Hegel on Religion, Education and Modernity

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Abstract:

Hegel contributed a pedagogical dimension to the question of political theology. He emphasized that the modern way of life of rational independence is founded upon a pedagogical orientation that critically appreciates how former historical forms of life, like religion, open up and illuminate our present. His intervention pushed backed against the simplistic notion that modernity was ahistorically self-sufficient. In this way, any modern engagement with religion itself demonstrates the pedagogical dimension inherent in the problem of political theology. Hegel contends that because Christianity secured conscience as a communal, not just individual, way of life, a hostile or indifferent modern attitude to religion fails to live up to its own conceptual ideals. Getting us to be critically appreciative of the past's conceptual contribution to who we are and what we hold absolutely valuable remains the indispensable educational necessity for fulfilling the modern project of critical autonomy.

Key Words: Hegel, modernity, religion, Christianity, Bildung, education, pedagogy, reason

Hegel contributed a pedagogical dimension to the question of political theology.[1] Hegel emphasized that how modernity engages with religion, and particularly Christianity, involves a kind of education (*Bildung*) towards critical autonomy that is historically reflexive. For Hegel, the Enlightenment promise to uphold a collective form of life, or Spirit, that is distinctively modern in being self-grounding and rationally independent is founded upon a pedagogical orientation that critically appreciates how former historical forms of life like religion open up and illuminate the present. Hegel teased out the dynamic of an immanent rationality in existing and prior forms of life which grounds the historical reflexivity crucial to who we are as *modern* human beings .[2] This intervention pushed backed against the simplistic, "uneducated" notion that modernity was fully self-sufficient in a way that made prior forms of living and thinking dispensable for its own project – the kind of radicalism he and his contemporaries saw unfolding first hand in Revolutionary France.[3]

That religion has and continues to form modernity is not all Hegel has to say. I argue that modernity's very engagement with religion itself demonstrates a pedagogical intent inherent in the problem of political theology. Hegel's contribution aims to say that because the most

[1] Hegel texts in this article will be taken from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans., Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). *Phenomenology* will be abbreviated as *PhG* with the corresponding paragraph number indicated by §xx. Other texts include Hegel's Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans., George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans., T. M. Knox, vol. 1 and 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans., H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans., R. F. Brown et al., One-Volume Edition ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans., William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).

[2] Steven B. Smith, "Hegel's Idea of a Critical Theory," *Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (1987).

[3] For the influence of the French Revolution and the historical context of Hegelian thought, see Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

important enabler of modern liberalism continues to be Christianity in its emphasis on the reason-giving self – conscience – as a communal, not just individual, way of life, a modernity that forgets this ends up failing to live up to its own conceptual ideals.[4] Getting us to be reflectively and critically appreciative of this contribution to the way we articulate who we are and what we hold absolutely valuable in our shared existence remains the indispensable educational necessity for achieving and fulfilling the modern project of critical autonomy. This reflexively critical aspect is, in Stanley Rosen's phrase, "the greatest advantage to be derived from the study of Hegel", which, I think forms the active core of Hegelian *Bildung* necessary for fulfilling our claims to be modern human beings.[5]

Additionally, what Hegel thought about religion's place in modern life speaks directly to contemporary political problems. Jürgen Habermas, for instance, thinks that religion is a necessary corrective to the atomism of modern life.[6] Although desirable, a completely rational life governed by discourse and deliberation, in his view, tends to fall prey to a kind "possessive individualism" which undercuts collective efforts at political solidarity.[7] Habermas thus thought instrumentally that religion could correct modernity's tendency towards anomie.[8] He is, of course, not alone. Tocqueville too thought something similar in his analysis of the modern

[4] Works on the Christian dimension of Hegelian thought include Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). See also Steve B. Smith, "Hegel on Slavery and Domination," *Review of Metaphysics* 46, no. 1 (1992); and Mark Lilla, "Hegel and the Political Theology of Reconciliation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (2001). Early on, see John N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), 354.
[5] Stanley Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 262-3.
[6] Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans., Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
[7] Crawford B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
[8] *An Awareness of What is Missing*, 19; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 110-111.

democratic revolution.[9] In any case, what Hegel argues is different. Hegel goes right to the heart of how certain religious forms of life directly and internally shape our modern reason-giving activities. As such, how Hegel radically departs from both the simplistic secular-religious dichotomy and the instrumental use of religion merits serious attention.

Historically, the reception of Hegelian philosophy that devolved into the internecine struggles between Right and Left schools has unfortunately sidelined this crucial pedagogical nuance Hegel offers, with disastrous consequences.[10] For first, there is the rare breed of the conservative Hegelians who view Hegel as an attempt in the rational justification (or, as Findlay argues, wholesale re-appropriation) of Christian mystery and dogma.[11] This Hegel seeks to have human beings accept things as they are; what history and past forms of life had contributed to the present are to be uncritically preserved as positive contributions. His politics, on this account, thus portrays Hegel as the "conservative sycophant," as his stalwart personal enemy Jacob Fries maintains.[12] And, when it comes to political theology, Hegel ultimately does to the Prussian Lutheran religion precisely what Thomas Aquinas did for Catholicism – justifying mystery with reason.[13] In any case, whatever the merits of such a view, both the historical inaccuracies of this position and Hegel's repeated philosophic strictures against self-undermining appeals to

