Hegel, styled by his disciples and friends as the Eternalized One (*der Verewigte*),\(^1\) irreversibly changed the Protestant theology of the German-speaking world. Hegel’s impact upon the English-speaking world is limited by the complexity of his technical terminology (*termini technici*) hammered out in complex German with no precise Latin equivalent.\(^2\) Although Hegel’s thought has

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2. Kant chose German as the language of his principal works, though his academic dissertations were written in Latin (as required). Nevertheless, Kant’s major writings were immediately translated into Latin. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Opera ad philosophiam critica*, trans. Friedrich Gottlob Born, 4 vols. (Lipsiae: Engelhard Benjamin Schwickert, 1796–1798). Hegel too was compelled to write his dissertations in Latin and occasionally to officiate in this language. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Dissertatio philosophica de orbitis planetarum,” in *Werke* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1834), 16:1–29; idem, “Drei lateinische Reden gehalten an der Friedrich Wilhelm’s Universität zu Berlin,” in *Werke* (1835), 17:305–30.
been widely researched, scholars seldom pay attention to his eschatology. Since Hegel’s thoughts on eschatology are scattered throughout his works and uttered in non-traditional vocabularies, this essay will reconstruct a comprehensive picture of his eschatology.

I. Hegel’s Eschatological Categories

Hegel’s eschatology does not revolve around the biblical eschatological categories. Naturally, Hegel referred to these notions as he expounded the biblical or patristic eschatology, but he did not deem them expedient for his own system. He either refrained from using traditional categories or reinterpreted them in accord with his philosophical tenets. Nevertheless, his thought is not devoid of eschatology. At times, Hegel resorted to neutral philosophical terms such as the continuation of personal existence.

Why did Hegel exert himself to adapt certain biblical terms into his own system and not limit himself to philosophical nomenclature only? To answer this question, it is necessary to elucidate the relationship between religion and philosophy in Hegel’s thought. In his view, only philosophy is able to offer ultimate and absolute knowledge of God and the universe, and genuine consolation to an individual. Religion can, at best, represent the universal truth symbolically, and thus functions as the philosophy for the poor (namely for those incapable of philosophical

reflections). Consequently, the adoption of the biblical notions was a pragmatic move, and peripheral to his speculations.

II. Foundations of Hegel’s System

From the very beginning, Hegel built his system after the fashion of formal logic. The systematization of Hegel’s philosophical project was undergirded by his theory of truth, as well as by his ontology and his epistemology. Besides, it suited the format of the philosophical encyclopaedia as developed by Hegel.

Hegel accommodated the Aristotelian correspondence theory of truth to his ontology. According to Aristotle, a factual statement is true if it corresponds to sensual data, whereas reason is the sole criterion of truth in the realm of ethics. For Hegel, all reality is governed by the laws of dialectics. Reality progresses from the primordial notion (i.e., the thesis) through nature (i.e., the antithesis) to the Spirit (i.e., the synthesis). These three elements of the dialectical process cannot be separated or isolated. Therefore, Hegel stated that the contradiction is the criterion of truth and that the non-contradiction is the criterion of falsity. The truth consists in the totality which embraces all three elements of the dialectical process, because all that exist cannot be comprehended except as a whole. On that account, the system is absolutely necessary.

5 As to the schema of thesis–antithesis–synthesis, see Ludwig Friedrich Otto Baumgarten-Crusius, De philosophiae Hegelianae usu in re theologica (Jena: Bran, 1826), 5.


7 Karl Rosenkranz, “Habilitationsdisputation am 27. August 1801,” in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s Leben (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1844), 156 [I].

8 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Phänomenologie des Geistes,” in Werke (1832), 2:3–58 [Vorrede].
Since reality, to which a statement must conform, is contradictory, truth and its criterion are contradictory too.\(^9\) Although pure being and the pure nothingness are identical in terms of dialectics, truth is neither being nor nothingness, but rather it is the perpetual movement between all elements of the dialectical process. Thus, truth is not static but dynamic; and it can even contain opposing statements.\(^{10}\)

Heraclitus of Ephesus first coined the concept of the coincidence of the opposites; he asserted that all things become and flow according to contradictory movements, albeit the fact that the world is one.\(^{11}\) Hegel lectured on and praised Heraclitus’ ideas: the identity of the being and the nothingness, the being as ceaseless change, the unity of the opposites, and truth as becoming rather than being.\(^{12}\) In the same lecture, Hegel noticed that Heraclitus claimed that the One, which differentiates itself, is brought together to itself.\(^{13}\) Although the original context of this claim is unknown, as it is extant only as a quotation by Plato, it aptly recapitulates Hegel’s ontology.

Hegel maintained that all philosophy exists in the ideas,\(^{14}\) but his definition of idea varies from Plato’s. In Platonism, ideas are perfect, pure, immaterial, eternal, complete, spiritual, and

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11 Diogenes Laertius, “Heraclitus,” in De clarorum philosophorum vitis, dogmatibus et apophthegmatibus, ed. Anton Westermann and Carel Gabriel Cobet (Parisiis: Firmin-Didot, 1862), 228 [IX, 1, 8].
14 Rosenkranz, “Habilitationsdisputation am 27. August 1801,” 158 [VI].
unchangeable. They are divine forms which leave their imprints upon formless and undetermined original matter. Out of the primordial matter, all things come into existence in the image of ideas. However, materiality is imperfect, impure, transient, perishable, incomplete and changeable. The material world exists, but its fragile existence is inferior to the absolute existence of the ideal world. Although material things are molded by ideas, the material and ideal realms are separated by a qualitative abyss.

