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**HEGEL ON INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: SPINOZISM,
ROMANTICISM, EUROCENTRISM**

by

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DEDICATION

For Ally, for turning up, keeping up, putting up, picking (me) up, and never letting up:
with love, good humor, and wonder

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ABSTRACT

This study examines nineteenth-century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's appraisal of philosophies of India. In Hegel's time, classical Indian texts such as the Vedas, *Upaniṣads*, and *Bhagavadgītā* had only recently been translated into European languages, and were generating tremendous controversy. Hegel carved out a unique and hugely influential position by devotedly reading fledgling translations of source texts alongside European interpretations, attempting to comprehend the philosophical significance of Indian thought. Hegel's legacy proved deeply problematic, however, both because his views were not entirely consistent or unambiguous over time, and because his evident relegation of Indian ideas to pre- or unphilosophical status became the dominant practice among Europeans and Westerners through the twentieth century even while Hegel's star, relatively speaking, went into a period of decline. While Hegel spent much more time and space discussing Indian philosophy in detail than did many philosophers who succeeded him in Europe and elsewhere, today his philosophy is too-frequently either reflexively labeled Eurocentric to legitimize ignoring or summarily dismissing it,

or studied and written about exclusively in the context of “Western” ideas as if India were of little or no serious concern to him.

This work first situates Hegel’s interest in and attention to Indian ideas in the context of the philosophical trends of Spinozism and Romanticism that he sought to navigate from his earliest forays into theology and philosophy. It then interrogates his analyses and judgments of Indian philosophical systems over the course of his career, revealing the increasing depth and innovation in his engagement with India over time while also critiquing his readings of Indian texts and his characterizations of Indian thought and culture. In doing so, it endeavors to supply the complete account of Hegel’s approach to Indian philosophy in its full complexity.

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Introduction

I. Problem

In a spate of recent studies on Hegel, whose philosophy has been experiencing something of a renaissance, contemporary thinkers have advanced competing interpretations of Hegel's texts, views, or arguments, as well as of his general philosophical enterprise. Virtually all of them, however, focus exclusively on Hegel's writings in the context of Western philosophy, politics, and society. This dissertation seeks to address an obvious, significant, yet largely unadmitted problem: Western Hegel studies continue to neglect the treatment that non-Western philosophies, specifically those indigenous to India, receive in Hegel's writings.

There are two facets to this problem. The first is the nature of Hegel's appraisals of non-Western philosophies and cultures. Did Hegel have a deeply Eurocentric prejudice? Did he deem the traditions, trends, and prospects of his Greco-Germanic culture or those of Europeans in general indisputably greater than any and all others, and judge the latter accordingly? What exactly did he write about India? How well does it measure up not only to the current understanding of Western Indologists and philosophers but also, and much more importantly, to what Indian philosophers and historians have said and written about their own traditions? In examining the substantial portions of Hegel's philosophical output relevant to these questions, it is imperative to keep in mind, first, the weighty fact that Hegel was unimpressed with Romantic tendencies of his day that minimized the accomplishments and adornments of European

culture in favor of the glorification of all things Oriental and Indian especially. He thought it imperative to resist such fetishism of the exotic. Second, and much more importantly, Hegel made a rather extensive study of Indian thought, and not merely with an axe to grind. He may have arrived at an ultimately negative assessment of Indian philosophy and society, but certainly not in complete ignorance of representative texts and commentaries that were available in his day.

The second (and arguably even more fascinating) facet of the problem, therefore, is that in the Hegel literature, especially but not exclusively in the English-speaking world, Hegel's appraisal of non-Western traditions and philosophies of India has received comparatively little attention. In the current resurgence of interest in Hegel among both North American and European philosophers there has largely been silence about his approach to non-Western philosophical traditions and texts. Despite the fact that Hegel produced ample material for consideration, the rare studies that do exist either do not have Indian philosophy as their primary focus or are comparatively brief. Why the relative dearth of explicit and detailed recognition, consideration, and critique by Western philosophers, right up to the present day, of Hegel's not-insignificant forays into the study of Indian philosophy and the conclusions he drew from them?

II. Thesis and Overview of Argument

The present study attempts to substantiate the claim that Hegel's sustained encounter with Indian philosophy, still underappreciated—even unrecognized—by the majority of Western scholars, shows he held a more informed and nuanced understanding of Indian philosophy than might be supposed. More specifically, there are two central

theses on offer. First, Hegel engaged closely and at length with Indian thought, learning about it in detail and coming to an extent—though ambivalently, and not univocally or consistently—to treat it as really philosophy, regarding and categorizing it as roughly equivalent to the philosophy of Spinoza. This still needs to be better known. Second, upon examination Hegel’s statements and writings on India over his lifetime, and particularly his “fixing” of all Indian thought as at its core a philosophy of substance (i.e., of an undifferentiated absolute), turn out to be problematic and contestable—from a classical Indian-philosophical perspective and a contemporary post-colonial perspective but also, quite possibly, even from an immanent Hegelian perspective. There are thus reasons for Hegel scholars and Hegelian philosophers to explore Indian philosophy, as well as for scholars of Indian philosophy to engage and grapple with Hegel’s ideas.

That Hegel *had* a prolonged encounter with Indian philosophy will be quite clear. Regarding the nature of it, it remains true that Hegel espoused a theory of history according to which the culmination of development lay in Spirit’s arriving at self-conscious knowledge of its existence in substance or in the “substantiality” of the material world. In accordance with this view, Hegel generally held Indian and other non-Western philosophical traditions to be only preliminarily philosophical at best. Yet Hegel’s bias, if it may be called that, did not prevent him from seriously studying non-Western texts and doctrines; in fact, he read a number of translated texts along with a great deal of the general presentations, focused studies, lecture transcripts, and other works by Europeans that were available to him. Moreover, if his appraisal was on the whole demonstrably negative, this was part and parcel of his resistance to making a fetish of the “exotic Orient” in the way he believed the Romantics among his contemporaries

were doing. It was also because he sensed parallels between Indian philosophy as he came to understand it and the philosophy of Spinoza, toward which he had worked out a definite position and with which he had developed a unique way of dealing before he undertook prolonged study of Indian thought. And not only can it be argued that Hegel exhibited pronounced ambivalence about whether India in particular had achieved philosophy “proper,” but it can also be shown that over the years Hegel subjected his own views to scrutiny and even fundamentally revised them in light of new material that became available to him. The present project attempts to accomplish both. In doing so it can inform ongoing returns to Hegel, which insist on the continued importance of his philosophical method, sensibility, and insights, by showing that (even if the question of Eurocentrism persists) there is more to the story of Hegel’s relationship with India than wholesale denigration and dismissal. At the same time it can also be a caution against reflexive rejection of Hegel, for there is in other quarters a strong tendency to write off his philosophy altogether on the basis of a received assumption that his thinking is fundamentally and incorrigibly Eurocentric. To do so, however, is not only to miss or forgo the unique and lastingly important philosophical ideas he developed; it is also to fail to recognize how important Indian philosophy is to Hegelian philosophy.

In order to substantiate the thesis that Hegel’s views on Indian philosophy in particular were both problematic and complex, given his desire to resist what he took to be exoticizing fascination with “the Orient,” this dissertation first situates Hegel’s efforts in the context of major German or European philosophical debates and controversies that motivated them. It focuses on two in particular: first, the controversy over the meaning, implications, and respectability of Spinoza’s philosophy; second, the debate about the

role and value of Indian cultural products and resources for Europeans' processes of cultural, intellectual, and character formation, a debate which went to the very heart of Romanticism as a movement for aesthetic, spiritual, and social renewal. These debates are key because Hegel developed initial responses to them before becoming acquainted with Indian ideas in depth, and therefore his approach to India was inflected by them as problems he was concerned to solve; yet as his acquaintance with Indian philosophy deepened and he found that there was much that was worthy of consideration in its own right, he nevertheless saw in the process new possibilities for positioning his own thought in relation to the longstanding "homegrown" concerns.

The argument then proceeds by way of documenting and analyzing the treatment that non-Western philosophies, specifically those indigenous to India, receive at Hegel's hands. The documentation and analysis cover Hegel's entire philosophical career, from unpublished fragments to essays, books, and materials from his many lecture courses, while emphasizing (in proportion to their length and significance) Hegel's extended considerations in his long-neglected, greatly under-discussed two-part *Bhagavadgītā* review essay of 1827. Surveying Hegel's work in its full scope and zeroing in on this crucial work demonstrates the increasing and remarkable, even surprising, extent of Hegel's knowledge about India's intellectual culture and philosophical currents (at least in the ancient or classical eras). It defies the too-easy dismissive view of Hegel as someone who pronounced negatively upon Indian philosophy while remaining completely ignorant of and uninformed about it, yet it also clearly shows that neither did Hegel unequivocally allow that there had been (or was) philosophy in India, nor was he even entirely consistent over the years. He did persist in describing Indian thought as

being at bottom a doctrine of the absolute as undifferentiated substance—a substance in which finite, concrete individual things and subjectivities are dissolved and are ultimately unreal (because they do not truly exist independently), and therefore a doctrine in which they have no rightful or proper place.

As the analysis shows, Hegel did not arrive at this view all at once, but in the *Bhagavadgītā* review he both expanded and refined it, alleging that the text represents the core of Indian thought and also arguing that it conveys the idea of the absolute as infinite substance. To the extent that Hegel’s assessment over-emphasizes the representativeness of the *Bhagavadgītā* as (or in) Indian philosophy, is challenged by elements and interpretations of that text itself, and potentially overstates the case for Indian thinking as wholly and only a doctrine of undifferentiated subject-less abstract substance, it is open to philosophical debate; to the extent that, among other things, it trucks in harsh, stereotyping, absolutizing, and dogmatic claims about Indian mentality, character, or morals, Hegel’s thought is prone to being charged with Eurocentrism. Via further discussion of his ambiguous position on Indian “philosophy” and his sources, the dissertation treats the problem of Eurocentrism in Hegel by examining prominent concepts and theories of Eurocentrism, and notable arguments accusing Hegel’s thinking of Eurocentrism or defending it from the accusation. Exploring the question of Eurocentrism in Hegel’s philosophy and his appraisal of Indian thinking raises not only the possibility of a variety of responses to Hegel drawing from the rich resources of Indian philosophical traditions and texts, but also the possibility of an immanent Hegelian dialectical critique of Hegel’s own analysis and placing of Indian philosophy that might preserve many of Hegel’s key philosophical insights while canceling or suspending

(without expunging or excusing) denigrating aspects of his evaluation of Indian culture and thought.