[9] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 275-8.
[10] Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 249. On the reception of Hegelian philosophy, see Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans., David E. Green (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). See also, Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999).
[11] Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, 354.
[12] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, viii.
[13] Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl*, trans., Brian Cozens and H. H. Hartwell (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 286-305.

traditions as "givens", or what he negatively calls "positivity", should already call into question any conservative categorization of his thinking.[14]

From another angle, Hegel can be read as a revolutionary philosopher educating thinkers to see the groundlessness of all supposedly "fixed" aspects of human life. Here stands the more influential tradition of the Young Hegelians, undoubtedly the more influential development of Hegelian thought.[15] Through Marx's encounter with Hegel, Hegelian philosophy inspired political and philosophic movements that radicalized the Kantian claim that human subjectivity mediates all human cognition. The Frankfurt School, inspired by the contributions of Lukàcs, Marcuse, and Habermas, portrays itself as fulfilling the Kantian-Hegelian project of critical autonomy by rejecting as groundless the reifications of human thought and being.[16] Hegel had shown that supposedly "essential" and "fixed" appeals to "nature" or to "laws" or "God" governing human interactions were nothing but intersubjective externalizations of human consciousness that was in fact fluid and, in a profound sense, alive. The young Hegelians simply carried this theoretical speculation into a practical program of political *kritik*. This, in no small measure, enabled the revival of Hegelian thought necessary for the return, initiated by Lukàcs, of

[14] Ibid, ix-xi. Early on in his essay "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" in Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* pp. 67-181, Hegel critiques the development of Christianity into a 'positive' religion. On the legacy of Kant in Hegel, see Pippin's essay "Hegel's 'Completion of Kant'" in his *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, p. 63.
[15] See the anthology Lawrence S. Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[16] See Robert Pippin's essay, "Technology as Ideology: Prospects" in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 188. Also, see for instance Hegel's contribution to the Frankfurt School in Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans., Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979); Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Humaninterests*, trans., Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans., E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973); Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1982), and Steven Smith's "Hegel's Idea of a Critical Theory".

Marxist thinking to the psychological dimensions of the subject in alienation away from dialectical materialism.[17]

Consequently, Hegel offered these radical thinkers deep resources with which to criticize Christianity. Hegel's rationalizations of Christian dogma and mystery paved the way for a form of immanent criticism that would bring out the "rational kernel" of Hegelian thought, as Marx argued, out from the "mystical shell" in which it was supposedly wrapped.[18] Once brought into the open, Hegel supplied a kind of immanent *Kritik* of bourgeois modernity, which radically aimed to un-fetishize and de-transcendentalize the relationship between human ideas and their economic world.[19] Moreover, what was so powerful about their interpretation of Hegelian philosophy was in their criticism that the phenomena of religion itself was deeply dependent upon a pre-critical and pre-modern "pattern of consciousness" that did not recognize its own reason-giving activities as authoritative. Yet, while their Hegel may contain a nucleus of truth, the hostility and dogmatism – or, in Hegelian terms, the 'one-sidedness' and 'abstract negativity' – of their position towards the past sidelines how Hegel himself critically appreciated our histories, traditions and religious ways of life.[20] Understanding how Hegel could reject external modes of legitimation and still hold onto rational criticism underscores the typically "Hegelian" nature of his pedagogical project for irreversibly modern human beings.[21]

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[17] Daniel Bell, "The 'Rediscovery' of Alienation: Some Notes Along the Quest for the Historical Marx," *The Journal of Philosophy* 56, no. 24 (1959).
[18] Shlomo Avineri, "The Hegelian Origins of Marx's Political Thought," *The Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 1 (1967): 35.
[19] Marx's comment on Hegelian philosophy found in "From the Afterword to the Second German Edition" of *Capital,* Volume One quoted from *The Marx-Engels Reader (Second Edition)* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 301-2.
[20] Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 253.
[21] Man cannot return to a premodern state for Hegel. So the question, as Rosen articulates Hegel's education, is how to understand our relationship to the past. *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom* (1976), 269.

So, what exactly is this Hegelian relationship that incorporates both the radicalism of critical autonomy and an appreciation of the past? This other way that I hope to bring out from Hegel is not just what Karl Löwith calls a "balance" between justifying and overturning the *status quo*.[22] Still less do I treat Hegel as an enlightening, but ultimately failed, modern attempt at reconciling individual autonomy with a Romantic metaphysical vision of the cosmos as Charles Taylor does.[23] Taylor's reading of Hegel, I think, ignores the critical dimension of Hegelian philosophy which decisively turns away from such appeals to transcendent metaphysical "beyonds". Instead, drawing from interpretations of Hegel inspired by Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, I show how Hegel attempted to tease out the notion that such a truly radical intellectual autonomy, unmoored from external appeals to what is fixed, is itself an historical "achievement" of consciousness *and* a product of our intellectual emergence from our own self-imposed minority.[24] That is, even to realize that our own reason-giving activities are dynamically and developmentally independent is itself a form of education that is central to the modern self-understanding.[25] And as a form of pedagogy, Hegel wanted to show how Christianity did shed light on who we are as modern human beings.