On the contrary, Hegel defined the Idea as the synthesis of infinity and finitude.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, for Hegel the Idea is the unity of notion and reality,\textsuperscript{16} the union of the subjective and the objective,\textsuperscript{17} and the blend of the empirical and the rational.\textsuperscript{18} In the Idea, the objective and the subjective are identical while being corresponds to notion.\textsuperscript{19} The Idea contains in itself its own life and its own material realization. Furthermore, the Idea is life, perception and knowledge. Friedrich Schelling immediately (in 1802–1803) grasped the relevance of Hegel’s reinterpretation of the concept of an idea (from 1801) and recalled that “every idea is the unity of infinity and finitude.”\textsuperscript{20}

Hegel’s ontological schema consists of three elements. The first element is called notion or concept, the Idea, the Absolute or being. It is identical to nothingness, because it is still indeterminate,
void of content and not mediated.\textsuperscript{21} The second element is termed nature, the world or the differentiated being. The third element is simply named the Spirit. In Hegel's opinion, becoming is the union of being and nothingness. Either there is emergence—the transition from nothingness to being—or there is passing away—the transition from being to nothingness.\textsuperscript{22}

The transition from one element to the other is wrought by negation—a peculiar operation in Hegel's system. In formal logic, negation abrogates what is negated and institutes the opposite. In Hegel, negation does not abolish what is negated; rather it adds a new entity, bringing to fruition what is dormant and latent, yet inherent in the negated element.

For Hegel, the negation of the negation does not restore what was previously negated \([\neg(\neg A) \neq A]\), but it continues and advances the dialectical process. Therefore, the negation of the first element (namely the Idea) is the world along with the idea; and the negation of the second element (namely the negation of the negation) is the Spirit along with the world and the idea. The emergence of the world does not nullify the Idea, nor does the emergence of the Spirit delete the world and the Idea. It cannot be ruled out that, in this respect, Hegel utilized the patristic doctrine of the incarnation. According to this doctrine, God became man in such a way that He is at the same time God and man; so that God does not cease to be God when He became man.

Hegel depicted the transition from notion to nature as alienation, externalisation and specification. The transition from nature to the Spirit was described as reconciliation, internalisation and generalisation. By negation, the Idea becomes alien to itself, external to itself and specific, and is mirrored in the world as in

\textsuperscript{22} Hegel, "Logik," in \textit{Werke} (1840), 18:95 (§9).
its own negation. Nature and notion are reconciled by the Spirit in that the dialectical process becomes internal and general. In other words, being (tantamount to nothingness) divides itself as the world, and unities itself as the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit is the terminus of the eternal becoming of the Idea which takes place beyond physical time. Although the Spirit is not the original Idea as it unites both notion and nature, Hegel declared the primordial Idea and the Spirit are identical in the sense that the Idea returns to itself as the Spirit. However, the self-returning Idea is altered and developed as compared to the original Idea. On that account, Hegel used the terms “the Idea” and “the Spirit” interchangeably.

Since time immemorial, epistemology was conditioned by the alternative between empiricism and rationalism. In Plato, ontology studies the source of perception and the status thereof. Accordingly, ideas are perceived by soul (identical to reason), which can reach the ideal world because it belongs thereto and is cognizant of its ideal origin. On the other hand, the knowledge of earthly phenomena is subject to the senses. Thus, rational knowledge (pertaining to ideas) is certain and reliable, while empirical knowledge is uncertain and unreliable because it refers to ephemeral material things.

Hegel was not bothered by this alternative because, for him, to be means to know oneself. Self-perception and self-knowledge constitute the Idea. The Idea not only becomes and develops but also knows itself by its own negation. Thus, the Idea explores itself by the forms which it assumes in the dialectical process. These forms determine the structure of Hegel’s philosophy. It is divided

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25 Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in Werke (1840), 18:166 [§84].
into the study of notion (i.e., the logic), the study of nature and the study of the Spirit. For Hegel, reality is rational, and rationality is real. The laws of dialectics underlie all existence and all non-existence.

Every sensual phenomenon is a dialectical manifestation and embodiment of the Idea and is wrought by these absolute and unshakeable laws. Therefore, a genuine conflict between rationality (i.e., the laws of dialectics) and empirical data is impossible. Based on this supposition, in Hegel’s dissertation, astronomical data that did not support his theoretical premises were adjusted accordingly. Similarly, in his lectures (on the philosophy of history, on aesthetics, on the philosophy of religion and on the history of philosophy), Hegel focused not upon researches into the historical phenomena but upon their significance to his own axiomatic system. Ultimately, the sensual perception and the rational notion must coincide and become identical in terms of their content. On the one hand, empirical data are transformed into rational theses; on the other hand, empirical data embody rational theses.

All knowledge (also termed by Hegel as revelation) is rational in the sense that it derives from reason (Vernunft), which is defined by Hegel as the reflection of God and the knowledge of the Absolute. Reason is not the same as common sense (Verstand), because common sense pertains only to the finitude. It is also different from Kantian reason, which describes our logical aptitude.

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26 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts,” in Werke (1833), 8:17 [Vorrede].
27 Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in Werke (1840), 18:147 [§7–9].
28 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Religionslehre,” in Werke (1840), 18:75 [§74].
29 Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie,” in Werke (1833), 13:96 [Einleitung, B, 2, b].
III. The Uniqueness of Christianity as the Absolute Religion

Undoubtedly, Hegel considered Christianity a unique and absolute religion; this is far from self-evident in his writings. The validity of this claim emerges as we enquire into Hegel’s understanding of Christianity and its relationship to non-Christian religions in his system.