The dissertation draws upon and incorporates, while also seeking to extend and further clarify, the conclusions of Wilhelm Halbfass in the knowledgeable, balanced chapter on Hegel in his landmark 1988 study *India and Europe*. In sum, Hegel moved over a period of several years in the 1820s and 1830s from a highly-critical, anti-Romanticist but nevertheless decidedly Orientalist-imperialist attitude toward “Eastern ‘quietism’ and obsession with voidness and nothingness,” to genuine respect and appreciation informed by scholarly study, even going so far as to state that philosophy “in the true and proper sense” is to be found in India.¹ In spite of this, however, generally he remained inclined to see India’s traditions as philosophy in a preliminary sense only: so that “while Hegel did not do justice to Indian philosophy, he certainly did not treat what he knew about it as mere ‘information’ or ‘opinion.’ He dealt with it in a subordinating and, at times, pejorative manner, but he did not forget that ‘it has an impact upon the highest notions of our understanding.’”² The modifications to Hegel’s appraisal followed certain developments in British, French, and German Indology, which were reflected in publications that he obtained and studied over the decade of the 1820s and into the early 1830s until his death in 1831. Halbfass’s account shows the ambivalence and complexity of Hegel’s appraisal of Indian philosophy: both his commitment to his conception of history and the history of philosophy and how set in his ways he could be, always in tension with a sincere desire to understand correctly that saw him regularly updating his views after consulting the latest material available. Halbfass also makes clear that

¹ *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 96-97.

² *Ibid.*, 98.

Hegel's judgments, specifically, had much to do with the subsequent wane of Romantic fascination with the Orient and the eventual exclusion of India from the history of philosophy, which took place despite the continuing development and diversification of Indology and Sanskrit studies in Germany and Europe generally. As Halbfass observes,

Hegel does provide us with an example of a very serious and comprehensive discussion of Indian thought. Yet his historical segregation of philosophy from religion, his devaluation of any form of yearning for a lost unity, and his conviction that Europe, by unfolding the "actual," "real" philosophy committed to the spirit of free science, had essentially surpassed the Orient, instead contributed to a restrictive use of the concept of philosophy and to a self-limitation in the historiography of philosophy. As a part of this process, the academic historians of philosophy, in their roles as caretakers of a specialized scholarly discipline, gave up the more comprehensive horizon of a phenomenology of the spirit and the world-historical perspective espoused in Hegel's history of philosophy in order to pursue a history of philosophy in its "true," "actual" sense. The willingness to concede India an "actual" philosophy as well, an attitude which Hegel occasionally gave utterance to during his later years, generally received little notice, and an essentially restrictive view of the history of philosophy emerged which was to eventually dominate nineteenth and early twentieth century thinking and which explicitly excluded the Orient, and thus India, from the historical record of philosophy."³

By way of its analyses of Hegel's philosophical ideas and convictions in the context of Spinozism, Romanticism, and Indian philosophy, the dissertation seeks to show that whether or not a conclusive answer to the question of Hegel's Eurocentrism is possible, the critique of the Eurocentrism that Hegel's declarations ushered in among his successors in Europe remains necessary, within the discipline of philosophy particularly. A recent rise in Hegel's popularity, a returning sense of the profundity of his metaphysical, logical, political, and aesthetical thought, has still not yet coincided with adequate recognition of the nature and extent either of his possible Eurocentric biases in

³ *Ibid.*, 146.

general or of his respective engagements with non-Western philosophical traditions in particular. Indeed, the many returns to Hegel currently underway are of great value not just for understanding his thought and influence on later thinkers but also for finding much that is useful for contemporary efforts to comprehend as well as to change our world. Yet for all this some seem to be unaware of, unconcerned by, uninterested in, or perhaps uncomfortable with both the question of Eurocentrism and the fact of Hegel's prolonged studies of Indian philosophy. In other words, it is possible that contemporary European and American philosophers who only consider Greco-Western thought "philosophy"—hence who know little or nothing at all of Hegel's own engagement with non-Western philosophies—lack awareness that Hegel's appraisal won out in terms of influence on succeeding generations of European philosophers. The irony here extends to the positions of some neo-Hegelian philosophers and also of so many philosophers who continue effectively to exclude Hegel himself from the history of philosophy. In much the same way that it is now high time for universal recognition of the properly philosophical character of non-Western traditions, texts, and debates about which Hegel manifested such deep ambivalence, his own sustained (if selective) attention to them can and should be better known among present-day Hegel scholars and readers of his "classic" texts—and should be openly discussed in their full detail, which is to say in their insightful, probing, and praising moments as well as in their confusing, subjugating, and derogatory ones.

There are, of course, contemporary thinkers whose renewed attention to and taking up of Hegelian themes and arguments is quite conscious and deliberate, and whose seeming inattention to India as a having been a major preoccupation and problem for

Hegel is not merely a question of sheer ignorance of “the non-West” or unwillingness to venture into unfamiliar territory for fear of somehow being, or being associated with the label, “Eurocentric.” Rather, for some there is a political theory at work in a left critique of the kind of identity politics, including certain forms of postcolonialism, which would declare off-limits even philosophical criticism of ideas on the basis of the identity (say, “Western”) of the critic and the identity (say, “Indian”) of the idea or its origin(ator). At the same time, then, it must be emphasized that both understanding and critiquing Hegel’s appraisal of India involves doing philosophy, grappling philosophically with both Indian and Hegelian philosophy, for Hegel’s engagement with Indian ideas itself had a philosophical basis and philosophical stakes. However Eurocentric Hegel might appear from a present-day vantage point, he took himself to be a philosopher dealing with the philosophical history of the world and the history of philosophical ideas in and about it; he was not one to refrain from criticizing an idea he found to be false, incomplete, or insufficient, regardless of its source. The aspiration to philosophical universality, moreover, which is key to Hegel’s thought, is not an intrinsically or necessarily Eurocentric phenomenon; Indian systems or *darśanas* may well have had (and still have) similar aspirations, and the demand that they be respected (from a safe distance, so to speak) in their particularity and “otherness” arguably confines them as much as it champions them, and may lead away from rather than toward productive philosophizing.

This means, then, that to do both Hegel and India justice requires focusing on the views on which Hegel based his eventual mature critique of Indian thought: the necessity of reconciling substance metaphysics with the undeniable fact of the reality and potency of subjectivity, personality, or working mind; the insufficiency of the neo-Platonic,

Spinozist, and/or Schellingian solutions to the problem of substance and subject that in the end eliminate the subject, drowning it in the abstract infinitude of the absolute; and the conviction that a Romanticism claiming and seeking direct access to the absolute via pure intuition unmediated by consciousness is effectively blind to the irreducibility of subjectivity—to the key role of consciousness in true philosophical knowledge of the absolute—and is doomed to fail in its attempt, no matter where it might look for corroboration of its wishful thinking. To do justice to both India and Hegel requires, furthermore, careful attention to the coherence, defensibility, and accuracy of Hegel’s philosophical claims about Indian ideas as they appear in his works, examining his justifications and taking them seriously even when contesting them. The present work endeavors to do all this while also engaging in criticism of Hegel’s arguments and, importantly, remaining vigilant concerning implicit assumptions upon which Hegel relies and explicit claims or pronouncements he ventures without proof or argument.

III. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, “Continental Debates: Spinozist Pantheism and the Romantics’ Embrace of the Exotic Orient,” establishes the context for Hegel’s treatment of “Oriental” philosophy in general and Indian philosophy in particular. It examines important questions of philosophical heritage and interpretation, as well as swelling currents of Romantic Orientalism and early Indology, that Hegel was seeking to navigate and with respect to which he sought to articulate his own positions. The first part of the chapter details the re-emergence of Spinoza into German philosophical circles during the *Pantheismusstreit*. The “Spinoza controversy” was sparked by F.H. Jacobi’s revelation

that G.E. Lessing, a highly respected figure, had shortly before his death confided to Jacobi his commitment to the philosophy of Spinoza. This section of the chapter also provides an account of Hegel's solution to the problem of Spinozist pantheism. Hegel believed his solution allowed him both to respect and to retain a crucial insight that Spinoza reached and also to make clear that philosophy must, could, and did progress beyond the standpoint of Spinoza, thereby deflecting the charge of pantheism against his own philosophy.

The support of some prominent intellectuals for a rejuvenated Spinozist pantheism dovetailed conveniently with emerging understandings about classical Indian thought, as the 1760s and 1770s had seen an influx of source texts from the Far East and Southeast Asia into Europe, along with area histories by French, British, and German commentators. Many attempts were made (of varying quality and degree of sincerity or charity) at interpreting the texts and views. The overall result was complex, but involved a large dose of glorification of the "ancient wisdom" of the East on the part of several influential figures of the period. The second part of Chapter 1 analyzes Romantic preoccupation with the East and India, and Hegel's repudiation of the Romantic approach. First it provides a basic sketch of the birth, growth, and features of Romanticism as a philosophical movement; then, it briefly accounts for Hegel's general relation to Romanticism. Finally, it traces the rise of Romantic enthusiasm for Indian culture and discusses examples of thinkers and works that prompted Hegel's disagreement.

Chapter 2, "Hegel's Estimation of India: Development, Maturation, and Crisis," sketches the contours of Hegel's appraisal of India and Indian philosophy as they first

took shape in his earliest writings of the 1790s and early 1800s and then gained greater relief in the lecture courses spanning the 1820s and continuing until his death in 1831. The first section discusses the earliest references to Indian traditions in fragments and unpublished essays; these references tend to be indirect or general, with the important exception of the lengthy fragment “*Geist der Orientalen*,” which is examined in full detail. The second section catalogues statements and passages concerning India and Asia in Hegel’s key published texts: the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. The third section surveys, in necessarily condensed fashion, what his lectures on aesthetics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history, and the history of philosophy have to say about Indian culture and thought. The fourth and final section, continuing to look at the last decade of Hegel’s life, argues that his general perspective and specific ideas about India were subject to significant change over the years. Delving into and navigating scholarly disagreement on the matter, it seeks to show how Hegel’s (arguably unfounded) confidence in his early positioning of Indian thought was challenged and thrown into crisis as he gained better understanding through his studies. By doing so it draws the chapter’s preceding sections together, reveals something of the complexity of Hegel’s encounter with India, and sets the stage for the following chapter’s thorough examination of a pivotal but overlooked text.