Expounding this claim therefore requires a dive into what exactly was Hegel's own contribution to the question of political theology. The first section will thus be devoted to the question of what exactly is "political theology." Here I explore the nature of the tension between religion and politics, showing how religion remains a contested topic especially because it

[22] Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 68.
[23] Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
[24] For instance, see Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For the phrasing, see Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment" in his *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8:35.
[25] Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 286-7;

challenges who we are as modern human. The second section will then turn to Hegel's view of modernity as a historically reflexive mode of being and thinking. Drawing on the opening of the *Phenomenology* I show how Hegel thought that central to the modern project of self-formation was a form of critical appreciation that considers our religious histories and traditions. The last section will then touch on Christianity as a mode of life which Hegel thought conceptually enabled that critical interiority so necessary for Kantian philosophy and his own contribution. For him Christianity crucially embodied in an individual and communal, and hence, not self-destructive, way this conceptual space for modern critical autonomy I finally conclude with a brief assessment of his claims to bring it up to date for our supposedly "postsecular" world.

I. Education and Political Theology

Religion remains a contested topic of modern discourse.[26] The progressivist – "secularist" – view of history grounded in the "disenchantment" of the world, as Max Weber once put it, grows increasingly questionable as a narrative for the 20th and 21st centuries. Even though we live in self-proclaimed secular, liberal democratic polities, religion continues to be a force in politics central to public life.[27] Modern political debates, then, are not so much about whether religion is present, but *what* exactly should be the nature of the relationship between politics and

[26] Recent work on political theology include: Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Graham L. Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds., *Political Theology and Early Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Jürgen Habermas, "The Political," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen(New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *The Future of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[27] See, for example, intro to Habermas' *An Awareness of What is Missing*, 2.

religion, i.e., what *should* we render proverbially *unto Caesar*.[28] As such, because being "modern" entails grounding our identity upon the authority of our own reason-giving activities, an inability to give an account of religion's place in public life will reveal a contradiction in who we say we are and what we actually are. The pedagogical dimension of political theology is therefore the reflective account we give of our encounter religion – i.e., of how we deal when, in Werner Jaeger's telling phrase, "God became a problem" as it once did for the Greeks.[29]

Historically, the term "political theology" initially arose out of existential political concerns.[30] Marcus Varro, St. Augustine relates, was the first to use this term in order to differentiate political theology from other kinds of theologies (natural and mystical) in order to shore up the power of the Roman emperor.[31] In this sense, *Political* theology was, in Thomas Hobbes and later Carl Schmitt, an attempt to subordinate religious (or conscientious) dissent to the political power of the sovereign.[32] Nevertheless, while not discounting these very real concerns, there is a dimension to it that goes philosophically deeper. Political theology in our Hegelian story is a notion that extends right to the heart of who we say we *are*. That is, as a way of accounting for religion, political theology touches on what kinds of reasons a polity's citizens ultimately give in light of religion's place in their lives, of who they are as members of such and such a community, and of what they hold to be of absolute value.[33]

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[28] Matthew 22:2

[29] Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* The Gifford Lectures (1936) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 4. For more on how the crisis of faith produces, or at least, motivates, theology, see George Hammill, *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, 1.

[30] For the history of the term "political theology" used here, see Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 25-6.

[31] See in St. Augustine's *The City of God* (4.27 and 31).

[32] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan; with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), I, xii, §32.; see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, vol. University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 2006). by which the term was made famous.

[33] *PhG* §656

Plato was the first to note such a formative dimension to the question of political theoloogy. Plato was not only the first to coin the word 'theology' in his *Republic*, but he also directly associates this term with the pedagogical dimension of any account humans give of religion in their lives.[34] Plato thought that the religious traditions of Hesiod and Homer were great obstacles in the pedagogical development the philosopher-kings, and that anything less than the full "purification" of these myths will not correct the formative (read: corrupt) influence of religion on the young. And we see this not just in Plato. Hobbes and Spinoza, in their Biblical exegeses, also show how religion can make or break a polity by directly challenging its citizens' identification with the political, creating in addition to a security crisis, an existential one as well.[35] Thus, so long as religions continue to operate in the public sphere, political theology remains, to use Claude Leforte's apt phrasing, a "permanent" question that any political community must address in articulating its own self-understanding and identity.[36]

And indeed, modern human beings today articulate a distinct understanding of their political relationship to religion, and the question is whether or not such a self-understanding remains true to who we are *as modern human beings*. Questioning modernity's relationship to religion, thinkers like Charles Taylor, Terry Eagleton, Giorgo Agamben, and to some extent Habermas, challenge the notion that the secular age we live in can completely dispense with religion.[37] Such an inadequate view (Hegel calls it a "monstrous blunder") belongs ultimately,

[34] Plato, *The Republic of Plato* trans., Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1991), ii, 379a.
[35] For instance, the Parts III and IV titles "Of a Christian Commonwealth" and "Of the Kingdom of Darkness" in Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Spinoza, *Spinoza: Theological-Political Treatise*, trans., Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[36] Claude LeFort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?," in *Democracy and Political Theory*(Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).
[37] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Giorgo Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans., Patricia Daley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

they argue, to Voltaire's *Ecrasez l'infame* – "the radical Enlightenment" who wanted to separate and dispense with religion altogether from the public sphere.[38] As a corrective to this way of thinking, "postsecularity" is, consequently, a contemporary *essai* in trying to move past this dichotomy which, as critical religion theorists like Timothy Fitzgerald, Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad argue, fails to account for religion's continued influence in modern, purportedly "secular" politics.[39] For them, it is not that we ignore religion, but rather, that religion in the West has become ultimately conditioned by the disciplinary and ideological constraints of the liberal state so as to become an inauthentic expression of our connection with the Infinite – whatever this Schleiermachean turn of phrase may mean.[40] In any case, important here is how such debates closely track the sense that we need a new account for our own modern relationship towards religion. Therefore, any real confrontation with the problem of political theology must engage with the deeper question of religion's continued influence on our own modern self-understanding – an engagement to which Hegel, I contend, made a very "un-dichotomous" pedagogical contribution.