Hegel’s attitude to Scripture as the sole, unique, ultimate, irreplaceable and infallible source of the saving knowledge of God (sola Scriptura) was ambiguous. He did not agree with the Enlightenment criticism of the Bible and refuted those arguments. His own system could not be verified either empirically or logically (in the mathematical sense of the term), and it could be questioned in the same way as Scripture was criticized by the Enlightenment.\(^{30}\)

However, the challenge of biblical criticisms convinced Hegel that the Bible can no longer be the unquestionable source of religious knowledge. It must be replaced with the reason, or the laws of dialectics. He argued that the knowledge of the Absolute could not be based on or mediated by anything but itself. The mediatorial role of Scripture is rejected, but reason is able to mediate truth because it is God’s reflection in man.\(^{31}\)

Naturally, Hegel claimed that he discovered the laws of dialectics; he did not set those laws. Christianity, which Hegel deemed unique and absolute, is not a historical phenomenon. He offered his own philosophical interpretation of Christianity. As we compare the biblical eschatology with Hegel’s eschatological concepts, we shall see how this interpretation works.

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31 Hegel, “Religionslehre,” in Werke (1840), 18:75 [§73].
The status of non-Christian religions in Hegel’s system is vague. On the one hand, both encyclopaedias, which were meant to be comprehensive and referential, are silent on this topic. They attribute the absolute religion to the activity of the Spirit alone. On the other hand, in the lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel divided the presentation into the determinate religion and the absolute religion. In his *Phenomenology*, he divided religions into natural religion, religion of art and revealed religion. It appears that religion evolves as the Spirit assumes various religious forms. The absolute, complete and final form is what he termed Christianity.

Did Hegel regard non-Christian religions as imperfect human thoughts about the spiritual realm, or are they the Spirit-guided preparatory stages for the absolute religion? However, these are false alternatives, because even if non-Christian religions are imperfect representations of human consciousness, every glimmer of consciousness derives from the Absolute. The Spirit knows itself and finds its own identity as the Spirit mediates itself through human consciousness, even when it is imperfect and incomplete. Eventually, the perfect and complete religious embodiment of the laws of dialectics becomes reality. According to Hegel, being is perpetual becoming. By the process of negation, the Absolute creates itself and attains perfection and completion.

32 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse,” in *Werke* (1845), 7/2:447–52 [§564–71], albeit 446 [§563]: “Fine arts (like their peculiar religion) have their future in the genuine religion”; idem, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in *Werke* (1840), 18:103–5 [§207].


account, different manifestations of the Spirit are all necessary as
the forms of its self-knowledge and its self-development at every
stage.\(^\text{36}\) Therefore, the similarities (e.g., the incarnation) between
various religions arise from the preparatory function of the non-
Christian religions as a sort of the Spirit's rehearsal.

### IV. An Outline of Hegel’s Eschatology

Since Hegel’s axiomatic system is founded on the laws of
dialectics, he did not approach Christianity as a historical
phenomenon. He reinterpreted certain biblical categories in order
to adapt them to his philosophical project. Hegel deliberately
detached his interpretation of Christianity from history, because
the dialectical process takes place not in physical time (\textit{Historie})
but in the history beyond time (\textit{Geschichte}).\(^\text{37}\) In his opinion, God
establishes His own history (\textit{Geschichte}) to explicate Himself. As
God moves and lives, so He writes His own history.\(^\text{38}\) The divine
history (\textit{eine göttliche Geschichte}) is the timeless event (\textit{zeitloses
Geschehen}) which, as the perfect action of the Absolute, is
perceived not by senses but by reason (\textit{Vernunft}).\(^\text{39}\) Thus, Hegel
evaded the Enlightenment doubts about the miracles attributed
to Christ in Scripture. In his view, historical events (and therefore
historically verifiable) are not dialectical and they do not belong to
the Spirit’s itinerary. Hegel asserted that such a reinterpretation
of the Christian categories in dialectical terms is immune to the
Enlightenment criticism of the historical verifiability of the Bible
(particularly the miracle stories were considered impossible events

\(^\text{36}\) Ibid., 344–49 [II, I, III, 2, a].
\(^\text{37}\) Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in \textit{Werke} (1840), 18:204 [§207].
\(^\text{38}\) Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,” in \textit{Werke} (1832), 11:256
[III, II, 3].
\(^\text{39}\) Ibid., 82 [I, B, b].
that go against the laws of nature).\textsuperscript{40}

For Hegel, the biblical concept of creation is a symbol of the emergence of the world from the primeval Idea by virtue of its negation process. He assented to \textit{creatio ex nihilo} but invested it with a meaning contrary to the patristic intent. For the vast majority of the Church Fathers, nothingness—out of which God created the universe—denotes the very void; while, according to Hegel, nothingness is tantamount to being, meaning that the Absolute created the world out of itself by self-negation.

Hegel expounded the Fall of the first couple as a myth. He extolled sin as a progress in the dialectical movement and the origin of human consciousness.\textsuperscript{41} Accordingly, the loss of paradise initiated the authentic existence of man and it was a necessary step forward.\textsuperscript{42} Prior to the Fall, men were like animals, for they did not exercise their right to choose good or evil.\textsuperscript{43} The natural state of man was neither good nor evil. Since he was unconscious of goodness, he was in a reprehensible state.\textsuperscript{44} Thanks to the Fall, man came to exist as the Spirit.\textsuperscript{45} Sin was a necessary stage in human independence and development. Hegel dissociated death

