error’. (Hammerschlag 2021: 112)

During his time as *Hauslehrer* to a wealthy Bernese family, Hegel would try his hand at several literary projects concerned with the role of religion in public life and moral formation. The first of these was ‘Das Leben Jesu’ (1795), an update of central episodes and lessons of the Christian Gospels. The question framing that

project is the significance of Christianity for modernity. But the central conceptual, moral and social problems that animate his reflections in 1795 are much the same as they were in 1793: what would it take for Christianity to coordinate sensual representations and rational principles so as to promulgate universal principles of conduct and actualize moral and political freedom without succumbing to the danger of the 'fetish' (*GW* 1: 138–40)? In answering, Hegel throws in his lot with Kant. Rational reforms necessary to adapt religion to modernity will be achieved, he writes, through the critical application of transcendental philosophy. In 'Das Leben Jesu', Jesus becomes a Kantian *avant la lettre*, the 'Golden Rule' becomes the categorical imperative, and 'divinity itself' becomes the inner spark of autonomous, practical reason (*GW* 1: 207).

To rationalize Christianity in this way also means to systematically disabuse it of its 'Jewishness'. In Hegel's text, Judaism emblemizes the moral vacuity that he previously associated with fetish faith: the inner Christian 'spirit' must overcome the externality of the Jewish 'letter', moral uprightness must take the place of the cult of sacrifice (*GW* 1: 222). Jesus encourages his followers to hearken to the inner voice of conscience, rather than to a supposedly supernatural authority attaching to a person, deity, or institution. But this is not what happened, Hegel notes in his essay 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' (1796). Because Jewish religion recognized only divine commandments as authoritative, Jesus could only contest the tradition by claiming that same authority for himself (*GW* 1: 113). Jesus had little choice then but to suggest that he was himself divine, or at least to allow others to believe it (*GW* 1: 114). He does not repudiate his messianic status or reports of miracles but leverages these to critique Judaism from within. In the end, however, Hegel believes that these concessions to Judaism undermine Jesus's legacy as a moral teacher. Because he is understood as divine, his followers misinterpret his death as the paradoxical fulfilment of the messianic promise of deliverance. They anxiously await the *Parousia* of the risen Christ, his glorious return, and the redemption of creation that this second coming heralds. In the meantime, they offer him prayers and devotion. The Christian religion becomes one of observances and statutes that compromise the true, moral content of the faith. 'Just as the Jews made sacrifices, ceremonies, and a compulsory faith into the essence of religion, so the Christians made its essence consist in lip service, external actions, inner feelings, and a historical faith' (*GW* 1: 117). Jesus found himself attempting to navigate the demands of his historical moment, to strike a balance atop the slippery slope that leads to fetish faith. Eventually, Hegel decides that the Kantian critique of religion that frames this approach falls prey to the same danger: the inner sacrifice of inclination does not overcome the danger of the fetish but instead makes universality into its own fetish object. Kant, in other words, fetishizes the struggle against fetishism. In doing so, he also reintroduces a dimension of abstract transcendence which reason must *believe* but cannot *know*: the

practical postulates. This residual metaphysical dogmatism means that Kantian religion is compromised by the very fetishistic degeneracy it struggles to refute. The practical postulates do not involve the true and complete sacrifice of the empirical for the sake of reason but only a deferral of satisfaction, per Hegel (*GW* 1: 357–58).