Chapter 3, “Hegel’s Review Articles on the *Bhagavadgītā* and Indian Philosophy and Religion,” dwells mainly and in needed detail on the sole work that Hegel composed devoted specifically to Indian philosophy: his much-underappreciated essay, which he published in two parts in 1827, reviewing his contemporary Wilhelm von Humboldt’s

two lectures on the *Bhagavadgītā* delivered in 1825 and 1826. Hegel took the occasion not just to comment on von Humboldt's arguments and characterizations of Indian philosophy but to forge his own in more detail than ever previously. In some measure Hegel used the Indian text and ideas as a pretext for continuing to attempt to distinguish his own thought from out-and-out Spinozism and to advance his arguments against the Romantics and others among his philosophical peers. The chapter's analysis separates this thread from the "purer" or more straightforward strand of his effort at cross-cultural interpretation—that is, his struggle to understand unfamiliar philosophical views and systems on their own terms. The first section of the chapter establishes both the broad and the immediate background within which Hegel was led to his compositions. The second and third sections go closely through the two parts of Hegel's review essay in sequence, identifying key claims and themes that emerge as well as highlighting distinctive and previously unnoted moments. The fourth and last section assesses Hegel's own appraisal of Indian philosophy in the review; it offers an initial critique, then carefully considers the insights of Hegel's reading and the relative strengths of his challenge to the philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā* with respect to five major topics of concern, and finally returns to the outstanding shortcomings and limitations of his views.

Chapter 4, "Hegel's Account of Indian Philosophy and the Question of Eurocentrism," contends with three key remaining questions, namely: 1) whether Hegel finally and truly allowed that there was philosophy in India; 2) whether Hegel's philosophical thinking, method, and system are demonstrably, unforgivably Eurocentric or racist; and 3) how Indian philosophical approaches, ideas, debates, and other resources can respond to and even transform the critique Hegel advanced, the legacy of exclusion

that followed on its heels, and the state of affairs which has consigned Indian philosophy to the past, to the margins, or otherwise to a place of relative unimportance. The chapter's first section argues that Hegel by and large accepted that something like philosophical thought could be found in India yet denied that philosophy in the full and proper sense could. It examines a recent scholarly contention to the contrary, discusses the amount and quality of sources at Hegel's disposal, and attempts to discern where his responsibility lay. The second section returns to the question of Eurocentrism in and after Hegel. It discusses prominent cases for and against the existence of indelible ethnic and race prejudice as essential or structuring features of Hegel's thought. An ultimate, conclusive answer is not ventured; rather, focus is shifted toward a number of tasks that are arguably both more necessary and more constructive than delivering a final verdict on Hegel's thought. The third and concluding section, touching again upon the problem of the Eurocentric drift of post-Hegelian European philosophy and historiography of philosophy, argues that "recuperating" Hegel from one-sided representations must go hand in hand with recognizing the right of Indian philosophy to enter into critical engagement with Hegel's representation of it. The section then offers an initial critique of Hegel's reading of India from an Advaita Vedānta perspective, which might be developed further, and also suggests a number of other possibilities and resources from within Indian intellectual traditions for contesting or counter-critiquing Hegel. Finally, it begins to articulate a concept, program, history, and practice of philosophy in which both Indian and Hegelian ideas not merely are included but are in fact indispensable.

Chapter One

Continental Debates: Spinozist Pantheism and the Romantics' Embrace of the Exotic Orient

This chapter's ambition is to set the stage for Hegel's pivotal encounter with India by detailing two major debates occurring in German intellectual culture during Hegel's lifetime, which were never far from his mind as he pursued his studies of Indian thought. In fact, throughout the 1820s especially Hegel increasingly drew explicit connections between certain Indian philosophical concepts and viewpoints as he understood them, and others within the Greco-Western line. The first of the two "domestic" controversies that preoccupied Hegel concerns the legacy of Spinoza in relation to the religio-philosophical doctrine of pantheism. The second involves the veneration of ancient Indian texts, and of the culture that produced them, by major early representatives of German Romanticism, which emerged as a countermovement in the late eighteenth century protesting certain aspects and tendencies of Enlightenment philosophy. Prominent Romantic thinkers turned to Indian and other "Oriental" texts, often in the belief that the primeval, pristine wisdom embodied in them could and should be utilized by contemporary Germans as inspiration for the rejuvenation of aesthetic and moral sensibilities in a broader process of cultural renewal.⁴

⁴ In an influential study, Dorothy M. Figueira has argued that an ostensible emphasis on "inspiration" masked, or at least alternated with, the need and the search for escape or rescue from deep-seated despair. This will be an instructive reminder when examining Romantic interest in India. Incidentally, it is not an entirely un-Hegelian observation: the great proponent of reconciliation, who in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Right* so famously used Aesop's "*Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*" to make the point, can rather easily be imagined urging his Romantic contemporaries, "Don't think India will save you from whatever malaise you might feel. Our inspiration, our meaning can—has to be—found here and now, in our own time, place, religion, thought, science, and institutions." Figueira may not realize this connection

Hegel's effort to critique Spinozism and show his own philosophy as an advancement on it, on one hand, and his desire to restrain what he saw as the Romantic tendency to glorify the ancient wisdom of an exoticized East, on the other, were fundamental factors motivating his approach to Indian philosophy. They influenced his reception of what he read in it and about it. His endorsement of certain aspects of Spinoza's thought—key among them its interest in grasping and explicating the absolute and in articulating the relation of the finite to the absolute as infinite—was qualified, as he believed that Spinoza's system failed to secure the rightful independent existence of finite things and subjects given that its modes and attributes were ultimately mere emanations or properties of infinite substance. Spinozism was an important starting point or stepping stone on the way to the full truth of philosophy, but not more than that. He came to seize on the resemblance of the Indian idea of *brahman* to Spinoza's absolute, for it offered a parallel and a further way of demarcating his own philosophy from that of Spinoza, Schelling, and others; by comparing Indian philosophy to Spinozism as deficient in accounting for subjectivity, he could better position his idealism as a necessary correction and a more complete system of thought. The more decidedly he construed this parallel, the more convinced he became that Romantic enthusiasm for the ancient wisdom of the "mystic East" was wrongheaded. Yet also, it can be said, the more exotic, foreign, and un- or incompletely philosophical Indian thought turned out to be, the

specifically, but that is not to say her critique is already answered or anticipated by Hegel. She states that trying "to view the French and German [Romantic] appropriations of India as attempts at self-understanding rather than simple mastery...permits me to attach a positive value to exoticism by seeing it as embedded in individual rather than collective agendas." As a consequence of her sympathetic approach to European appropriations of India, Hegel's deflationary account of Indian thought can clearly be seen as selective, "a vision of fatalism and a denial of Indian morality," and as having "produced a reading no more authoritative than that of the Romantics he sought to debunk." In short, "By attempting to demolish the lure of the exotic, Hegel does no more than close India off to dialogue." See Dorothy M. Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 11, 79-80, 166.

more unacceptable could Europeans' attempt to adopt or take refuge in it be deemed. (This might even go some way toward accounting for Hegel's occasional vehemence and hostility, for some of his cruder and more offensive proclamations regarding India.)

To seek to contextualize Hegel's inquiry into Indian traditions in this way is not to say that he conducted his investigations *only* because he was prompted to do so by local debates; Hegel was a wide-ranging and avid philosophical researcher in his own right. It would also be unfair to summarily discount or dismiss his studies and conclusions concerning India by assuming that Hegel's motivation to learn about India was polluted from the start by a petty or insular desire to do *nothing* but settle scores with his own philosophical peers. Let it be allowed for the sake of argument, and also as faithful to the historical facts, that Hegel found himself intrigued and even stimulated by Indian ideas, texts, and debates as he became aware of them, and that they seemed to him to merit serious attention.

I. Spinoza, pantheism, and Hegel

A. The re-emergence of Spinoza and the pantheism controversy

As is well known, during his lifetime (1632-1677) Baruch or Benedictus Spinoza was regarded as a dangerously immoral thinker, so incorrigibly subversive that he was excommunicated from the Jewish community in Amsterdam in 1656, without even having published a work of his thought yet. The stigma that attached to his heretical ideas only intensified with the anonymous publication in 1670 of his *Theological-Political Treatise*—which was received as radical and scandalous—and the posthumous publication shortly after his death of the *Ethics*, which Spinoza had not dared to put into print even anonymously. In 1678 his books were banned throughout Holland; possession

of one was a criminal offense. Later the Catholic Church also placed his works on its list of prohibited books. For most of the next century, the name “Spinoza” was synonymous with all that was unholy in religious and philosophical thought. Given the dominance of Catholic and then, particularly in German-speaking lands, Protestant orthodoxy, producing a refutation of the heterodox philosophy of Spinoza (or simply denouncing him) was one of the most common ways for a budding philosopher, theologian, or member of the clergy to insinuate himself into the religious and intellectual establishment. For many decades Spinoza was generally treated, as G.E. Lessing so memorably observed, like a “dead dog.”

Aside from the fact of Spinoza’s Jewish heritage, which regrettably enough was a strike against him as far as the majority Christian opinion was concerned, there are two closely related reasons his philosophy was so harshly vilified and so relentlessly condemned. The first is that in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza espoused what was then the most extreme form of left-wing political thought. He called for democratic governance, separation of church and state, freedom of speech, and religious tolerance, among other progressive ideals. Because princes governing German principalities had gained the right to establish the official religions of their territories in the middle of the sixteenth century, church and state were deeply intertwined; hence Spinoza’s freethinking posed a direct and potentially serious threat to the Lutheran ruling powers. Even those clergy and government officials, including most teachers and professors, who might have harbored grievances against their political leaders—or been tepid or halfhearted believers in the Christian faith—had a vested interest in further defaming Spinoza. It was effectively a matter of political survival.

The second reason attacks on Spinoza were ubiquitous and impassioned is that his claims regarding religion flew in the face of the teachings of orthodox Protestantism, on at least two grounds. First, his work developed a program of historical criticism of Biblical authority. The notion that the Bible was a socio-historically conditioned document, a claim Spinoza argued in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, entailed on one hand that the text was not divinely authored and infallible; and, on the other hand, that individual human beings, reading the Bible that Luther had made publicly accessible for the first time by translating it into German, could make their own moral decisions based on their interpretations of passages and their understanding of their personal relationship with God.