\textsuperscript{40} Hegel, "Philosophische Enzyklopädie," in \textit{Werke} (1840), 18:204 [§207].
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 189–203 [II, I, Die unmittelbare Religion oder die Naturreligion].
\textsuperscript{44} According to Scripture, the first people were created perfect but with ability to lose this perfection by disobedience to God. However, the patristic theology was not clear about that. For instance, Clement of Alexandria maintained that the first people were created capable of perfection for which they should strive. See Clemens Alexandrinus, "Stromata," in \textit{Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca}, ed. J.-P. Migne (Parisii: J.-P. Migne, 1857), 9:317–26 [VI, XII].
\textsuperscript{45} Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Rede zum Schuljahrschluss am 29. September 1809,” in \textit{Werke} (1834), 16:139.
from sin. The immortality of man as the Spirit and the mortality of man as body have nothing to do with sin, but they are determined by the laws of dialectics. Consequently, as far as man is inadequate for the generality (Unangemessenheit zur Allgemeinheit), he is mortal; whereas as far as man is the Spirit, that is *eo ipso* adequate for the generality, he is immortal.46 According to Hegel, death is a transition from specificity (*Einzelheit*) to generality (*Allgemeinheit*). It corresponds to the transition from nature (i.e., specific) to Spirit (i.e., general) through which the Spirit emerges (*Hervorgehen des Geistes*).47

Concerning evil, Hegel did not reckon it to be in equal status with the world, and he rejected the hypothesis that evil is the alienation process by which the world emerges.48 In his view, evil is not a part of the dialectical process, and on that account it does not actually exist in the proper sense of the term. Evil is rather a misinterpretation of the world’s status. The world is good and perfect as viewed from the perspective of the totality, namely in connection with other elements of the dialectical process. Evil means that the world is looked upon as isolated from the original notion and that the finitude strives to be absolute (i.e., self-reliant) and free from infinity.

Hegel accorded the patristic titles such as God-man (*Gottmensch*) to Christ but explained them in a way that is contradictory to the patristic Christology. For the Church Fathers, Christ is very God who became the specific yet sinless man, and He assumed a true body for eternity in order to redeem mankind.

46 Hegel, “Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse,” in *Werke* (1842), 7/1:691–96 [§375–76].


48 Hegel, “Religionslehre,” in *Werke* (1840), 18:76 [§78].
In Hegel’s view, Christ is a symbol of the fusion of the Idea and the world.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, Hegel acknowledged Christ as the General Man, but not as a specific person.\textsuperscript{50} According to the Chalcedonian definition, in Christ the divine nature (i.e., divinity) and the human nature (i.e., humanity) are united but not confused. Hegel regarded both natures as identical\textsuperscript{51} because, for him, Christ symbolizes a fusion (i.e., like an alloy) of infinity and finitude rather than a union. Consequently, Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection were interpreted as the pictures of the negation of the negation by which the Spirit emerges in the dialectical process.\textsuperscript{52}

Furthermore, Hegel also identified Christ with the Spirit, causing a confusion in trinitarian terms. Let us remember that, in Hegel, the term “the Spirit” covers both the Spirit in a narrow sense of the term (namely the 3rd element of the dialectical process) and the Spirit in a wide sense of the term (namely being as such). Every element of the dialectical process, including Christ, is a form of the Spirit in the wide sense.\textsuperscript{53} The same is true of the term “the Absolute,” which pertains either to the first element of the dialectical process or to being in its dialectical flow.

Although the negation of the negation is a singular operation, two aspects thereof can be distinguished. The negation of the negation negates what is existing, namely the Idea and the


\textsuperscript{50} Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in \textit{Werke} (1840), 18:204 [§207].

\textsuperscript{51} Hegel, “Phänomenologie des Geistes,” in \textit{Werke} (1832), 2:509–70 [CC, VII, C].


\textsuperscript{53} The idea — the inception of the being, the world — the negation of the being, the Spirit — the fulfilment of the being.
world (their fusion symbolized by Christ), by bringing the Spirit to fruition. The negation is exhibited by Christ’s death, whereas the emergence of the Spirit is demonstrated by His resurrection. In Hegel’s system, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and reconciliation are merged into one dialectical event.\(^{54}\)

Since negation causes alienation, the negation of the negation abolishes the alienation. This process is called reconciliation.\(^ {55}\) Since Christ symbolizes the fusion of infinity and finitude and His death depicts the negation of the negation, He is recognized as the One who reconciles the Absolute and the world.\(^ {56}\) Actually, this reconciliation is a self-reconciliation. Since the world is the negation of the Absolute, by the negation of the negation the Absolute reconciles itself with its own dialectical opposite. Both alienation and reconciliation do not happen in time but in eternity.\(^ {57}\)

For Hegel, the comprehension of the after-world lies within the circumscription of the world. To understand the significance of Hegel’s attitude to the world as well as to the after-world, we need to compare it with the view of the Church Fathers. To apprehend the patristic views on the universe, we ought to start with Platonism and Neo-Platonism.

Plato taught that the material world is inferior to the ideal realm. Eternal souls, which are perfect in themselves and belong to the ideal world, repeatedly enter imperfect and mortal bodies. Ultimately, certain souls will be liberated from their transmigration (\(\text{μετεμψύχωσις}\)) and from their bodies, described as their grave and prison. Thus, they can return to their ideal abode whence

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55 Hegel, “Religionslehre,” in *Werke* (1840), 18:76 [§ 79].
56 Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in *Werke* (1840), 18:204 [§ 207].
they originate. Since the material world reflects the ideal world to a certain degree, Plato did not declare the world to be evil in the absolute sense of the term. In terms of its imperfection, the earthly realm is imperfect or even evil; but in terms of its derivation from the ideal realm, the world is good. The process of imprinting implies inevitable imperfection and deficiency. Although the universe is transient, evanescent and mutable, it will never disappear completely.