II. A Hegelian Modernity

[38] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §552.
Works by critical religion theorists that I have found helpful include, Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford Oxford Univeristy Press, 2000); Talal Asad, "Thinking About Religious Belief and Politics," in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also, on the disciplinary and political dimenstion to supposedly "liberal" or "neutral" policies towards religion, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan et al., eds., *The Politics of Religious Freedom* (Chicago Univeristy of Chicago Press, 2015); Trevor Stack, Naomi R. Goldenberg, and Timothy Fitzgerald, eds., *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* (Leiden: Brilll, 2015).
[40] I read Schleiermacher and the critical religion theorists as coming from the same intention that seeks to discover a more "authentic" religious experience that is not conditioned or beholden to Christianity or a Western logocentric modes of being. See Friedrich Scheleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans., Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Hegel understood modernity as a distinctly Christian conceptual possibility.[41] Modern humans required a particular form of individual *and* collective life that reflexively emphasized critical autonomy which only Christianity opened up – a position that prompted Duncan Forbes to claim that Christianity "is the most direct route to the heart of Hegel's philosophy."[42] Such a claim needs context because it is easily misunderstood, but it must wait untill after we have conceptualized the dynamic of Hegel's "modernity" which he thought was a historically reflexive, collective project at "the self-legitimation of reason" , to use Pippin's phrasing. Only after we have understood what this means can we begin to see what Christianity brings to the table in Hegel's thought. On his account, this rational independence was not something that simply "happened" to us, nor is modern critical autonomy something that is just "natural" to us in the sense of being always "there" in our fundamental species-being. It was, instead, a pedagogical "achievement" that required a history and development.[43]

Autonomy is an achievement because it requires a long period of education (*Bildung*) through which we pass in order to achieve, individually and collectively, a form of consciousness that grounds us as the self-legislating and critically autonomous beings we claim ourselves to be. I argue that the opening of Hegel's *Phenomenology* captures this notion that an active "recollection" of and "reflection" on the past is crucial in understanding modern autonomy. In what follows, I think it indispensable to hear Hegel's own words on the issue. The excerpted passage is dense, but in it, Hegel is trying to say that modernity is an *active* process of self-

[41] Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, 243-44. See also Pippin's essay, "The Modernity Problem," in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 1-15, esp. 17.
[42] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans., H. B. NIsbet (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1984), ix.
[43] Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 287.

conscious recollection and understanding, a highly reflexive process that critically understands its own mode of being and thinking *in relation to* the past which has enabled and informs it.

> [T]he task of leading the individual from his culturally immature standpoint up to and into science had to be taken in its universal sense, and the universal individual, the world spirit, had to be examined in the development of its cultural education… In any spirit that stands higher than another, the lower concrete existence has descended to the status of an insignificant moment; what was formerly at stake is now only a trace; its shape has been covered over and has become a simple shading of itself… In that way, each individual spirit also runs through the culturally formative stages of the universal spirit, but it runs through them as shapes which spirit has already laid aside.. *In this pedagogical progression, we recognize the history of the cultural formation of the world sketched in silhouette. This past existence has already become an acquired possession of the universal spirit; it constitutes the substance of the individual, or, his inorganic nature. – In this respect, the cultural formation of the individual regarded from his own point of view consists in his acquiring all of this which is available, in his living off that inorganic nature and in his taking possession of it for himself.* Likewise, this is nothing but the universal spirit itself, or, substance giving itself its self-

> consciousness, or, its coming-to-be and its reflective turn into itself.[44]

Hegel is here explicit about how such a "pedagogical progression" towards critical autonomy consists in a reflexive appropriation of "the history of the cultural formation of the world sketched in silhouette" – his figurative way of saying that our histories matter for our own modern self-understanding. He thus thinks that such a reflective orientation cannot dispense with the forms of life it supersedes, and that any "shortcuts" which neglect this and tries to substitute it ultimately fall back into some sort of uncritical complacency in how things are. On his account, neglecting the history of our own conceptual development is equivalent to, in Hegel's vivid imagery, substituting coffee with chicory.[45] Hegel wants real modernity, not its ersatz version.

Hegel calls such a recollective dynamism in thought "dialectics". On a sociological level, Hegel held the view that all forms of life, individual and collective, result from an immanent attempt by members of a community to deal with conceptual inadequacies that frustrate or alienate them from their notion of who they are and what they hold valuable. When who they articulate themselves to be and who they indeed are do not align, such a discrepancy provokes a contradiction which prompts both a revision of the initial claim and of their relationship to it. This dynamic attempt by consciousness – this back-and-forth of "self-engendering, advancing, and then returning into itself" – is what in Hegelese one calls "dialectics".[46] And, when such a process becomes consciously known and recollected to the subject, it is called "experience" –

[44] *PhG*, §48, emphasis added.
[45] *PhG*, §68
[46] *PhG*, § 65, see Michael Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method" in Frederick C. Beiser, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1993), 130-170.