This is a turning point in Hegel's works, to be sure. From here forward, Hegel struggles to step beyond Kantian moralism and the formal limits of transcendental critique. One thing, however, remains the same. Hegel continues to appeal to peoples who are non-white and non-European as the bases of unfavourable comparison vis-à-vis European traditions he believes compromise human freedom. In 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' (1799), Hegel recommences his interpretation of Christianity. But, having charged Kant with his own form of fetish faith, Hegel aligns the sage of Königsberg with the abstract transcendence, self-objectification and servitude that he identifies with Judaism. Kant is less like Jesus, and more like Abraham, Hegel now believes. Abraham attempts to elevate himself above nature by separation (*Trennung*), breaking bonds of filiation and nature and leaving his homeland (*GW* 2: 29–31). His autarchic conception of freedom leads, dialectically, to his eventual 'submission' to an alien power, in a precise parallel to Hegel's critique of Kantian morality and its turn to the practical postulates. From this, a host of familiar anti-Jewish tropes spring forth: hostility to nature, melancholy, mechanical observance and legalism.<sup>9</sup> The 'fate' (*Schicksal*) of Judaism and Kantianism is a slide into a form of rarefied, abstracted fetishism. In a mean-spirited re-writing of a passage from Kant's *Religion*, Hegel employs Kant's invective for 'oriental' superstition against him.<sup>10</sup> Not to criticize him for his racism, of course. Instead, he extends Kant's own unfavourable, racialized comparisons to the man himself:

The difference between the Tungusic Shaman and the European prelate who rules church and state, or between the *Mogulitzen* and the Puritan, and one who is obedient to the command of duty, is not that the former make themselves servants [*Knechten*] while the latter is free; the difference, rather, is that each of these carries the Lord [*Herrn*] outside of themselves, while the latter carries the Lord within himself, and is equally his own slave.<sup>11</sup> (*GW* 2: 152)

Hegel thus reconceived the task of Jesus and of moral religion. By 1799 Hegel decides that true freedom is found in the harmonization or alignment of inclination and duty, rather than the perpetual sacrifice of the former for the sake of the latter. This means being guided by the ideal of *love* rather than duty, aligning objective command with subjective inclination (*GW* 2: 157–59). Only in giving love an *objective* form does Jesus's teaching rise to the level of a 'religion', Hegel insists (*GW* 2: 232–33). Jesus's answer to this challenge is the symbolic power of commensality.



The meal of bread and wine shared by Jesus and his friends—and which later becomes the model for the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist—objectifies the inner disposition of love shared by those gathered at the table. The object is re-assimilated to the subjects in the act of eating (*GW* 2: 236). In the end, however, this produced a ‘confusion’ (*Vermischung*) of subject and object rather than a beautiful symbol of their unity inspiring love and devotion (*GW* 2: 236–38). A truly enduring representation of love—one that could both depict and *inspire* love—would only be achieved after Jesus’s death. Jesus’s followers seek out such a symbol in the idea of the resurrected Christ, who died as the ultimate expression of love, and is now united with his followers *in Spirit*. But, like the Eucharist, this representation ultimately reproduces infinite longing and eschatological desire (*GW* 2: 325–28). On the one hand, Jesus has risen in body and has joined God the Father in heaven. On the other, he is somehow present in the community through the *inhabitation* of the third person of the Trinity, the ‘Spirit’. Owing to this ambiguity, the true, final reconciliation of love—is and ought, finite and infinite—remains outstanding. It will not be attained until the *Parousia* when Christ returns to Earth. Again, the balancing act proves too delicate. The meal becomes a quasi-magical observance. Christ becomes a heteronomous authority who promises a final reconciliation of is and ought from ‘beyond’. Christianity thus succumbs once more to a form of transcendental fetishism that Hegel associates with less ‘developed’, more ‘childlike’ races.

But by 1800 Hegel decided that the true conception of ‘infinite life’ or the Absolute must include the negativity of the finite, rather than oppose itself to it. Hence, Jesus’s incarnation, death, and resurrection take on a new value for Hegel: instead of a stumbling block to reason, these reveal the ‘life’ of the true, integrally conceived infinity and the necessary condition for realizing a form of historical agency which dispenses with superstition and eschatological hopes. To grasp the infinite or absolute ‘life’ which outstrips and comprehends the finite beings which compose it means representing the disappearance and recuperation of the finite as moments of the infinite’s self-expression, what Hegel calls in 1800 the ‘union of union and non-union’ (*GW* 2: 343–44). It is in this connection that Jesus’s incarnation, death and resurrection as Spirit take on a new systematic significance for Hegel. Still, at this point, he believes that Christianity represents and believes the infinite or absolute totality that philosophy cannot quite manage to think and know (*GW* 2: 343–44). The negation of the empirical is not externally opposed to the infinite but constitutes an essential moment of its immanent self-expression. Though all religious traditions unconsciously grope toward this idea, it is fully realized in the incarnational, sacrificial and ‘spiritual’ standpoint of Christianity alone, Hegel argues.