Neo-Platonism reinterpreted and advanced Plato’s legacy. Porphyry maintained that the descent of the soul into the body is the soul’s fall, exile, contamination, intoxication and delusion. Thence, every soul aims at returning home. This return can be achieved by the pursuit of perfection and the knowledge of the divine truth. This truth is engraved in the soul and unveiled in the Platonic philosophy. Every soul can recall (ἀνάμνησις) what it was in the ideal world, and thus regain true consciousness of its own nature and destiny. By the pursuit of virtues and of enlightenment, and assuming that the One is the source and the perpetrator of any genuine enlightenment, perfection and moral good, man should ultimately become “God” (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ). Porphyry realized that not all souls will wake up from the lethal slumber in the body, and not all souls will be able to break the bonds of the metempsychosis. He did not deem the descent of the soul into the body as inevitable. Rather, he emphasized that every soul that falls into the corporeality is responsible for and guilty of its fall. Similarly, every soul is responsible for its restoration to the eternal bliss.

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58 Plato, “Timaeus,” in Opera omnia, ed. Gottfried Stallbaum (Gothae and Erfordiae: Hennings, 1838), 7:133 [Τ1, 34b].

59 The concept of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ appears in the Church Fathers as θέωσις and differs from the biblical view on man’s creatureliness according to which man was created to be man and this is God’s ultimate intent. The Scripture links man’s fall and restoration not to his creatureliness but to his will towards God.
Porphyry pictured the way of return as the ascent of the soul to the gods that emanate from “God” (the One). The One is the source of all beings. All beings constitute a chain of beings. The perfection of a being is proportional to its position in the chain. The closer to the One the being is, the more perfect it is; whereas the further from the One the being is, the less perfect it is. Every being participates only in the more perfect being, and thus the One is finally reached indirectly. Although Porphyry considered the world to be a temporary (hence dissolvable) institution, he did attribute evil found therein to man alone because the One cannot be held accountable for any moral evil. Moreover, he treated the world as the school for souls that have fallen into the body. There they can prepare themselves to regain their intrinsic perfection, so that the earthly existence is not pointless but rather aids in the soul’s return to the unapproachable glory of the incorruptible One. According to Porphyry, death itself does not release the soul. The soul must be purified from its attachment to matter which the soul is infected due to its fall into the corporeality.

Besides Platonism and Neo-Platonism, other schools of ancient Greek philosophy also regarded the world and its institutions as negative and defiled. Stoicism knew two principles (ἀρχαί) in reality, the active one (τὸ ποιοῦν) and the passive one (τὸ πάσχον). The passive principle is an indeterminate

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60 That is precisely why theologians influenced by Neo-Platonism grew uneasy at the Nicene definition because the Son as the effluence from the Father must be of lower substance than His Source namely the Father. The Neo-Platonic ontological schema simply refutes that what is begotten can be qualitatively equal to what begets. Accordingly, all elements that are emanated from the One constitute the chain of beings of unequal perfection depending on their distance from the One. To affirm the Nicene resolution it was necessary to suspend the Neo-Platonic views in this regard.

61 Diogenes Laertius, “Zeno,” in De clarorum philosophorum vitis, dogmatibus et
matter (ὕλη). The active principle, or Logos, is immanent within matter, and it is equal to God. Nevertheless, the ethics of Stoicism postulates ἀταραξία and ἀπάθεια, and it encourages an escape (or at best a separation) from the world and its institutions. The material world may cause suffering or at least may engage in a reality satiated with the anxiety and fragility. The same is true of Epicureanism, in spite of its materialism.\(^{62}\) The comment on the corporeality from *Corpus Hermeticum* seems to be representative of ancient Greek culture:\(^{63}\)

πρῶτον δὲ δεῖ σε περιρρήξασθαι ὃν φορεῖς χιτῶνα, τὸ τῆς ἀγνωσίας ύφασμα, τὸ τῆς κακίας στήριγμα, τὸν τῆς φθορὰς δεσμόν, τὸν σκοτεινὸν περίβολον, τὸν ζῶντα θάνατον, τὸν αἰσθητόν νεκρόν, τὸν περιφόρητον τάφον, τὸν ἔνοικον ληστήν, τὸν δὲ ἄν φιλεὶ μισοῦντα καὶ δὲ ἄν μισεὶ φθονοῦντα.\(^{64}\)

But first you ought to tear off the garment which you wear, the web of ignorance, the foundation of evil, the chains of destruction, the dark enclosure, the living death, the sensual corpse, the portable grave, the squatter, the one that hates by what it loves, and the one that bears a grudge by what it hates.\(^{65}\)

\(^{62}\) Diogenes Laertius, “Epicurus,” in *De clarorum philosophorum vitis, dogmatibus et apophthegmatibus*, 255–88 [X].


\(^{65}\) An English translation of the above fragment (note 64 from *Corpus Hermeticum*)

Most Church Fathers continued this paradigm. The eschatology of the Church Fathers cannot be considered as coherent or uniform. Justin Martyr adhered to millenarianism, though he noticed that such a theory was not commonly accepted. Origen’s eschatology resembled Neo-Platonic systems (cf. the emanation—alienation schema) which he learnt from Ammonius Saccas, the master of Plotinus. Due to his condemnation by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (AD 553), the works of Origen were either destroyed or neglected. Some of them were lost, and some of them survived only in the Latin translations of Rufinus of Aquileia of which

by the author.