Hegel's way of emphasizing that human consciousness is that which learns from its own attempts at self-realization.[47]

Antinomies like the ancient Greek debate between *physis* and *nomos*, Antigone's tragic demise, the painful alienation of monastic Christianity, and the self-destructive nature of Jacobin radical freedom are all such discrepancies between what a polity articulates itself to be and what it actually is. That is, these are all self-understandings through which human beings progress dialectically towards a state of collective, mutual recognition in which all humans are known to themselves and each other as critically autonomous beings worthy of respect and dignity. Hegel expresses it thus:

> Spirit is the *ethical life* of a *people* to the extent that it *is* the *immediate truth*; it is the individual who is a world. It must advance to a consciousness about what it immediately is, it must sublate the beautiful ethical life, and, by passing through a series of shapes, it must attain a knowing of itself. However, these shapes distinguish themselves from the preceding as a result of which they are real spirits, genuine actualities, and, instead of being shapes only of consciousness, they are shapes of a world.[48]

This educative process of dialectical revision "passing through a series of shapes" is the immanent rationality inherent in the living dynamism of *Spirit*, which in my reading of Hegel is not a metaphysical or divine entity, *pace* Quentin Bauer, but ultimately the self-conscious, intersubjective articulation between the members of a community of who they are and what they

[47] *PhG* § 85-6
[48] *PhG*, §440

absolutely value.[49] In this vein, the modern spirit is a mode of intersubjectivity defined by the mutual recognition of each other as collectively upholding critical autonomy as the distinct identity and worth of what makes a modern human modern. In other words, Hegel is trying to articulate a progressive, pedagogical process of intersubjective relations among human beings of a particular polity that immanently and dialectically realize *explicitly* what they implicitly are as critically autonomous agents (subjects). This illuminates what Hegel says, that "everything hangs on grasping and expressing the true not just as substance but just as much as *subject*."[50]

In pointing out that who we are and what we value is the result of conceptual developments mediated by our own reason-giving activities, then and only then, Hegel says, do we realize that the "subject" (i.e., "I") is *the* determinate factor in our thinking of and interaction with each other and the world. And on a deeper level, Hegel is saying that there is no way we can come to know things and interact with them that does not already presuppose a particular understanding of the self and its relation to the world. Such conceptual priors or schemes literally enable cognition itself.[51] Hence, for him, what counts as "self" and "world" is enabled by the notions and concepts of who we take ourselves to be and the reasons through which we understand the cognitive relations we take up both to ourselves and others. This is why Hegel is an "idealist."[52] For him, dichotomies like "Subject-Object" are not "given" and "fixed" facts, but rather conceptual orientations that we presuppose and consider legitimate in the first place in order then to go about cognizing the world according to, for lack of a better term, this "rubric". But what is even more important here is the centrality of a subject's own reason-giving activities as the necessary presupposition for any cognition of the world. Something, a happening, an

[49] Quentin Bauer, "Religion and Culture", 107.
[50] *PhG*, §17, emphasis mine.
[51] See Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Hegel's Idealism: The Logic of Conceptuality" in Beiser, ed., 102-129.
[52] Pippin, "Hegel's Completion of Kant", p. 67.

occurrence, a fact, must be taken *by me* subjectively to be such a thing *for me* within the conceptual openings in order for something to be *for me* at all. In addition, Hegel wants to show that this idealist nature of one's consciousness *is* developmental and conceptually dependent upon its history of dialectical resolutions. There is no independent or "external" measure (or criterion) of knowing except consciousness itself in its own conceptual development, and recognizing this developmental truth about subjectivity is itself a form of "achievement".[53]

Yet, this is not even his most ambitious claim. Hegel does not just say that achieving this second-order type self-reflection is distinctively modern. He also wants to say that it is a product of effort and education enabled by Christianity! For him, the realization of subjectivity enabled the move towards a rational and autonomous way of thinking and being on a societal, not just individual, level. To be sure, such a claim almost seems too preposterous to be worth deep discussion today in a pluralistic and postmodern world. It seems to imply, quite worrisomely, that pre-modern human beings had no "self-consciousness", and that before the modern world, human beings had. No "subjectivity" in their cognitive experiences, as if Socrates truly did not know what he was doing.[54] In short, Hegel's claims seem tantamount, when taken seriously, to be effectually a dismissal of premodern (and, by extension, all non-Western) civilizations that did not have a Kant or Luther.

Additionally, to even suggest that self-consciousness and subjectivity depends on a "long process of cultural formation" opens the door to all sorts of disciplinarian and authoritative political relationships, implying that those bereft of human "subjectivity" could henceforth be treated as "objects" instead of as "subjects". If Hegel was indeed arguing for such a position, this

[53] Hegel writes, ""Consciousness in its own self provides its own standard" *PhG*, §84.
[54] For reason that we cannot go into now, Hegel thinks that Socrates' self-consciousness operated in a different way compared to ours, not that it did not exist for him: when Socrates followed his *daimon*, he did not identify this inner voice as *him*-self, but as a "divine voice".

would make him, truly, to be the one of most ridiculous and dangerous thinker German Idealism has ever produced. The line from such a mode of thinking to the Holocaust could be more than strongly implied, and Karl Popper would be vindicated.[55] And if all this were true, we can quite rightly dismiss him as nothing more than an archaic remnant of a deluded attempt at rationalizing an outmoded form of Christianity no longer relevant to our world governed by difference and deep pluralism. In this light, his famous saying that the rational is the actual furthermore takes on a particularly nefarious tone.[56]