*Mutatis mutandis*, Hegel’s early views on religion (between roughly 1793 and 1800) appear to accord with the general, systematic function given to religion by

Kant's second *Critique*. Rationally clarified, religion shores up the immanent cleavage within the system of reason. It does this, for young Hegel, by *representing* the Absolute and thus bridging the gap between the finite and infinite, real and ideal, sense and reason, ought and is. In time, however, Hegel comes to believe that religion cannot fulfil this role on its own. Religion vitiates the very absoluteness it seeks to express owing to the formal deficiency of its representational standpoint. The problem is twofold: practically speaking, any representation of the Absolute is liable to inspire fetishistic attachment where a mere representation of the infinite is taken as the infinite itself. Acknowledging the dogmatic mischief liable to arise in the hiatus between representation and reality is not enough to defuse the threat, however. Representationalism as such is the culprit, because the formal structure of representation perpetually reproduces abstract transcendence in the form of a 'beyond' which remains an impenetrable mystery for reason. In other words, *cognition* of the Absolute, and the historically concrete freedom which such cognition actualizes, is only possible where the structure of representation is overcome, and the last transcendental refuge of metaphysical and religious dogmatism is extirpated. This requires the move from mere religion to philosophically comprehended religion, a philosophical justification and clarification of religion. Only a conceptual demonstration (*Darstellung*) of the necessary, immanent unity of finite oppositions of being and thinking can disabuse us of the need to appeal to some transcendent being 'beyond' the grasp of our concepts.

This is the crucial breakthrough for Hegel—it motivates the speculative reconstruction of Christianity as the figurative or representational anticipation of Absolute idealism and, thus, of nascent forms of modern subjectivity and the ideal of universal freedom (*GW* 18: 149). As Hegel has it in *Faith and Knowledge*, a speculative interpretation of Christianity is the necessary step for overcoming all dogmatism and instituting an absolute idealism—a 'speculative Good Friday' is needed to supersede the religious representation of Good Friday as a singular historical event (*GW* 4: 413–14). Christianity's religious imagination includes the sacrifice of the abstractly transcendent deity, lets the 'death' of this God stand as a 'moment' of the Absolute's unfolding for philosophical cognition, and internalizes its remains—much like Christian worshippers internalize materiality, particularity and externality by consuming the host in celebration of the Eucharist. Understood in the context of Hegel's overarching development, this speculative interpretation of Christianity may be understood as a reflexively counter-fetishistic dialectic by which Hegel ultimately legitimates the rational supremacy of European modernity.