68 It is debatable to what extent the council condemned Origen’s views or the view of contemporaneous Origenists. Origen’s position was tolerable during his lifetime, but it became indefensible as the Nicene orthodoxy got firmly established. Although the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) dealt mainly with the doctrine of the Trinity, they also engaged in rethinking and redefining other doctrines, including creation, Christology and soteriology. After the councils, the influence of Platonism in patristic theology did not subside (cf. Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), but it was even enhanced, albeit in a hidden way.
accuracy was impugned by Jerome.\textsuperscript{69} Definitely, Origen taught (or at least allowed for) the following doctrines: the pre-existence of souls and of matter, corporeality as a result of the primordial Fall (cf. the theory of ψυχή and ψύχω), the impossibility of the carnal resurrection, the metempsychosis, a plurality of sequential worlds, the circular concept of time and the apocatastasis defined as the universal restoration including the evil angels.\textsuperscript{70}

Tertullian and Augustine defended the corporeality for the sake of the incarnation and the resurrection,\textsuperscript{71} but even they rejected corporeality by propagating virginity and asceticism. John of Damascus twisted biblical Christology in its Chalcedonian formulation and showed contempt for human corporeality when he asserted that the divinity (i.e., the Logos) was united with the flesh by means of mind (νοῦς) because the purity (καθαρότης) typical of the divinity and the dullness (παχύτης) typical of the corporeality cannot be united without an intermediate element (i.e., mind). Of course, νοῦς was counted as the integral part of Jesus' human nature since the time of Apollinaris of Laodicea.\textsuperscript{72}

The mature patristic theology formulated its eschatological consensus in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.\textsuperscript{73} It employed

\textsuperscript{69} Jerome claimed that Rufinus' translation was more orthodox than the original text. Even if that were the case, many heretical statements could be found therein. Cf. Hieronymus, “Epistola CXXIV ad Avitum,” in Series Latina (1859), 22:1059–72.


\textsuperscript{72} Damascenus, “De fide orthodoxa,” in Series Graeca (1864), 94:1205–12 [III, VI].

the term αἰών which has a wide range of meaning in Greek literature\(^{74}\) as well as in the New Testament,\(^{75}\) as noted by Augustine\(^{76}\) and John of Damascus.\(^{77}\) Generally, αἰών denotes either a time (an age) or a space (a world) either in a positive sense or in a negative sense. However, this concept does not imply a choice between a time and a space, but rather unites both aspects. Schelling expressed this union by the German noun Weltalter (a world-age).\(^{78}\) The time-space fusion inherent in αἰών matches with New Testament eschatology. It assumes that, after the last judgement, man composed of soul and resurrected body will continue to exist (the time aspect) either in the reality of heaven or in the reality of hell (the space aspect), albeit eschatological time and space differ from the present time and space known to us. Furthermore, the expression αἰών μέλλων occurs in the New Testament (cf. Matt 12:32; Luke 18:30; Heb 6:5). Additionally, the Church Fathers spared no effort to differentiate biblical eschatology as interpreted by them and Graeco-Roman eschatological concepts recorded in ancient literature.\(^{79}\) Similarities were acknowledged to be a consequence of the natural knowledge of God (cf. the theory

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\(^{74}\) Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon Based on the German Work of Francis Passow* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 45 [s.v. αἰών].

\(^{75}\) Otto Schmoller, ed., *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1868), 23–24 [s.v. αἰών].

\(^{76}\) Augustinus, “De civitate Dei,” in *Series Latina* (1845), 41:368–69 [XII, XIX].

\(^{77}\) Damascenus, “De fide orthodoxa,” in *Series Graeca* (1864), 94:861–64 [II, I].


of λόγος σπερματικός), whereas dissimilarities were attributed to deviations from the truth as a result of original sin.

The Reformation rejected hostility towards the world and its institutions. On the basis of Scripture (cf. Gen 1; 1 Tim 4:4), the Reformers considered the world good as far as it is God’s creation. They appreciated what God has established in the world for man’s benefit, especially marriage, civil government and labour. Within these institutions, man can respond to Christ’s unconditional love for mankind by loving his neighbours. Reformation theology perceives sin as the total corruption of man’s will towards God and defines justification as the sentence of acquittal for Christ’s sake. Therefore, both sin and grace are not bound to the creatureliness.

Hegel’s conception of the world differs from both the paradigm of patristic theology and the Reformation approach. In contrast to Platonism and Neo-Platonism, Hegel did not regard matter as evil, imperfect or deficient. In his system, goodness, perfection and completion apply not to an isolated element of the dialectical process but to the whole process of becoming of the original notion. According to Porphyry, the process of emanation of beings from the One involves their degradation; whereas, according to Hegel, every form of being is necessary in the dialectical process and should not be despised. Although, for Porphyry, evil originates from man’s choice, and matter is what corrupts the soul. Therefore, matter must be emanated indirectly from the One, since the One cannot be associated with any evil.

80 The patristic theology studied Romans 1–2, but, in contradiction to these loci classici, the Church Fathers tended to credit natural knowledge of God with the ability to save the lost.

Hegel attempted to evade the problem of theodicy by defining evil as ill-perception.

For Hegel, the perennial Idea is not deprived of corporeality; corporeality is inherent within the Idea. The Spirit manifests itself as the subjective Spirit (cf. feeling, mental representations and thinking), as the objective Spirit (cf. law, morals and state) and as the absolute Spirit (cf. arts, religion and science) that are not incorporeal, but they are seething with sensual phenomena. In Hegel’s opinion, the world is the Absolute that has become the Other towards itself and that the Absolute looks at itself in the world as in the mirror. Consequently, there is no Absolute without the world and there is no world without the Absolute, because the world is the negation of the Absolute. The world’s existence implies the existence of the Absolute. Moreover, the threefold Spirit fills the universe with institutions which make the world what it is. According to Hegel, matter is the embodiment of the Idea and the fulfillment of time and space.\(^\text{82}\)

The world is transient and evanescent not in the sense that the universe is to be dissolved. Rather, it will be drawn into the Spirit and continues as the Spirit and along with the Spirit. The Spirit is the ultimate and final stage of self-knowledge, self-identification and self-development of being in the dialectical process. Thus, the world in itself is not imperishable, but the whole dialectical process, in which the universe participates, is eternal. For Hegel, true eternal life is the pulse (\textit{Rhytmus}) of the Absolute that exists as the Idea. The Absolute makes itself the object (\textit{Gegenstand}) of its own perception as nature and finally reconciles itself with itself as the Spirit so that it can attain freedom of being at itself (\textit{bei sich selbst zu sein}).\(^\text{83}\)

\(^{82}\) Hegel, "Philosophische Enzyklopädie," in \textit{Werke} (1840), 18:173 [§110].