These implications, however, are unjustified, firstly, because Hegel's point is not meant to justify modern dominance over pre-modern ways of thinking and life. To set pre-modern and modern against each other in a relationship of superior to that of inferior ultimately neglects the developmental, and, in Hegel's famous plant analogies, organic nature of their conceptual relationships.[57] The purpose of accomplishing such a subjectivity is not to then sink it back into a hubristic mode of self-assertion and dominance which he calls "dogmatism."[58] Nothing can be further from the spirit of Hegelian philosophy than a jingoistic, dogmatic modernity, claiming to have achieved all that there is to have been achieved, and belittling pre-modern lives. Against such dogmatism Hegel reserves very harsh words: it ultimately fails to fulfill the very spirit of modernity which is to be an open, living project, not a "dead repose".[59] Additionally, and most importantly, such modern hubris completely ignores the pedagogical dimension central to this whole modern effort at upholding critical reflexivity. The whole point of reminding us of our

[55] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies (New One-Volume Edition)* (Princeton, NJ. : Princeton University Press, 2013), 246. See also the "right" interpretations of Hegelian doctrine in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, viii.
[56] Emil L. Fackenheim, "On the Actuality of the Rational and the Rationality of the Actual," *The Review of Metaphysics* 23, no. 4 (1970).
[57] *PhG*, §6
[58] *PhG*, §40
[59] *Science of Logic*, 12.177. See also *PhG*, §788, 798

historicity is to draw our attention to a dangerous tendency we have in becoming complacent in our own mode of being.[60]

In short, Hegel is deeply worried that, in its very success, modernity will soon forget the very mode of education so necessary to its continuation. That is, our formative histories cannot just be "forgotten" without consequences. Who we are today *is* shaped by and *is* the conceptual development of the forms of life that we have superseded. The failure to realize the sheer historicity of our consciousness and its development is tantamount to a form of collective amnesia. Pinkard puts it nicely:

> In constructing the path that those various reflective forms of life have retrospectively been seen to have taken, we find not only that each such 'formation of consciousness' is intelligible only in terms of the historical insufficiencies of the preceding 'formations of consciousness,' but that these 'formations of consciousness' have left remnants of themselves in all the succeeding 'formations of consciousness' such that the intelligibility of each - and of our own - is possibly *only* in terms of the intelligibility of *all* its predecessors.[61]

III. Christianity's Contribution

[60] PhG, §4; See also, *PhG*, §32.
[61] Pinkard, *Sociality of Reason*, 16

One key aspect of this education to be modern involves the proper orientation towards religion. To rearticulate the above, because being modern consists in the capacity for a self-conscious, rational reflection upon our own reason-giving activities, we cease to be modern when this critical autonomy ceases to be operative in our lives. And one way that such a critically appreciative orientation ceases to be operative in our modern lives is when we become hostile towards the pedagogical contributions of Christianity to our very modern project of collective autonomy. Thus, the reason why religion is important has less to do with Habermas' view that modern reason religion to sustain itself and foster collective solidarity.[62] What Hegel is after is different.[63] Hegel, I contend, makes the case that modern human being's efforts at collective critical autonomy conceptually presupposes a notion of conscience and interiority that Christianity both enabled and embedded into a collective form of life. In engaging religion, the modern self-understanding must take this into account for it to be truly self-reflective.

Plato, we recall, confronted the religious tradition he inherited. The contradictions, he thought, in the Greek myths threatened to severely disrupt the common life of the envisioned ideal city. There was no way that the Greek traditions which extolled the heroic virtues of self-sufficiency and passionate rage (thumos) could be reconciled with the 5th and 4th century Athenian culture of democratic rule and deliberation, let alone the ideal city governed by philosophic wisdom. Nonetheless, Plato did not completely negate the heroic culture he critiqued and tried to supersede. Instead he attempted to find a place for it within a larger framework that incorporated heroic virtue under the guidance of philosophic wisdom. In the same way, modernity in its historically reflexive mode should be understood not as an attempt to negate the

[62] *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 3, 110.
[63] See, for instance, Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 118.

claims of Christianity, but rather, as a critical appreciation that the modern spirit is the product of the way Christianity embodied critical autonomy *both* individually *and* collectively in institutions, laws, rituals, etc.

For this reason, the way Christianity embodied this conceptual opening of interiority and conscience in communal ways of life is *its* distinctive modern contribution. But in saying this, we need to be careful. Hegel is not saying that interiority came *only* out of Christianity. Interiority has always been around, but Christianity, however, made it the collective spirit of a community, and this is different. For only when "conscience" has been upheld authoritatively in an intersubjective manner and collectively embedded in a community's identity, practices, institutions, laws, and norms will such a concept obtain "reality" in an efficient and practical, not just individual and theoretical sense. Seen in this light, it illuminates why H. S. Harris claims that, for Hegel, the modern notion of interiority is "a distinctively modern, *Christian* achievement."[64] It is the reason why Hegel calls Christianity a modern religion;

> No Idea is so generally recognized as indefinite, ambiguous, and open to the greatest misconceptions... as the idea of Liberty... When individuals and nations have got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence mind, and that as its very actuality. Whole continents, Africa and the east, have never had this Idea, and are still without it still. The Greeks and Romans, Plato and Aristotle, even the Stoics, did not have it...