### III. Race, religion and the future of the fetish

My task in this essay was to take some small, tentative steps in developing a clearer picture of the connection between Hegel's racial anxieties and his religious and metaphysical concerns. Admittedly, there is much more work to be done in this vein. Hegel does not racialize all non-European peoples in the same way, as I have hinted throughout this essay; further research is required to understand the relationship between Hegel's philosophy of religion and the distinctive racializing logics that appear throughout his works. What I hope to have shown is that racist assumptions and attitudes—both fuelled by the reality of colonialism and ultimately deployed in support of it—accompany the articulation of Hegel's philosophy at nearly every step. While some of these racist positions are quite plain, others require historical and systematic reconstruction, such as I provided in the foregoing. These are not incidental features of his thought but, rather, are integral to understanding Hegel's system in its context. This is most clearly demonstrated when we look at the role of religion in Hegel's system and in its development. Hegel's early, critical uses of 'fetish' and 'fetishism' lay groundwork for renewed racist and pro-colonial gestures in Hegel's later thought. If non-European peoples haunt the margins of Hegel's earliest reflections on European forms of life they simultaneously insinuate themselves at their heart. Peoples of Asian and African descent function as the 'extimate' others of the European *logos*, in Hegel's works. While he locates them 'outside' the European world, they also represent the immanent possibility of a decline of European culture into irrationality and fetishism. Hegel's early, racial anxieties seem to arise from consideration of an outside which is also inside, a recalcitrant particularity that troubles and disrupts the integrity of the 'universal' from within. Hegel reproduces this dynamic in his polemical positioning of Judaism *vis-à-vis* Christianity in the Bern and Frankfurt writings, and this ultimately shapes his speculative rehabilitation of Christianity as the religion of Spirit and freedom.

In the 1820s and 30s, when Hegel turns his gaze toward a direct treatment of non-European races, his presentations of racial difference appear to harden. The youthful anxiety regarding non-Europeans is replaced with the triumphant condescension of age. In the case of the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, Hotho's record of Hegel's lectures describes them as *incapable* of ascending to consciousness of their rational freedom without intervention from more advanced races (*GW* 25,1: 36). Freedom must be foisted upon them through the harsh lessons of human bondage and the sacrifices it extracts from 'mere' nature. And, as corroborated in the notes of multiple students, Hegel seems to have seen Christianity as a form of subjectivation that could provide access to modern freedom that peoples of African descent could not otherwise attain. It suggests

a religious antidote to the arrested development reflected in fetishism. In this connection, we can recall that Hegel appeals to a relative lack of such ‘development’ (*Entwicklung*) among non-European peoples to defend colonization as a waystation on the *via dolorosa* of Spirit. The putatively civilizing mission of Europe will indeed be painful, Hegel is the first to admit. History, after all, is a ‘slaughter bench’ (*Schlachtbank*) upon which the wisdom of peoples—and at times peoples themselves—is offered as an enormous, monstrous ‘sacrifice’ (*Opfer*). A telling slippage appears. The rhetoric of slaughter, the rationally appointed transformation of nature into commodity, animality into saleable flesh, gives way to the religious language of agonistic sacrifice as the path to genuine freedom. The cross becomes a slaughterbench. And if history puts the knife to the wisdom of peoples, it appears no less to demand a productive sacrifice of all forms of materiality and particularity—all fetishes and all fetish-producing subjects—which resist the construction of a fundamentally Christian, European order of ‘spiritual’ filiation. The entanglement of Hegelian religion and racism contribute to the foundational ‘canon’ of this view of historical progress—one which reaches beyond the ‘concrete’ universalism of Hegelianism proper (Tibebu 2011: xvii). We must thus class the mature expression of Hegel’s racism and support for colonialism among those Robert Bernasconi has described as forms of prejudice that

germinated as a side effect of the new version of universalism [...] to be found in moral gradualism, geographical determinism, or in the gesture which demands ‘become like us’ and which adds *sotte voce* ‘you can never become like us because you are not one of us’. (Bernasconi 2003: 19)

Reconstructing this trajectory provides historical and systematic context for Hegel’s racism and support for colonization. Still, the complex of ‘symptoms’ represented by Hegel’s racism and approval of colonialism cannot be cured simply by providing their aetiology. Those who would avail themselves of Hegelian arguments in pursuit of human emancipation are apt to fall prey to an overarching conceptual and historical problem of which European racism and colonialism are perhaps the most telling examples. One may reject the specific historical constellation of Hegelian racism while simultaneously expressing new forms of animus against communities that one defines—*vis-à-vis* some antecedent concept of filiation or affiliation—as mired in recalcitrant forms of material and historical particularity.<sup>12</sup>