The challenge to religion posed by the dethroning of the historicized Bible was only exacerbated by the second perceived characteristic of Spinoza's philosophy: that its explicit avowal of substance monism, pantheism, and emanationist metaphysics committed it to fatalism and, more perniciously, outright atheism. Spinoza claimed in Part I of the *Ethics* that there can be only one substance that is the cause of itself, that this substance is infinite and universal, and therefore that "the single substance, which is identified with Nature conceived as a whole, is also properly identified with God."⁵ This *deus sive natura* line of thought was widely taken as clear—and shocking—proof that Spinoza denied all distinction between the Creator and creation and hence, at least from the perspective of creationist theism, was an atheist. His particular kind of atheism, insofar as it was coextensive with a robust determinism, deprived human beings of the qualities of autonomy and free will to boot: if everything was merely an attribute or mode of substance and followed necessarily and strictly logically from the nature of substance

⁵ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 39.

itself, then every human action or thought “belonged” in the scheme and was effectively fully programmed. The alleged consequences of Spinozism were viewed by many, in power or fearful of those in power, as an assault on the very foundations of even the Christianity that had emerged from the Protestant Reformation.

As radically opposed to official Christian doctrine as such conceptions might be, there were nonetheless commonalities between Spinoza’s philosophical pantheism and emerging ideas in Protestant streams of thought. Protestant thinkers, particularly those who felt that the Lutheran church had betrayed its Reformation origins when it allied with state power, believed that humans were equal before God in a way that no worldly authority could alter. They found Spinoza’s conviction, that individuals (as indistinct from God) could enter into immediate relation with God, to be in the true spirit of Martin Luther. Thus, as Frederick Beiser writes in the go-to English-language analysis of the pantheism controversy, “the appeal of [Spinozist] pantheism ultimately lay deep in Lutheranism itself,” and pantheism “was the secret credo of the heterodox Lutheran.”⁶ That is, radical intellectuals interpreted Spinoza’s pantheism as conducive to anti-authoritarian politics, both reflecting and fortifying the theologico-political ideals of human equality in the eyes of God and of the possibility of a direct relationship to God unmediated by a clerical hierarchy, which had been central to Luther’s original protest against the Church in the early 1500s. Beiser notes that classical “rationalist orthodox Spinozism” and the later “mystical strand” propagated by figures such as Goethe, Herder, Schleiermacher, and Novalis were equally “Lutheranism without the Bible,” and that in

⁶ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 52.

truth there was “a single Spinozist tradition...one that was constantly under the inspiration of Luther.”⁷

It should be recognized that Spinoza’s religious and philosophical positions testify to a fundamental and exclusive reliance on the powers of human thought and reason, however limited, as opposed to the “truths” allegedly attested through faith and revelation. In this respect, Spinoza was in fact a forerunner of the *Aufklärer*, even though early exponents of Enlightenment philosophy in Germany such as Leibniz and Wolff followed the time-honored tradition of producing refutations of his philosophy (albeit under the guise of “impartial criticisms”). And so Spinoza may have been a withdrawn and solitary figure, but in terms of philosophical and political views he never really stood alone; in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, all freethinkers and “unhappy children of the Protestant Counter-Reformation”⁸ were covert or overt Spinozists. Although Spinoza’s thought already contained much of what would become central to the Enlightenment tradition, in terms of its method (relying only on human reason) and its results (advocacy of democracy, toleration, freedom of speech and conscience, etc.), acknowledgment of this was still somewhat slow in coming. Equally importantly, when Spinoza’s philosophy did finally resurface openly it was embraced as much by thinkers not wholly satisfied with Enlightenment tendencies as by those steadfastly committed to Enlightenment ideals.⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹ This is partly because some prominent Enlightenment thinkers, for all their declarations of support for the free use of reason and hence for the education of the public to this end, were nonetheless actually rather conservative and hence saw no contradiction in defending many elements of established religious doctrine and political order.

The remarkable rise in fortunes of Spinoza and his philosophy took place in the 1700s, in a gradual swell of conversation, correspondence, and debate punctuated occasionally by sensational occurrences. The most major event, which is still the most well-known today, was the publication in 1785 of F.H. Jacobi's *Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza (Letters Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza)* and the outpouring of declarations of affinity for Spinoza's thought that it ignited.¹⁰ The storm had been gathering for some time prior to that, however; in 1755, the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn mounted "a spirited defense of Spinoza" in his first published work and called for serious reexamination of Spinoza's philosophy on a truly impartial basis, i.e., without taking either the success or failure of his thought as a foregone conclusion, or having an ulterior motive (either to endorse or condemn) in assessing it. F.H. Jacobi began thinking about Spinoza around 1763 while reading Leibniz and Kant, although as will be seen shortly, Jacobi's fideist and anti-*Aufklärung* convictions prompted an intensely and lastingly negative reaction to what he took to be the consequences of Spinozist philosophy. G.E. Lessing, who first learned about Spinoza from Mendelssohn in the 1750s, undertook more sustained study of Spinoza's works beginning in 1763 and became an avowed Spinozist. Lessing, widely—even universally—revered as a man of letters, would become the most famous Spinozist of all; the impetus for major poets, philosophers, and literary figures from Goethe and Herder to Hegel and Schleiermacher publicly coming out in support of Lessing and identifying with Spinoza's thought; and the person almost singlehandedly responsible for rehabilitating Spinoza in the late eighteenth century.

¹⁰ Friedrich H. Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn (1785)*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill,"* trans. by George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 173-251. Excerpts from the 1789 second edition of the *Briefe* appear on pages 339-378.

“Almost,” because while Lessing may have been the axis around which rejuvenated Spinozist pantheism revolved, Jacobi’s role in making Lessing’s sympathies known was also decisive. While Herder’s 1787 publication *Gott, Einige Gespräche* (*God, Some Conversations*) may have been more fundamental to the Romantic reinterpretation of Spinoza than Jacobi’s 1785 *Briefe*¹¹, Jacobi’s still remains the key text in terms of airing the exchange on Lessing’s pantheism that exposed it to the learned public and thus propelled the philosophy of Spinoza to new heights of popularity.

In briefly recounting the events central to the *Pantheismusstreit* or “pantheism controversy” of the early 1780s, it is important to consider that Jacobi was a devout believer in Christianity who took Spinozist and Enlightenment thought equally to be mistaken as well as pernicious. To him, *Aufklärer* were in practice not the radically tolerant thinkers they portrayed themselves as, but rather were too often hypocritical and contemptuous intellectual tyrants who derided the views of others. Even more problematically was that if they were to adhere strictly to their stated ideal of radical rational critique in the search for truth, they would eventually find themselves heading down a skeptical and nihilist path of no return, unable to provide true foundations for private virtue, public morality, or social order. Spinozism, though being much less smug or self-assured than Enlightenment confidence in reason, was still an attempt to rationalize religion philosophically and ended finally in atheism and fatalism. No surer footing should, or indeed could, be found for morality than simple faith in God and His

¹¹ “It seems to me that the Herder text is far more important than F.H. Jacobi’s *Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza*, which has lately received most attention as the source of the romantic understanding of Spinoza.” Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 182. See also Johann Gottfried Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, trans. by Frederick M. Burkhardt (New York: Veritas Press, 1940).

will as communicated by the revealed religion of the Bible, which necessarily relegated reason to a limited role.

These views of Jacobi put him in conflict with, among others, Moses Mendelssohn, who like Kant sought to navigate between uncritical dogmatism and Humean skepticism without altogether eliminating space for religious commitment. Jacobi's decision to divulge the contents of a private conversation he'd had during a visit with Lessing in 1780 before that great philosopher's death the following year had more than a little to do with his clash with Mendelssohn, who had maintained a decades-long friendship with Lessing: Jacobi knew that revealing a secret Lessing had apparently never shared with Mendelssohn would devastate him. More importantly, while in a way he respected Lessing for having "the courage to pursue inquiry for its own sake, despite the consequences" and "the honesty to take criticism to its tragic [i.e., nihilist] conclusion without moral or religious scruples"¹², Jacobi only abhorred those consequences and that conclusion. And he thought that revealing the pitiable and scary places to which Lessing's enthusiasm for Spinozist pantheism led him would force his peers, including Mendelssohn, to first acknowledge that Spinozist rationalism was tantamount to atheism, led to fatalism and nihilism, and threatened morality; and, consequently, to admit that reason must be subordinated to faith and religion.

Jacobi's expectations were absolutely shattered by the cascade of pro-Spinoza declarations that rained down in response to his making the secret of Lessing's Spinozism known. In short, Jacobi privately informed Mendelssohn in 1783 that he had reason to believe Lessing had become a convinced Spinozist atheist in his later years. Mendelssohn replied requesting proof and, after receiving 36 pages from Jacobi detailing his visit and

¹² Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 76-77.

exchange with Lessing, wrote again to apologize and admit it was possible that Lessing had become *that kind* of Spinozist after all. In fact Mendelssohn's concession was a ploy to buy time to prepare his own interpretation of Lessing's thinking, in the likely event that Jacobi was preparing to make his news public. As the two continued to correspond into 1785, the pot began to simmer, and it boiled over when Jacobi included some of Mendelssohn's correspondence without permission in his *Briefe*, which was printed in September 1785, beating out Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* (*Morning Hours*) by a month. Mendelssohn's death in December taking his second response to Jacobi, the last word he intended to have on the subject, to the printer—he rushed out into the cold and fell ill, dying days later—only added to the sensation, since the implication was that Jacobi had indirectly (or even directly, as some rumors had it) killed Mendelssohn by making the disclosure.¹³ Mendelssohn's focus on Jacobi's intention to “convert” Mendelssohn and readers of the *Briefe* “to his orthodox and mystical version of Christianity”¹⁴, as well as on the compatibility of Lessing's Spinozism with traditional morality and religion (which Mendelssohn also deemphasized as mostly a playful gesture rooted in Lessing's penchant for paradox and irony), were meant to save Lessing's good reputation. They also clearly showed that Mendelssohn's view of Spinoza had gravitated toward one of concerned rejection during his three decades of acquaintance with Spinoza's work. Jacobi's orientation remained as negative as it had ever been since he had first encountered Spinoza via Leibniz and Kant and begun to think that “all speculative philosophy ends in Spinozism.”¹⁵

¹³ Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 74.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