[64] H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 76, emphasis mine.

> It was through Christianity that this Idea came into the world. According to Christianity, the individual *as such* has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love, destined as mind to live in absolute relationship with God himself and have God's mind dwelling in him: i.e., man is implicitly destined to supreme freedom.[65]

To be sure, passages like these superficially appear to imply that only with the introduction of Christianity did individual liberty (his other way of saying "conscience" and "interiority") arise. Yet, this ignores the other portions of the *Phenomenology*, like, for instance, his treatment of the slave becoming the Stoic by withdrawing "within" or the Beautiful Soul fleeing from political involvement into herself, or the kind of Faustial individualism, in all of which Hegel notes the rise of interiority and individualism, but noted their self-contradictory, self-negating, ephemeral natures. These forms of interiority lacked one decisive aspect that Christianity did not – a communal, external embodiment. The Stoic freedom, for instance, was not real; nor was the Beautiful Soul ultimately anything but the deluded hypocrisy of an escapist timid; nor did Faust ever come to anything concrete and fulfilling in the unboundedness of his caprice. However, by being a communal religion, Christianity instituted in a real and lived way this conceptual interiority, and forms the consciousness of its adherents to uphold conscience within a contextually deep manner. To be sure, Christianity did so through religious imagery and

[65] *Philosophy of Mind*, §482. See also *PhG*, §25

pictorial representations, but these were secondary to the debates on the general education to autonomy that Hegel intervened in as did Lessing and Kant before him.[66] We need to say more.

Religion, in Hegelian thought, means something very specific. *Geist* we said is for Hegel the self-conscious, intersubjective articulation between the members of a community of who they are and what they absolutely value. *How Geist* articulates itself, however, can differ. Hegel notes three ways in which we can articulate who we are: firstly, through sensuous embodiment in art; secondly, through representational imagery in religion; and thirdly, through pure conceptual thinking in philosophy.[67] On this account, the Greeks expressed their self-understanding immediately in sensuous artistic media like sculpture, architecture, painting. Artistic media, however, on his account, has its expressive limits.[68] When humans seek to express more meaning than what art can immediately embody, they proceed to enter into the realm of representational imagery and symbolism through which religion expresses itself.[69] These representations, in a way, "go beyond" what they immediately signify, and hence already point to a transcending of mere sensuosity. But finally, when even representational thinking cannot fully articulate what humans intend, then we see, on Hegel's account, arise full philosophic thinking that dispenses with both the constraints of art and representational imagery in articulating itself in pure conceptual thought. Seen in this light, the Hegelian problem of political theology is about how critical thinking – the Enlightenment ideal of pure conceptual thinking unmediated by art or

[66] See, for example, Lessing, "The Education of the Human Race (1777-80)" in his *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans., H. B. NIsbet (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2005), 217-240. For an interesting discussion about the debate on Christianity that Hegel intervened in (and in some sense inherited), see H. B. Nisbet, "The Rationalisation of the Holy Trinity from Lessing to Hegel," in *Lessing Yearbook Xxxi*, ed. Herbert Rowland and Richard E. Schade(Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999).
[67] Taylor in his *Hegel* treats of the three in "Part V: Absolute Spirit", pp. 465-536.
[68] Hegel has been famously charged with inaccurately predicting the "end of art" in the modern world; see his *Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, 10-11. Pippin tries to offer a new reading of Hegel's theory of art in his *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[69] Taylor, *Hegel*, 480.

religion – engages with the politics of religion which Hegel famously thought was, at least for Christianity, *in content* the same.[70]

Here, then, is where the aspiration of modernity to critical autonomy and the representational form of thinking Christianity embodies meet. As different ways of articulating the same critical autonomy – one through rigorous conceptual thinking and the other through representational imagery – Hegel suggests that pure philosophic thinking cannot for everyone. He does not, however, think that the *hoi polloi*, as Plato thought, are incapable. Instead, Hegel argued that because we live in a complex, modern society governed by specialization, not everyone has the time and leisure to engage in it.[71] And so, even if human beings no longer express who they are immediately in art anymore, they may still need to, alongside philosophy, articulate themselves as autonomous beings through representational imagery that guides the heart and soul.[72] That is, religion will still coexist with philosophy as a representational, "emotive," way human beings articulate their own self-understandings even if philosophic conceptual thinking has arrived on the scene.

With that, Hegel suggests that for those who are not going to be engaged in philosophic thinking professionally, they can still uphold the modern *ethos* by being part of a Christian community that upholds these conceptual spaces individually and collectively through a rationally qualified "intuition, feeling, and representational cognition".[73] An assessment of such a view for today will be reserved for the last section; but we can immediately note a few things. First, Hegel argues that certain forms of religion, particularly those of the Lutheran kind, can

[70] *Philosophy of Mind*, §573
[71] Taylor, *Hegel*, 487-8; see also §270 of his *Philosophy of Right*.
[72] Fackenheim, *Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, 206-14.
[73] *Philosophy of Right*, §270, p 292.

directly support a liberal modernity by educating the citizens of the liberal state to uphold these free spaces of conscience within them as definitive of who they are and of what is of absolute value for them. "The Christian religion," Hegel argues, "is the religion of freedom".[74] And what is important in this respect is how Christianity, as a collective affair, also means that these conceptual spaces receive intersubjective recognition, thus ensuring that they receive lasting embodiment through institutionalization (churches), ritual enactments, etc.