\(^{83}\) Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,” in \textit{Werke} (1832), 11:35
Both Neo-Platonism and Hegelianism are preoccupied with saving knowledge, albeit they define its content diversely. For Porphyry, the key is to know the soul’s fall from the intangible world into the tangible world and its returning journey. For Hegel, it is about the laws of dialectics which determine how being becomes. In Porphyry’s view, the Fall and salvation pertain to the fate of individual souls and do not refer to a universal process. Whereas in Hegel’s system, the Fall is equal to the transition from the Idea to nature while reconciliation is the transition from the world to the Spirit. In this case, the Fall and salvation embrace all people and are universal. In defiance of biblical doctrine, Hegel did not teach that faith is necessary for man to receive the benefits of the universal reconciliation.

For Hegel all that happens is universal and independent of man, so that there is no place for the biblical concept of the last judgment. Moreover, there is nothing to expect beyond the dialectical process. There is no world to come. The sole, unique, and irreplaceable world has already come as the negation of the Idea and the return of the Idea to itself as the threefold Spirit that contains and unites the intangible and the tangible. According to Hegel, the Idea returns to itself altered, matured, complete, knowing itself, reconciled with itself and interwoven with the world. Thus, the Absolute comes to fruition in the Spirit, in accordance to its own nature as eternal union of the infinite and the finite.

Since Christ is a mere symbol of the synthesis of infinity and finitude, Hegel rendered His second coming null and void. In Hegel’s system, man is a form of the Spirit and as such is immortal. There is no premise for the resurrection of the flesh. The

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84 Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in Werke (1840), 18:204 [§207].

84 Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in Werke (1840), 18:204 [§207].
carnal resurrection presumes that a future is possible, while Hegel reduced all aspects of time to the present moment.\textsuperscript{85} Hegel’s denial of the resurrection of the flesh was motivated not by a contempt for the corporeality,\textsuperscript{86} but Hegel was driven by his system which leaves no space for such a phenomenon. From the perspective of ancient Greek philosophy and culture, there was nothing more terrifying than a restoration of the body, even when postponed to the after-life. All its efforts were directed at the ontological liberation from corporeality or the ethical separation from corporeality. Plotinus wrote that the soul’s aim is to rise (ἀνάστασις), namely to wake up (ἐγρήγορσις) from the body (ἀπὸ σώματος), without the body (οὐ μετὰ σώματος).\textsuperscript{87}

What happens to man after death? For Hegel, the phrase “after death” indicates the physical measure of time, a measure inapplicable to the dialectical process. Man as the Spirit continues to exist, but eternity is not an endless duration but incessant self-knowledge beyond the flow of time.\textsuperscript{88} In contradistinction to the ancient Greek philosophy (cf. the concept of ἐκπύρωσις\textsuperscript{89}), Hegel opted for the linear, not circular, concept of time which safeguards the non-recurrence nature of the dialectical process.

Hegel defined the term God’s kingdom (called also the

\textsuperscript{85} Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,” in Werke (1832), 12:266 [III, III, 1].
\textsuperscript{86} For the Church Fathers, procreation was classified as an effect of the Fall, even though, according to Gen 1:28, the Lord called the first people in the state of integrity to procreate. See Methodius, “Con vivium decem virginum,” in Series Graeca (1857), 18:27–220.
\textsuperscript{87} Plotinus, “Enneades,” in Opera omnia, ed. Friedrich Creuzer (Oxonii: E Typographeo Academico, 1835), 1:565 [III, VI, 310, 6–7].
\textsuperscript{88} Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,” in Werke (1832), 12:220–21 [III, II, 3].
\textsuperscript{89} Laertius, “Zeno,” 187–88 [VII, 1, 134]; idem, “Heraclitus,” 228 [IX, 1, 8].
kingdom of the Spirit) as God’s presence (*Gegenwart*) and reality (*Wirklichkeit*) among all who understand the dialectical process, particularly alienation and reconciliation, regardless of their church affiliation.\(^90\) However, there are no eschatological consequences to ignorance and no eschatological benefits of belonging to God’s kingdom. According to Hegel, man desires to be cognizant of the truth. Owing to the Fall, he is driven by consciousness and by the pursuit of the knowledge. Hegel’s system has no damnation, or even no possibility thereof, even though hell is so vividly described in Scripture and exists in Neo-Platonism as the continual transmigration of the soul. Hegel stressed that every soul (i.e., an individual Spirit) will attain eternal beatitude by virtue of its eternal self-determination.\(^91\)

**V. Philosophia pauperum**

Hegel asserted that arts, religion and science (i.e., philosophy) handle the same subject, namely the Absolute in its dialectical becoming, but have diverse manners of presentation.\(^92\) Philosophy conceptually (*in Begriffsform*) encompasses what arts and religion seize by contemplation (*Anschauung*), by representation (*Vorstellung*) and by experience (*Empfindung*). This does not imply that religion is incapable of any intellectual presentation:

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Religion presents the absolute Spirit not only to contemplation (Anschauung) and representation (Vorstellung), but also to understanding (Gedanke) and perception (Erkenntnis). Religion is first of all meant to raise the individual to God’s thoughts, to unite the individual with God and to assure the individual of this unity. Religion is the truth as it is for all men. The essence (Wesen) of true religion is love. Religion is essentially (wesentlich) the attitude (Gesinnung) as the knowledge of the truth about human will.⁹³

For Hegel, science (Wissenschaft) is the final manifestation of the absolute Spirit and the ultimate form of its self-knowledge.⁹⁴ The absolute Spirit comprehends itself conceptually (in Begriffsform) through science. This science is equal to philosophy, namely his own philosophical system, which he considered to be the purest embodiment of the absolute Spirit.