In spite of the reservations and objections of the likes of Mendelssohn and Jacobi—reservations and objections that, it bears repeating, were different and stemmed from markedly contrasting commitments and convictions—there was nevertheless “universal admiration” for Spinoza in avant-garde German intellectual culture after 1785: “[Lessing’s] credo automatically gave a stamp of legitimacy to every secret Spinozist. One after another the Spinozists could now come out of their closets and form a file behind Lessing...Lessing made it a fashion to be unorthodox; and to be fashionably unorthodox was to be a Spinozist.”¹⁶ The “fashion” included the phenomenon of young seminary students like Hegel and friends earnestly—if cheesily—writing the pantheist slogan “*Hen kai pan!*” or “One and all!” on one another’s class albums. Of course, fashionable unorthodoxy is still unorthodoxy, and Christian orthodoxy quickly regrouped behind the continued efforts of theologians and doctrinally-committed philosophers like Jacobi. And even as the coalescence of Romanticism took place thanks in large part to the inspiration of Spinozist thought, the senescence of the Enlightenment, or at least of its first glory days, can be traced to the concerted resistance to it by representatives of various faiths. But their blows only rocked an edifice that was shaking on its own foundations. For the deeper philosophical issue lurking beneath the surface controversy of Spinozist atheism and pantheism was the problem of the authority of reason, a dimension of the perennial conflict between reason and faith themselves: the question of whether reason has or needs a foundation external to itself or is self-authorizing, self-legitimizing, and unsusceptible to the otherwise universal critique it has the apparent power to level. If the latter is not the case, or if rationality itself can be shown to require a kind of faith or trust, then the door cannot easily be closed on other forms of faith, or on

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

postulates like a creator God that provide the ultimate foundation for reason that it cannot secure for itself.

B. The charge of pantheism against Hegel

By the time Hegel began to make his own inroads into theology and philosophy as a seminary student in Tübingen in the late 1780s, then, the tide was certainly changing. Spinoza had come into fashion in a serious way. Due to the range of application (or to the “sheer over-determination,” as Bradley L. Herling puts it, borrowing Althusser’s term¹⁷) of the labels “Spinozism” and “pantheism,” however, into the 1800s they still functioned as watchwords for determinism, fatalism, atheism, and moral danger, which meant they had the power to damage or destroy a philosophy like the one Hegel was laboring to develop—not to mention the aspirations of its author to a university professorship. (Among others, Fichte had his academic career more or less ruined by a scandal over the alleged atheism of his doctrines, despite his strenuous protests to the contrary.) Sure enough, Hegel’s own philosophy was indeed labeled Spinozist and pantheist in order to impugn it. By whom, why, in which senses of the terms “Spinozist” and “pantheist,” and on what grounds?

First of all, Jacobi’s infamous anti-rationalist challenges to both Kant and Fichte greatly troubled Hegel early on in his development as a philosopher. Under the immediate influence of Fichte, Hegel worked with Friedrich Schelling to formulate a rationalist idealism that would avoid the subjective excesses of Fichte’s “one-sided” (a descriptor Hegel frequently applied) postulation of the ego as first principle, while still crediting Fichte’s rejection of Kant’s throwing-up-of-hands transcendental-idealist

¹⁷ Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gītā: Hermeneutics and Discipline in the German Reception of Indian Thought, 1778-1831* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 91.

“solution” to the problem of reason and knowledge. Faced with what he considered the intractable paralogisms and antinomies of pure reason, Kant had simply limited reason’s purview to “the appearances of things” or phenomena, consigning “the things themselves” to the realm of noumena, inaccessible to human reason and thus unknowable. For Hegel (as, he believed, for Fichte), Kant’s concession amounted to a hollowing out of the term “knowledge,” an abdication of the philosopher’s responsibility to attain true knowledge of the real, and was not only extreme but also ultimately unwarranted. Hegel was interested in a version of idealism that would, in other words, neither overestimate the power of concrete human reason as a limited and messy process maturing over historical time nor give up on its viability as the best available source of knowledge, sacrificing it to the demand of the religious believer who required its subordination to faith, whether in the form of trust in one’s own mysterious “inner” intuition of the presence of a transcendent God or in the form of assent to pre-established purported revelation. “[W]e need a roundabout way to sneak the Absolute in,” as Hegel famously both posed the problem and stated the goal in the first issue of the short-lived critical journal he and Schelling co-founded and co-edited.¹⁸ The intoxicating thought of Spinoza, at once rationalist, naturalist, and mystical, offered an obvious alternative, but the danger of pre-critical dogmatism also lurked in Spinoza’s concept of substance as the self-evident universal Absolute. And Jacobi’s equation of Spinozist pantheism with atheism and fatalism in his *Briefe* challenged a thinker like Hegel as much as it stirred his

¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, “Introduction for the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*: On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular,” in *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 215.

sympathies for Spinoza and Lessing alike; Hegel once remarked that Jacobi's text had come as "a thunderbolt out of the blue."¹⁹

Surprisingly, although Jacobi lived until 1819 and engaged in serial polemical exchanges with Mendelssohn and Schelling, he never took pen to paper in the interest of substantively contesting Hegel's independent attempt to work out a "middle path" through the Jacobean dilemma, his effort to articulate a post-critical and non-dogmatic kind of reason that could shore up moral and religious attitudes worth preserving, without resorting to the kind of anti-rationalist leap of faith insisted upon by Jacobi and other defenders of orthodox Christian doctrine. Given Hegel's intense attention to thinkers like Kant, Fichte, and Spinoza himself, whom Jacobi spilled much ink in protesting and challenging, he would also have been a prime target for Jacobi's fideist polemic.²⁰ Hegel's youthful fervor for Spinozism matured into respect and a conviction that certain aspects of Spinoza's thought were essential to a fully developed philosophy as not merely

¹⁹ Hegel, *Werke XX*, 316-317, cited in Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 46.

²⁰ There is a longer story here. Although Hegel's 1802 *Faith and Knowledge* in fact contained an explicit, pointed, and at times trenchant critique of Jacobi, Hegel was little known at the time and there was no compelling reason for someone of Jacobi's stature to regard him as anything more than a brash upstart. That is not to say there was nothing to take offense to; indeed, Hegel's polemic upset Jacobi significantly, occasioning an uncomfortable and years-long distance between the two. Hegel, however, almost immediately began reconsidering his views, and gravitated farther toward Jacobi as his disagreements with Schelling intensified. He also appealed to his friend Immanuel Niethammer to intercede on his behalf. For his part, Jacobi was not one to hold a grudge, and the first meeting between the two in 1812 was an amiable one. Hegel then visited Jacobi in Munich in 1815, and by the time Hegel published his review of the third volume of Jacobi's collected works in 1817 the rift had for all intents and purposes already been healed. Jacobi was pleased by Hegel's review and even went so far as to suggest that Hegel might be right about whatever philosophical and theological differences still existed between them, and that he (Jacobi) could not follow or understand Hegel due to his failing eyesight and memory. Thus, perhaps the main reason Jacobi never discussed Hegel's philosophy in print was his advanced age; he died in 1819, not long after Hegel's review of his work appeared. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Heidelberg Writings: Journal Publications*, trans. and ed. by Brady Bowman and Allen Speight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Bowman and Speight's discussion on pages x-xvi is particularly informative. Hegel's review is translated on pages 3-32, and a helpful appendix of excerpts from letters by Hegel and Jacobi is included on pages 137-139. See also *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. by Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 90-93 and 129-130; and, for additional treatment of the Hegel-Jacobi affair, Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 251-255, 377-381.

love of wisdom but a true science of knowing, a perspective poignantly conveyed in the Preface to the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel writes, “To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing—that is what I have set myself to do.”²¹ Hence, even an implicit or felt condemnation from Jacobi in this regard made Hegel conscious of the importance of refuting the strict-theist Jacobean standpoint as he worked out his comprehensive system of philosophy over the years.

A more direct association of Hegel’s approach with the putative mistakes and alleged deleterious consequences of Spinozist pantheism came from August Tholuck, a Pietist theologian and younger contemporary of Hegel. In the 1820s, with Hegel comfortably ensconced in the privileged academic domain of the University of Berlin, Tholuck began to engage in a polemic against speculative philosophy as a distortion of the Biblical doctrine of the trinity. His work, utilizing his extensive training in near-Eastern languages and his knowledge of various religious and mystical traditions, attempted to discredit present-day philosophical conceptions of God by tracing them to ancient Eastern mystical traditions by way of neo-Platonism as a fusion of these with Greek philosophy. In equating philosophy, and particularly modern philosophy, with pantheism Tholuck sought to “inflict maximum injury on the reputation of philosophy.”²² Hegel’s own brand of idealist philosophy was clearly implicated, and Hegel responded to Tholuck’s advances in the 1827 revised edition of the *Encyclopedia*, as well as in his

²¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §5, 3.

²² Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 144.

lectures on the philosophy of religion that year and subsequently.²³ Tholuck was not the only one to make the accusation; an anonymous work on Hegel's doctrine, subtitled "Absolute Knowing and modern Pantheism," appeared in 1829.²⁴ And it is worth noting in this context that Hegel also took issue with Friedrich Schlegel on the subject of pantheism, and much earlier than the mid-1820s; however, he did so on the basis of what he felt was Schlegel's overwrought early enthusiasm for Indian culture and religion. Far from being *accused* by Schlegel of pantheism, then, if anything Hegel used Schlegel to answer the Jacobi-inspired charge indirectly by showing how far his own thought was removed from that of a contemporary thinker whom Hegel regarded as insufficiently critical toward the expansive pantheon of gods, goddesses, and other idols in Indian religion. But for one thing Schlegel took pains to distinguish his own view as an emanationist and not strictly pantheist one, and for another by converting to Catholicism in the early 1800s Schlegel effectively reversed, or at least moved away from, some of his earlier convictions.²⁵

At this juncture it is clear that, as things still stood in Hegel's day, despite the rising popularity of Spinoza's thought among intellectual avant-garde admirers of Lessing (whose own enthusiasm had sanctioned the legitimacy of Spinoza, at least for

²³ As Peter C. Hodgson, editor of the English edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, states, "While this [neo-Pietist] theology may have seemed to offer welcome assistance in the struggle against latter-day rationalism, as is clear from Hegel's parting words to Tholuck, in fact a more bitter competitor for the Hegelian philosophy of religion was here emerging than rationalism and the theology of feeling had been. The 1827 lectures show Hegel less as an assailant than on the defensive—on the defensive, that is, against the charge of Spinozism, by which was meant pantheism and atheism." Hodgson, "Editorial Introduction" to G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion vol. I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 7-8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 375, n.20.