Interrogating central issues in Hegel’s philosophy of religion helped to illuminate the depth and persistence of his racist presumptions and their relationship to the historical phenomena of modern European colonialism. A certain approach to the philosophy of religion can also help us to step beyond mere diagnosis and begin to ‘work through’ this malady of Spirit. The first step is systematic

investigation and re-evaluation of the fetish as it features in post-Hegelian philosophy of religion and, thus, a re-conception of the task of philosophy of religion itself. The comments of Jacques Derrida on the link between counter-fetishism and the critique of religion (both religious and anti-religious) are illuminating here: ‘To ground *or* destroy religion (the familial production) always comes down to wanting to reduce fetishism [...] the teleological horizon of “true and unique religion” is the disappearance of the fetish’ (Derrida 2021: 231–32). To resist the racializing and colonial tendencies of Hegelian counter-fetishism, philosophers of religion ought to critically engage the fabricated, representational character of the ‘fetish’ while rejecting the ‘teleological horizon’ Derrida describes. This amounts to a perversion of Hegelian desire, a refusal to offer sacrifices upon the cross-made-slaughterbench, a rejection of exclusions that consolidate antecedent senses of filiation against the teleological horizon of Hegelian historicity. In this connection, I propose that post-Hegelian philosophers of religion should work to articulate a critical concept of fetishism as the plural, aleatory, persistent and ultimately ineliminable residue of historical configurations of desire (cf. Matory 2018). Doing so, we might clear a path toward a concretely pluralistic conception of modernity and rational reflexivity as mediated by religious traditions and representations. Rather than a steppingstone (at best) or a roadblock (at worst), the fetish would appear as the irrevocable historical and transcendental frustration of the concept, the irreducibly phantasmatic trace of a negativity which cannot be negated but which, nevertheless, does not invite revived appeals to abstract transcendence.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> That Hegel’s account of history was Eurocentric in some significant sense is hardly in question —what this means for his broader philosophical project (and for world history generally) is a more contentious issue. See, for example, Bernasconi (2000), Bonetto (2006), Buchwalter (2011), Cole (2009), Dussel (1993), Stone (2020) and Tibebe (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, Hegel’s works are cited with an abbreviation of the relevant edition or collection, followed by the volume number. Translations are my own.

*SW* = Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952).

*GW* = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. W. Jaeschke et al. (Hamburg, Meiner, 1968–).

W = Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> The use of the solar metaphor as a figure of the growth and self-actualization of humanity appears early in Hegel's personal writings. In a letter to Schelling, dated 16 April 1795, the young Bernese *Hofmeister* writes that he always endeavors to keep the following motto in his heart: "Strive toward the sun, friends, so that the salvation [*Heil*] of humankind may soon ripen. What do the hindering leaves want? What of the branches? Cut your way through to the sun, and if you tire, then good! The better to sleep" (*SW* 1:24–25).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Shaw (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mascot (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Significant research in this vein has been pursued with respect to adjacent figures and intellectual movements, however. In his 2018 book, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*, J. Lorand Matory has shown how 'ethnological Schadenfreude' motivated the adoption of 'fetishism' as a critical concept in the works of Freud and Marx. Matory argues that each of these accomplished Jewish theorists used the racialized and religious lens of 'fetishism' to criticize the European bourgeoisie and, at the same time, to assert his rightful place within it. Most significantly, Matory's work turns the charge of fetishism against these thinkers based on a vantage opened *within* West African religious thought. In the same gesture, he articulates an alternative theory of the fetish as a material instantiation of competing social values and positions. As a crucial forebear to psychoanalytic and Marxian perspectives on religion, race and Africa, Hegel haunts Matory's analyses. Still, much work remains to be done to fully appreciate the entanglement of Hegel's own views on race, coloniality, and religion. The current effort will strike out in this direction, in sympathy with Matory's project, and in hopes of addressing this lacuna within the existing literature on Hegel.