Speaking of the relationship between philosophy and religion, Hegel did not approach religion as the historical phenomenon. He relied on his own philosophical interpretation of the absolute religion. In his opinion the authentic content of Christianity can be defended by philosophy, not by history.⁹⁵ Therefore, whatever cannot be reinterpreted and justified by the laws of dialectics in Christianity must be dismissed.

Although the Church Fathers were indebted to ancient Greek philosophy, they tended to look at philosophy as the handmaid of theology.⁹⁶ Hegel, on the contrary, believed that theology is the handmaid of philosophy because philosophy plainly and clearly

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⁹³ Hegel, “Philosophische Enzyklopädie,” in Werke (1840), 18:203 [§207].
⁹⁴ Ibid., 205 [§208].
explicates in abstract terms what theology picturesquely depicts.

One may wonder if religion has any right to exist after philosophy has come into existence. In Hegel’s view, religion is still useful as “philosophy for the poor” (*philosophia pauperum*). Since not all people are equipped to be edified by philosophy, they need religion for edification. In this respect, Hegel concurred with Kant in adhering to the paradigm of ancient Greek philosophy, which claims that the most perfect and pure knowledge (i.e., philosophy) is not accessible to everyone. It is only accessible to the intellectual and moral elite. Synesius of Cyrene, the Neo-Platonic philosopher of the 4th century, stated that truth about divine things should be hidden (ἀπόρρητος) from common people. They need a different system in the form of religion.\(^97\) Thus, despite its deficiency in perfection and truth, as a deficiency of light is better for weak eyes than an excess thereof, religion is necessary for those who are ill-equipped to admire the unmarred light of philosophy. This paradigm was abandoned by Christianity, which seeks to address all people without exception in order to bring them to heaven.\(^98\)

Both Hegel and Kant tried to keep religion within the boundaries of reason, albeit they varied in their conception of reason. For Hegel, reason is man’s window to the Absolute; whereas, for Kant, it is the logical capacity of man. They maintained that philosophy of religion can exist apart from the historical phenomenon of Christianity, but this kind of bare philosophy would be destitute of any social impact.

Both Hegelianism and Kantianism reject traditional eschatology for different reasons.\(^99\) Hegel reduced religion to

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98 Although Synesius cherished Neo-Platonism and denied the doctrine of the carnal resurrection, he was appointed the bishop of Ptolemais.
99 Immanuel Kant, “Das Ende aller Dinge,” in *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Inselverlag,
ontology, while Kant reduced it to ethics. For the former, no future is possible; for the latter, the concept of the soul’s existence after death is necessary only for providing a sense of purpose for man’s actions.

VI. Conclusion

In the 19th century, Hegel had a significant impact upon the Protestant theology of the German-speaking world. His influence was not restricted to the German states, but it also stretched to Scandinavia (cf. Ebbe Samuel Bring, Paulus Genberg) which was culturally and religiously affiliated to German Lutheranism. In 1836, Georg Andreas Gabler delivered a Latin inaugural lecture “On the Piety of the True Philosophy in Relation to the Christian Religion” founded on the Hegelian tenets, and in 1826 Ludwig Friedrich Otto Baumgarten-Crusius researched the application of Hegelianism in Protestant theology in a Latin tract *De philosophiae Hegelianae usu in re theologica*. Despite these works, Hegel’s philosophy scarcely extended its impact beyond the German world. For a while Hegelianism won over German and Nordic universities and thus made an indelible mark. Henceforth every scholar in humanities had to take a stance on Hegel. His legacy was treasured by the Tübingen School (cf. Ferdinand Christian Baur, Bruno Bauer, Albrecht Ritschl, David Friedrich Strauss), and it was not absent in the Erlangen School (cf. Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, Gottfried Thomasius). The liberal theologians recognized Hegel as their precursor (cf. Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Ernst Troeltsch), whereas the conservative theologians supported the

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1921), 6:635–52.
100 Georg Andreas Gabler, *De verae philosophiae erga religionem Christianam pietae* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1836).
101 Jena: Bran, 1826.
ecclesiastical accommodation of Hegel’s legacy prompted by the Old Hegelians (cf. Karl Daub, Johann Eduard Erdmann, Georg Andreas Gabler, Philip Marheineke, Karl Ludwig Michelet, Karl Rosenkranz, Julius Schaller).

Hegel rejected Patristic eschatology and he expected no \( \alpha \iota \omega \nu \) to come. Everything is about the world at hand. Moreover, he disallows any possibility that the current universe is senseless, purposeless or tossed by mere accidents. All events happen in accord with the immutable laws of dialectics. There is nothing beyond the present reality, because the Spirit reaches the terminus of its dialectical voyage within the phenomena which are present to us: the Spirit’s subjectivity (emotions and intellect), the Spirit’s objectivity (the law, the society, the government) and the Spirit’s absoluteness (arts, religion and science).\(^{102}\) Thus, Hegel proves to be a confessor of the world as consubstantial with the eternal Idea that is concealed in and pervades all reality.

\(^{102}\) Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie,” in Werke (1836), 15:105–8 [II, Einleitung, 4, \( \beta \)].
The first page of Hegel's lectures on “Philosophy of Religion” as was noted down by Carl Pastenaci. Collected in the library of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, Poland, EU; catalogue number: 136/R-3. Photo provided by the author.