²⁵ In Hegel's eyes, however, Schlegel's conversion was a regression rather than any kind of improvement; he associated Catholicism with dogmatism, entrenched hierarchy, repression, and reactionism, all of which constituted variations of a general aversion and opposition to the gradual progress of human freedom in the modern age. To the extent that even a loose connection between Schlegel's Romantic Indophilia and his embrace of Catholicism was discernible to Hegel, it may have served to make him even more suspicious of Romantic enthusiasm for Indian and Eastern cultures.

them), any perceived or actual charges of Spinozism and pantheism must be contested in order to avoid the implications of impiety, amoralism, and atheism. Articulating an account of the similarities and differences between Spinoza's thought and his own that would successfully repudiate and refute such charges was thus a task that continually preoccupied Hegel.

C. Hegel's Spinozism

His response to the charges was far from a simple denial, however. In fact, like much in Hegel's thought as it ranged through the first three decades of the nineteenth century, there was hardly anything simple about it. For one thing, while it is difficult to overstate the crucial importance of the figure of Spinoza for Hegel, it is also essential to keep in mind Hegel's characteristic ambivalence toward the accomplishments of his predecessors. There was no thinker for whom it can be said that Hegel had unmitigated admiration, that he did not seek to critique just as firmly as he sought to elucidate via exegesis. Some scholars, not without justification, would venture quite far in the opposite direction: that Hegel's interpretations, for all that they purported to be immanent critiques of previous or contemporary philosophical positions, dialectically showing from the inside how internal contradictions contained in a given figure of thought caused it to self-destruct or self-propel toward new a formulation that would preserve core insights while shedding errors, involved selected or even distorted accounts designed to make his claims seem obvious and uncontroversial (not to mention maximally generous at the same time).²⁶ This is certainly not irrelevant to India as the case at hand, but the finer points of

²⁶ Perhaps the foremost recent critic of Hegel on the subject of Spinoza has been Pierre Macherey, who contends in part that Hegel's persistent misconstruing of Spinoza over the course of repeated treatments "indicates that he found something there that was indigestible, a resistance he continually needed to confront anew. Everything transpired as if Spinoza occupied a limit-position in relation to Hegelian

Hegel's Spinoza interpretation as it might be supported or challenged by Spinoza scholars must be passed over here. For another thing, although there may be "no obvious development" or change in the views that Hegel advanced apropos Spinoza during his mature years, so that "the same themes and the same arguments recur constantly"²⁷ and are largely consistent, they are still spread out widely across his work, occurring in natural and obvious places such as Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy and those on the philosophy of religion, but also cropping up (however abruptly or expectedly, passingly or prolonged) in *The Science of Logic*, the *Encyclopedia*, and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Given Hegel's proclivity in published texts to discuss positions of his philosophical predecessors and peers in a condensed fashion and also anonymously, it is fortunate that frequently enough, though not always, passages concerning Spinoza do include the philosopher's proper name and are quite explicit.

The complexity only persists, furthermore, upon moving to a consideration of the actual content of Hegel's various discussions of Spinoza. Hegel's own response to the Spinoza problem had to contend with the paradox inherent in accusing a thinker of atheism whose fundamental presupposition and axiom was taken to be that there is only God. How atheism could be attributed to Spinoza if he held that God was the one universal substance and hence everything was God, other than by alleging that in making God immanent to the cosmos he spurned the Christian belief in a transcendent creator God standing external to it, is admittedly hard to understand. That, however, was the

discourse, which [Hegel] rejected even at the moment of its inclusion." Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979); *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. by Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 9.

²⁷ G.H.R. Parkinson, "Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38:3 (1977), 449-459, 450.

basic position of the orthodox, whose stance Hegel wanted to reject even as he sought to deny atheism in his own thought while nevertheless endorsing a qualified Spinozism.

Hegel's first step, a clarifying one, was to delineate the different possible versions of pantheism, in order to show what could and what could not plausibly be said of Spinoza. For Hegel, the *hen kai pan* or "one and all" doctrine characteristically attributed to philosophical pantheism or pantheistic philosophy is ambiguous. On one hand, it can be understood or interpreted as the claim that any and every concrete, particular being or thing that exists, fully *is God* itself. This *Allesgötterei* or "everything is God" doctrine, Hegel insists, has not seriously been entertained by any religion or by any philosophy: "It has never occurred to anyone to say that everything, all individual things collectively, in their individuality and contingency, are God—for example, that this paper or this table is God. No one has ever held that. Still less has this been maintained in any philosophy."²⁸ It would be patent nonsense to assert that each existing thing actually is God in the exhaustive totality of the Godhood of God. So there can be no question of ascribing such a stance even to the most farfetched of religious fancies, let alone to the philosophy of Spinoza. On the other hand, pantheism can be taken to mean that God is the divine One-All, *das eine All*, within, behind, and composing all finite beings as their substance. In this sense God is universal but present in all individuals, which thereby partake in God and are reducible to and nothing but God while still being finite, limited, and not fully identifiable with God on their own. The latter, the *Allgötterei* or "the all is God" view,

²⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* vol. I, 375.

avoids the manifest absurdity of the first kind of pantheism while still being potentially consistent and therefore reconcilable with a philosophical monist ontology.²⁹

The next, and innovative, move for Hegel was to admit openly that Spinoza's philosophy was pantheistic in the second sense, that is in being a doctrine that each thing and all things are in God without exhausting God, and correspondingly that God sustains, infuses, even more precisely somehow self-transforms into all things, which then have a quasi-existence but arguably not full, independent ontological heft since they are still made up entirely of God. They are at best semblances or appearances, saturated with and absorbed in God even as they seem to be differentiated entities in a world of particulars. The sense of this idea is perhaps conveyed properly enough in a remark by Teddy, the adolescent-mystic title character of a J.D. Salinger story: "I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up and all that," Teddy said. "It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was only a very tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that *she* was God and the *milk* was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."³⁰

Declaring Spinoza to be a pantheist of the second kind was innovative first of all because it allowed Hegel to reverse the allegation of atheism, to claim that Spinoza's philosophy was not atheistic at all, and was in fact the very opposite of atheism, since for it there is really only God. Instead, Hegel said, Spinoza's thought must be understood and described as acosmism, or the denial of the standalone reality of the manifest universe. It was the world rather than God the existence of which Spinoza rejected, or which he

²⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* vol. 3, 572-573. See also Parkinson, "Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza," 450, and Ignatius Viyagappa, S.J., *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980), 72-73.

³⁰ J.D. Salinger, *Nine Stories* (New York: Little, Brown, 1991), 189.

negated.³¹ Accepting the charge of acosmist pantheism with respect to Spinoza's thought further presented Hegel with the opportunity to put a unique and unexpected twist on the ultimate source of the discontent that motivated the oft-repeated protestations against Spinoza's philosophy: what Hegel's peers really found unforgivable in Spinoza was not his denial of God, since he did not deny God at all, but instead his denial of the full reality of the world and all existing things. Human beings, of course, are among all the worldly things whose right to existence is jeopardized by Spinoza's "God-drunkenness," to paraphrase Heine, and this sat poorly with thinkers who felt themselves to be truly real, not just quasi-existing apparitional dimensions of God. Hegel's contention is that philosophers or theologians, like Jacobi, who label Spinoza an atheist are actually more interested in themselves than in God:

They [those who accuse Spinoza of atheism] say: If God is the identity of mind and nature, then nature or the individual man is God. This is quite correct, but they forget that nature and the individual disappear in this same identity: and they cannot forgive Spinoza for thus annihilating them. Those who defame him in such a way as this are therefore not aiming at maintaining God, but at maintaining the finite and the worldly; they do not fancy their own extinction and that of the world.³²

But it can still be asked, then: what does "Spinozist" ultimately mean to Hegel?

The answer to this question is twofold, involving for Hegel the essential discovery and positive contribution of Spinoza on one hand, and the "defect" or "failure"³³ of his system on the other. On the basis of the former Hegel could both defend Spinoza against

³¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), §151 addition, 224-225. See also Yitzhak Melamed, "Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48:1 (2010), 77-92, 79-80; Parkinson, "Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza," 450-451.

³² Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy vol. 3: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. by E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 282.

³³ Hegel uses these words explicitly, e.g. *Science of Logic*, 580-581; *Encyclopedia Logic* 225; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy vol. 3*, 269, 289.

the main lines of traditional anti-Spinoza calumny and also self-identify as a Spinozist; on the basis of the latter, however, he could still put a certain distance between Spinoza and himself to ensure that not everything that could or should be said about Spinoza's thought ought to be taken as applying equally to his own speculative-dialectical absolute idealism. The major achievement of Spinoza, his lasting contribution to the history of thought, is quite straightforwardly his conception of the absolute, his modern identification of God with universal substance, the self-caused cause and substratum or ground in which all things live, move, and have their being. For Spinoza everything is One, this One-All is God, and hence finite things are only comprehensible in their relation to the absolute: in the sense that, as the *Phenomenology* also urges, "The True is the Whole."³⁴ As Hegel says, "The simple thought of Spinoza's idealism is this: The true is simply and solely the one substance, whose attributes are thought and extension or nature: and only this absolute unity is reality, it alone is God."³⁵ The positive meaning of "Spinozist," then, is that it refers to the qualities of being concerned with the divine and of seeing God in all things (or all things as manifestations/extensions of God).

The shortfall of Spinozism, on the other hand—the reason the term "Spinozist" also has a negative connotation—is its misplaced contentment with pure, undifferentiated, simple substance as its infinite absolute: "the philosophy which adopts the standpoint of substance and stops there is the system of Spinoza."³⁶ Spinoza's focus on the One in its universality causes him to overlook how important it is to "preserve distinctions," specifically the distinctions represented by the finite and by free individual

³⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §20, 11.

³⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. 3, 256.

³⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 580.

subjectivity.³⁷ So, instead, in his system of thought “all particularity and individuality pass away in the one substance.”³⁸ As both infinite and immanent absolute substance, Spinoza’s God is an improvement upon other conceptions and is a vital philosophical development, but it is finally too lifeless, too abstract: “his philosophy has only a rigid and unyielding substance, and not yet spirit; in it we are not at home with ourselves.”³⁹ Spinoza’s philosophy, in other words, exalts undifferentiated substance at the expense of both the objective world and subjectivity as a remarkable, unique phenomenon. It offers no way to account either for the world that human beings (or, more abstractly, thinking intellects) inhabit, nor for those thinking intellects themselves as they are (self-)aware of themselves existing and inhabiting that world. It is just unable to explain the “why” of the self-sundering of God-One-Substance into the (even-if-only-apparent) world of existent individuals, let alone the thornier “how” of the activity of the former and the corresponding emergence of the latter. For Hegel, these are unavoidable questions but also insoluble problems on Spinozist lines alone; hence the subsequent necessity of departing from Spinoza that is, of course, famously articulated in the *Phenomenology* with the insistence that “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.”⁴⁰ Or again, as Hegel elaborates in the lectures on the history of philosophy: “absolute substance is the truth, but it is not the whole truth; in order to be this it must also be thought of as itself active and living, and by that very means it must determine itself as mind. But substance with Spinoza is only the universal

³⁷ E.g., “...with Parmenides as with Spinoza, there is no progress from being or absolute substance to the negative, to the finite.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 94-95. The *Encyclopedia Logic* provides the simple appositive, “Spinozism, the philosophy in which God is determined only as *substance* and not as subject and spirit.” (13).

³⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. 3, 254.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §17, 9-10.

and consequently the abstract determination of mind; it may undoubtedly be said that this thought is the foundation of all true views—not, however, as their absolutely fixed and permanent basis, but as the abstract unity which mind is in itself.”⁴¹

According to Hegel, owing to Spinoza’s positive achievement it is the case that any and all philosophy deserving of that name *begins* with Spinoza: “It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy.”⁴² This is, however, emphatically not to say that for Hegel Spinozism provides all that is required; it has something profoundly necessary to “true” philosophy, but it fails to arrive at what is fully sufficient for it. This Hegel thinks his work alone supplies. The fact remains that Hegel regularly stressed the importance of Spinoza’s thought to “true” philosophy, which he made unmistakably clear in declarations such as, “...it may really be said: You are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all”⁴³ and “Spinoza is the high point of modern philosophy. Either Spinozism or no philosophy.”⁴⁴ In the *Science of Logic* Hegel writes, “The only possible refutation of Spinozism must therefore consist, in the first place, in recognizing its standpoint as essential and necessary and then going on to raise that standpoint to the higher one through its own immanent dialectic.”⁴⁵ So, it is clear, Spinozism represented for Hegel a crucial, indispensable insight that is nevertheless subject to dialectical transformation—a major and irrevocable step, yet not by any means a consummate and final one, on the path of philosophy as a science of knowing.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. 3, 257.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Werke XX*, 163-164, quoted in Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 84.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 581.

Again, whether Hegel correctly understood Spinoza, and was fair in his diagnosis of the failings of Spinozism, cannot be judged definitively here. Beiser, for example, has emphasized that Romantic philosophers' embrace of Spinoza involved a significant reinterpretation of his monist and pantheist metaphysics along vitalist (or "dynamist"), teleological, developmental, and organicist lines, which would have caused Spinoza to "turn in his grave."⁴⁶ Whatever else may be said, this refashioning of Spinozism was at the very least the setting within which Hegel encountered Spinoza and in the light of which he formed his own semi-supportive, semi-critical position. Frederick Copleston has noted the added dimension with which Hegel would have had to contend: "German speculative idealism was certainly influenced by Spinoza, but the Spinozistic pantheism was rethought in a more dynamic form and (a most important point) it had passed through the fire of the Kantian critique, a fact which rendered a new approach inevitable, for the post-Kantian idealist would be unable to start from the concept of substance."⁴⁷ Yet Melamed argues that while Hegel was trying to navigate current problems and was largely sympathetic to Spinoza's philosophical project, his idea of acosmism is insensitive to the nuances of Spinoza's thought and thus unsupported by careful reading; Hegel, that is, "used a broad-brush characterization of Spinoza against which he could better present his own view."⁴⁸ Parkinson also contends that Hegel is mistaken in his interpretation: Hegel was wrong that Spinoza explicitly held acosmism. He was even wrong in thinking that acosmism followed logically from Spinoza's conception of substance whether Spinoza liked it or not—in immanent dialectical fashion, in other words. Hegel's objection that Spinoza is unable to deduce attributes and modes strictly

⁴⁶ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 141.

⁴⁷ F.C. Copleston, "Pantheism in Spinoza and the German Idealists," *Philosophy* 21:78 (1946), 46.

⁴⁸ Melamed, "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?," 77.

from substance, and so has to take them merely as given, “overlooks the essentially dynamic character of Spinoza’s substance.”⁴⁹ Moreover, “when he tries to place Spinoza in his intellectual context, he places him in the wrong context,” failing to realize that Spinoza’s thought ought to be more closely associated with the pioneering scientific attitude of his day than with a mystico-religious perspective that Hegel believed to be part and parcel of Jewish thought as a subclass of the “oriental” vision of the world.⁵⁰

The goal of the foregoing has been not to resolve the question of the accuracy or fairness of Hegel’s reading of Spinoza, but only to indicate just how important the locally-prosecuted Spinoza controversy was to Hegel in the formation, articulation, and consolidation of his philosophical position and system.⁵¹ Explicit links that Hegel made between Spinozism and Indian philosophy may be left aside for the moment; some of these will be taken up in chapters 2 and 3. Presently let it suffice to note that Hegel articulated these links in a way that defanged both Spinoza and Indian thought and at the same time showed his own philosophy to be superior to them—or at least to be the logical consequence of their self-generated dialectical sublation, which amounts to the same thing. As Bradley L. Herling observes in his analysis of the early reception of the *Bhagavadgītā* among German intellectuals, “Hegel’s Indian spirit often corresponds directly with the spirit of Romanticism *itself*, thereby positioning both India and contemporary Romanticism as retrograde.” This prompts the question whether “Hegel’s perspective [would] have been different if India had not been so tightly wound together

⁴⁹ Parkinson, “Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza,” 458.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁵¹ In defense of Hegel’s reading(s) of Spinoza, see, e.g., Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), especially Chapter 2, “For a Thoughtful Ontology: Hegel’s Immanent Critique of Spinoza,” 23-49; and J.M. Fritzman and Brianne Riley, “Not Only *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*, but Equally *Sub Specie Durationis*: A Defense of Hegel’s Criticisms of Spinoza’s Philosophy,” *The Pluralist* 4:3 (2009), 76-97.

with a movement he found reprehensible within his own local community of intellectual discourse.”⁵² To see what in his own milieu was so unpalatable to Hegel, we turn from the specific case of Spinoza to the more general subject of Romanticism broadly construed.

II. Romantic thought and the turn east

A. Foundations and characteristics of Romanticism

For the present purposes, it is unnecessary to wade very deeply into the pool of figures, texts, and debates comprising the period known as *Frühromantik* or early German Romanticism. A brief sketch of the origins and chief concerns of the Romantic cadre is nevertheless requisite for a discussion of Hegel’s commonalities and discordances with their aims, approaches, and convictions, particularly with respect to Indian culture and thought. The prevailing scholarly consensus has presented the Romantic movement as primarily a literary and poetic one and much less, if at all, a philosophical one. The recent challenge to this received opinion by philosophers and historians of philosophy, however, has made it very clear that “Romantic philosophy” is not a contradiction in terms.⁵³ Rather, the underpinnings of German Romanticism involve explicitly philosophical considerations.

⁵² Herling, *The German Gītā*, 223-224.

⁵³ In particular, Frederick Beiser’s *The Romantic Imperative* and Manfred Frank’s *Unendliche Annäherung (Infinite Approximation)*, part of which has been translated by Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert as *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), make this case convincingly. See also the recent collection of essays edited by Dalia Nassar, *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), as well as—from a more literary-theoretical yet still philosophically nuanced point of view—the classic studies of M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

There should not be anything deeply surprising about this, given the movement's rise in the vibrant intellectual center of Jena at the end of the 1700s among a group of thinkers including Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, and Friedrich von Hardenberg (better known by the pen name Novalis). Both Kant's philosophy in particular and Enlightenment thought in general were extraordinarily momentous developments capturing the attention and reflection of German-speaking intellectuals. Notably, while being heavily influenced by and indebted to Kant, the Romantics were motivated by acute dissatisfaction with his answer to the classic questions, inherited from the Greeks, of the nature of the highest good in life and the manner of its realization. Kant's solution, put somewhat roughly, was the union of virtue-as-duty with happiness, approachable by imperfectly rational beings only at the limit of infinite progress; this was disagreeable to the Romantics, who were made restless by the thought of perpetual deferment into the distant future of a true "kingdom of ends."

Likewise, more generally, the Romantic circle had a complex and intensely ambivalent attitude toward the main currents of Enlightenment thought. They were equally uneasy about the claim that human reason rested on secure foundations and the claim that it was a self-authorizing critical faculty that did not or could not itself be subjected to criticism. They were suspicious of presumptions of the universality and ahistorical nature of reason, as well as doubtful of the existence of any self-evident first principles on which all other knowledge could be grounded. Yet it would be hasty and inaccurate to construe early Romanticism as merely an anti- or irrationalist cast of thought. As Beiser has argued, this interpretation rests on three contentions: first, that

early Romantics explicitly desired and actively worked to replace Enlightenment rationalism with pure aestheticism; second, that they rejected the individualism prized by the Enlightenment, “advocating instead an ideal of community in which the individual was subordinate to the group;” and third, that early Romanticism was basically a conservative ideology that militated against liberal Enlightenment values of church-state separation, religious tolerance, and individual freedom.⁵⁴ By the 1790s, however, the project of reason’s critique of established ideas had generated deadlock: the conceit that everything *but* reason itself could be subject to the scrutiny of reason appeared more and more to be just that, i.e., a conceit—yet allowing that reason too was fallible ran the risk of conceding the fideist point that the free exercise of reason can only lead to skepticism and nihilism. At the same time, the Enlightenment ideal of *Bildung*—literally “formation,” but characteristically translated as “education” or “culture”—had both an individual and a public sense, with the latter requiring at least a minimal collective understanding of moral, aesthetic, and political values that were immune from reason’s otherwise relentless process of questioning and undermining. So Romantic thinkers both saw themselves as, and in reality were, engaged in the effort to reconcile the contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment ideals of radical criticism, individual liberty, and political, moral, and aesthetic cultivation. Thus Romanticism was not *merely* Enlightenment thought repackaged, but on the other hand the Romantics were not, at least at first, pure antagonists of the *Aufklärer*. In fact, they largely shared the goals of the latter, so much so that rather than regarding early German Romanticism as an irrationalist