Moreover, Hegel tells us that because religions tend to be lived experienced through which individuals are formed, such an engagement with religion is invaluable for the modern liberal state. For instance, Hegel realizes how most individuals are born into households that are, at the very least, nominally of a certain faith, and for him this shows that the ethical life of any community is grounded in some religious articulation of our self-understandings.[75] This is an inescapable fact of our contextually embodied existence. Human beings cannot simply ignore the formative pedagogical dimension these religions have on the minds of the young (re: Plato). But, nonetheless, even if secular liberals are weary of religion's contributions to how citizens articulate who they are, an engagement with religious forces cannot be naïvely dismissive of religious claims. An honest encounter with them needs to involve a serious engagement with their formative impact, and, as critical religion theorists have long been pointing out, the liberal state *does* shape, in Foucauldian ways, religious belief in a way that secures its own liberal way of life – although I do not necessarily see such influences as totally undesirable.[76] It may indeed be the case that if the modern state wants to continue to uphold the critical autonomy of

[74] *Philosophy of Right*, §270, p. 303.
[75] *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, f. 180 on p. 336.
[76] Drawing on Foucault, critical religion theorists like Trevor Stack and Timothy Fitzgerald see the liberal state as engaging in these kinds of "disciplinary" measures. We already alluded to them above.

conscience as a collective way of life, being as it were a "Temple of Human Freedom," then it should not ignore both how some religious forms of education aids in this liberal dimension.

Consequently, Hegel's contribution to the debate on political theology reminds us of the important pedagogical dimension of this perspective. In our attitude towards the claims of religion, the tendency in us to sink into a dogmatic acceptance of how things are undoes the enormous labors *Geist* has had to undergo just to enable critical autonomy as a way of life. Hegel intends to keep the Spirit of modernity alive, not to write its epitaph. And so, in short, I argue that in our critical appreciation of Christianity and the conceptual spaces it has and continues to open up, Hegel wants us to be open to new possibilities, paradoxically by way of a critical appreciation of the past. He is not intending to pigeonhole us into some historical narrative that is somehow deterministic and teleologically driven. And if there is a determinism and teleology in Hegelian thought, then it is because human consciousness, as a spontaneous force that tries to overcome conceptual contradictions and unrest, unceasingly moves forward towards "higher" planes of development. Such a claim does not posit some fixed end goal of history; rather, it creates history by being our collective attempt towards achieving a way of life in which we can all be recognized as the deserving, dignity bearing, critically thinking and autonomous beings we, as Kant famously argued, are.

IV. Hegel Today

Truth be told, Hegel's claim about Christianity's contribution to modernity does seem slightly unconvincing.[77] The euro-centrism of such a claim aside, even if we are philosophically

[77] Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 163-216.

inclined to accept the conceptual narrative Hegel presents us, modern human beings today have different expectations and experiences of religion than that of simply "Protestantizing everything."[78] In the 20th and 21st centuries alone, modern humans have experienced the rise of relatively liberal and modern societies in non-Christian, non-Western contexts like Japan and South Korea. From the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong to the Arab Spring, modern events have shown that appeals to critical autonomy as a collective aspiration is not a strictly Western or Christian monopoly. Also, even if we want to be sympathetic to his claim, we, who live in a world marked by globalization and difference, find such appeals to a particular tradition unjustified and, in a way, un-authoritative for our sense of who we are. We today want to respect critical autonomy in its varied, not monochromatic, manifestations. There are, indeed, certainly limits to such liberality, but this is a far cry from claiming that there is only one flavor of modernity. As we see places around the world continue to work out, on their own terms, collective ways to embody the critical autonomy in their own particular contexts and histories, the notion that only a Christian "soil" to use Emil Fackenheim's imagery produces liberal, modern polities sounds, quite frankly, odd and dated.[79] So why read Hegel at all?

This is because Hegel can be read differently. Hegel may have unfortunately held some views which are indefensible and philosophically unjustified. But, his reminder to us that central to our own collective project of autonomy is a critically appreciative orientation towards the past remains indispensable for a modernity that continues to encounter religion as a force in politics. Political theology, as we have shown, is deeply pedagogical. Religion is not, as some liberals seem to think, something that can be neatly boxed or quarantined in the private sphere. And as

[78] Ibid, 203.
[79] *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, 179.

other societies with their own religious traditions grapple with the claims of autonomy, they need an approach which seeks to ground it in a way of life that is not self-destructive or self-negating. Hegel offers us less a straightjacket for how modernity has arisen than an orientation for how, if any collective seeks to be modern, they should address the question of political theology in their own contexts. It is an effort in a kind of modern education, or an education on how to be modern, in a critically reflective way. Hegel, read in this light, can be instructive for political societies that are marked by deep divisions between new secular and old, oftentimes reactionary, religious forces. Hegel does not offer us policy for say the question of Islamic fundamentalism, but he does caution us that any effort to "modernize" without particular attention to how religious traditions have conceptually opened up and closed certain possibilities, will result in problematic outcomes. At the end of the day, modernity is, for Hegel, an open project, and I argue that we can learn much more from how he engaged the issue than from what final answers he supposedly took as "Absolute".

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