<sup>7</sup> Every 'I is a 'we', Hegel teaches us. Accordingly, I would like to thank the 'we' that I am in my capacity as the author of this article. Thanks to Sean M. Hannan and Stefan Heßbrüggen-Walter for graciously helping me track down sources crucial for my work. I also wish to thank my friend Stanton F. Kidd for his patient and truly invaluable feedback on these drafts at each step along the way. Thanks to Lucas Scott Wright for answering my questions about some of the trickier passages of Hegel's German. Finally, I must offer heartfelt thanks to the other contributing authors in this issue, as well as the issue's keen-eyed editors, for their excellent suggestions and criticisms.

<sup>8</sup> For an extended treatment of Hegel's early views on religion and their place within his emerging system, see Harris (1972).

<sup>9</sup> For a sustained reading of the anti-Judaic dimension of Hegel's thought, see 'Philosophical Struggles with Judaism, from Kant to Heine' in Nirenberg (2013).

<sup>10</sup> See 'Enlightenment and Romantic Writers Look at Shamans' in Znamenski (2007) for additional background on the representation of Siberian shaman by modern European intellectuals.

<sup>11</sup> There is a curious philological detail here that deserves further comment. In the *Akademie Ausgabe*, based on the original manuscripts, Hegel uses the term '*Mogulützen*' when re-working

this passage from Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Mere Reason*. In the first printing of Kant's book, which appeared in the spring of 1793, Kant's text reads 'Mogulitzen' (1793: 254). For my part, I have not seen this word used outside of these two texts. In the second edition of Kant's *Religion*, published the following year, 'Mogulitzen' was corrected to 'Wogulitzen' to thereby designate a people of nomadic hunters that lived on the Eurasian Steppe (Kant 1794: 270). I am not aware of the precise details of the revision but, given the painfully similar appearance of 'M' and 'W' in *Fraktur* script, it is likely Kant intended to refer to the 'Wogulitzen' all along. In their influential English translation, Knox and Kroner opt to render this 'Voguls', (Hegel 1948: 211), thus modifying Hegel's language to accord more closely with the source passage as it appears in Kant's 1794 edition. There is value in underlining the precise term Hegel used here, however. One cannot help but wonder what Hegel had in mind as he used this term to turn Kant's argument against him. There are at least two possibilities. It could be that Hegel believed that Kant was referencing Mughal India. It is not implausible however, and perhaps more intriguing still, that Hegel may have had no clear idea at all of whom Kant meant by 'Mogulitzen'. I leave Hegel's usage untranslated here both for the sake of specifying his source, and to indicate that he may have had even more geographically distant or even undefined racial and religious 'others' in mind when turning the tables on Kant.

<sup>12</sup> I agree with Andrew Buchwalter that Hegel remains profoundly relevant in our globalized world (Buchwalter 2011). I am considerably more ambivalent about the nature of this relevance, however. Buchwalter argues that Hegelian philosophy—its Eurocentrism notwithstanding—retains promise for a conception of modernity and freedom that is more pluralistic than Hegel himself appears to allow. If I am correct in my assessment, however, difficulties emerge with respect to such attempts to rehabilitate Hegel. The necessarily retroactive and reconstructive nature of Hegelian idealism binds the ideal of universal freedom to a specific historical constellation of European Christianity and its effects on European culture and world history. It is unclear then how far we can extend Hegelian insights (which formalize the incarnational logic of Christianity) without affirming, *nolens volens*, Hegel's view that the historical effect of the Christian imaginary upon European culture was *uniquely* salutary and liberating. From here we come to the final sticking point. Even if one rejects the racist and pro-colonial conclusions (or are they presumptions?) of Hegel's position, it seems likely, perhaps inevitable, that parallel forms of social exclusion and hierarchization will result. To put the matter bluntly: the entanglement of Hegelian religion and racism render suspect the dialectical achievement of universal spiritual filiation. The promise of Hegelianism seems equal precisely to the threat it poses.

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