⁵⁴ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 44.

protest against the Enlightenment, it would perhaps be better to think of it as “the Enlightenment’s Enlightenment.”⁵⁵

Beiser thus offers three theses concerning the early German Romanticism of the years 1796-1801 especially. First, its major ideals were primarily ethical and political rather than literary and critical. Second, its fundamental ethical ideal was *Aufklärung*-inspired *Bildung*, conceived principally as self-realization and the development of individuals’ powers for the good of all, while its political ideal was that of community seen as the pursuit of a good life within society and the state. This was a holistic goal, the attempt “to create through reason that unity with oneself, others, and nature that had been given in antiquity.”⁵⁶ Third, the unity sought after in the Romantic ideals constituted an attempt to reaffirm the value and restore the possibility of human wholeness against the fragmenting forces of modern civil society that tended to erode it. Again, the Romantics were critics but not absolute opponents of the Enlightenment; while their ethical and political ideals “were in crucial respects a reaction against modernity, they were in others an attempt to preserve some of its fundamental values: freedom, reason, and progress.”⁵⁷

The uniqueness of the situation the Romantics found themselves in, and of the difficulties they faced in articulating ideals that sought to reconcile competing values and principles, was likely a major factor in the development and cultivation of the unusual literary, poetic, and aesthetic styles and forms that were distinctive of the movement.⁵⁸ In introducing her translation of the eminent German philosopher Manfred Frank’s lectures

⁵⁵ See Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 56. Beiser attributes the phrase *Aufklärung der Aufklärung* to Wolfgang Mederer.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Oskar Walzel: “It is but rarely that one finds romanticism applying single-mindedly the formula *l’art pour l’art*.” *German Romanticism*, trans. by Alma Elise Lussky (New York: Capricorn, 1966), 34.

on German Romanticism, Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert underscores the Romantics' "epistemological anti-foundationalism: that is, their skepticism regarding first principles in philosophy," their "important challenges to universal claims of reason," and their groundbreaking move "toward incorporating historical and political issues into philosophy."⁵⁹ These can be seen to go hand in hand with more traditionally recognized Romantic innovations, such as the concept of irony and the use of the fragment as a form of aesthetic and poetic expression; indeed, according to Millán-Zaibert it is precisely *because* philosophical concerns motivated them "to redefine the categories of poetry and philosophy" that representatives of Romanticism "employed unconventional forms for the expression of their ideas."⁶⁰

Romantic thinkers were gripped by the challenge of reconciling individual liberty with social connectedness, cohesion, and harmony. They struggled to come up with a design for the state as a constructive community, which would provide members with a sense of belonging as well as a sense of security, without sacrificing the values of individuality, critical rationality, and political liberty acquired in the modern era. "While there would be no going back to the classical Greek polis," Beiser writes, "there also could be no going forward to a point where society simply dissolved into a collection of self-interested atoms held together by a mere 'watchguard' state."⁶¹ The task was to find a solution that could reconcile the demands and desires of individuals as subjective agents with those of communities as collective bodies, and that could be workable as a practical model for the structure and governance of real societies.

⁵⁹ Millán-Zaibert, "Introduction" in Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 3, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 33.

B. Hegel and Romanticism

It is easy to see that to a great extent Hegel shared the philosophical and sociopolitical concerns of the Romantics addressed in the previous section. In the view of some scholars, the influence of the early Romantics on Hegel was so powerful that it persisted throughout his life. For example, according to Beiser, “The reversal of the Frankfurt years” of 1796-1801, during which time Hegel in draft essays defended religion against the Enlightenment critique (he himself had leveled it earlier, during his years in Tübingen and Berne) and also reinterpreted religion “in more mystical terms,” “was in large measure the result of Hegel’s appropriation of early Jena romanticism... In fundamental respects, Hegel’s thinking adopts the substance of early romanticism: an organic concept of nature, an ethic of love, an appreciation of religious mysticism. Most significantly, he even disputes the Enlightenment principle of the sovereignty of reason, the power of reason to criticize religious belief. Hegel will never depart from the context or substance of the romantic legacy; his main departure from it will only be in terms of its form, in how to demonstrate this substance.”⁶² That is, Hegel incorporated early-Romantic ideas into his own philosophy quite extensively, yet articulated them in a manner uniquely his own, and often while obscuring their origin. As a result, it has become too easy to see aspects of Hegel’s thought as utterly original to him when they in fact owe a great deal to Romanticism. This is perhaps also because Hegel reached the heights of philosophical stardom while Romanticism underwent various changes and the philosophical dimensions of its earliest incarnation were largely forgotten. A case in point is the early Romantics’ “essential concern” with “achiev[ing] *identity-in-difference, unity-in-opposition*,” regarding which Beiser writes, “Such an agenda has often been

⁶² Beiser, *Hegel*, 13.

ascribed to Hegel, as if it were his distinctive virtue as a political philosopher. But in this regard, as in so many others, Hegel was simply a typical romantic.”⁶³ He puts the point even more emphatically elsewhere, with a longer list of examples: “There is not a single Hegelian theme that cannot be traced back to his predecessors in Jena, to many other thinkers whom Hegel and the Hegelian school either belittled or ignored... So many ideas that are seen as uniquely Hegelian—the absolute, immanent critique, the synthesis of Fichte and Spinoza, the absolute as the identity of identity and nonidentity, the importance of history within philosophy, self-positing spirit, alienation, the unity of community and individual liberty—were all commonplaces in Jena before Hegel came there in 1801.”⁶⁴

Beiser’s position is lucidly presented and defensible; it is also somewhat unusual. It shows the wider purchase of ideas that have been mistaken as uniquely Hegelian, and it acknowledges that Hegel’s beliefs about the nature and role of reason were a major cause of his break with other Romantic thinkers, but in doing so it obviously does not take Hegel to be straightforwardly and wholly a lover of reason (or Reason) and a consistent, trenchant critic of Romantic ideas. Yet this latter view has a long history and is arguably still the prevalent scholarly understanding among both defenders and detractors of Hegel. In a recent study, Jeffrey Reid perhaps goes even a step further than many by arguing that Hegel, far from being a Romantic in any meaningful sense of the word, was in fact the “anti-Romantic” par excellence.⁶⁵ On the other hand, certain capable Hegel scholars continue to urge that Hegel’s perspective on the limited and contingent nature of human

⁶³ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 33.

⁶⁴ Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10-11.

⁶⁵ Reid, *The Anti-Romantic: Hegel Against Ironic Romanticism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

reason not be forgotten. Some even insist on an ir- or anti-rationalist strain in Hegel's own philosophical approach. Jon Stewart, for instance, protests in "Hegel and the Myth of Reason" that Hegel was not the archrationalist he is often believed to be, so convinced of the power and purpose of reason in history that he accepted the political evils and authoritarian or proto-fascist tendencies of the Prussian state of his time uncritically, even with a Panglossian optimism that all that exists is rational, good, and just.⁶⁶ Rather, Stewart suggests, a clear irrationalist streak can be detected in Hegel (which incidentally offers evidence for claims that Hegel was an important forerunner of the existentialists).

Yet whether Hegel can most accurately be classified as never a Romantic, always a Romantic, or an erstwhile Romantic who was initially in thrall to the movement's critique and transformation of Enlightenment thought yet for some reason or reasons later rejected key claims or ideas and thus decisively broke with the movement, is an issue that neither can be nor need be settled once and for all here.⁶⁷ (Again, part of the difficulty would lie in fully accounting for the philosophical underpinnings of Romanticism in their relation to the principles of the *Aufklärung*.) It is enough to reiterate that Hegel came of age philosophically during the period of early Romanticism, was intimately connected with young participants—indeed, innovators—in the movement such as Schelling and the Schlegel brothers, and was deeply provoked and significantly influenced by it during his development into the challenging and renowned philosopher that he certainly was in his

⁶⁶ Jon Stewart, "Hegel and the Myth of Reason," in Stewart, ed., *The Hegel Myths and Legends* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 307-308.

⁶⁷ Again, Beiser: "Hegel's grand achievement was to synthesize the *Aufklärung* with some of the currents of romanticism, creating a romanticized rationalism or a rationalized romanticism." *Hegel*, 22. Richard Kroner also writes, "During Hegel's young manhood he was an enthusiastic Romanticist; and, although he became in his maturity an ardent realist and an outspoken critic of Romantic views, strands of his early Romanticism are woven into the pattern of his final philosophy." Kroner, "Introduction" to G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. by T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 14.

later years. Just as Romantic thinkers had conflicting feelings regarding the aims, achievements, and outcome of the Enlightenment, so Hegel's relationship to Romanticism was also intensely ambivalent. Still, one serious gripe that Hegel had was with certain Romantics' championing Eastern civilizations, texts, and ideas as ideal exemplars for contemporary Germans and Europeans—in other words, with their uses and abuses, or perhaps even better their contortions and distortions, of ancient Eastern culture for modern Western life.

C. Glorifying the exotic Orient?

Hegel may come to mind as the most prominent—not to say notorious—example of the post-Kantian tendency to bring historical and political concerns to the forefront of philosophical inquiry and critique, or at least to address them at length alongside more traditionally philosophical concerns such as metaphysical, cosmological, and epistemological ones. As scholars such as Millán-Zaibert have made clear, however, representatives of early Romanticism, being in the first generation of Kant readers, had also begun to spread their historical and political wings. And although their heritage and education may largely have been limited to the history and culture of the thin geographical portion of the globe running from the Eastern Mediterranean through Italy and into central Europe, their concerns and interests were decidedly not. Romantics combined their rather natural intimacy with “classical” western and European traditions with increasing attention to, and affinity for, elements of the cultures and thoughts of the Eastern world, including India. So it is somewhat surprising that in much past and recent discussion of Hegel and Romanticism, little or no mention is made of the extent to which the Romantics became preoccupied with what of Indian culture and philosophy had been

imported into and taken up in German-speaking lands. This seems to be true of major commentators such as Manfred Frank, Rudolf Haym, Otto Pöggeler, Oskar Walzel, and Beiser himself, as well as of focused studies where it would seem logical for India to enter the picture as a relevant concern, such as Ernst Benz's small but illuminating (and underappreciated) *The Mystical Sources of Early German Romantic Philosophy*.⁶⁸ And the trend continues in recent books like Reid's *The Anti-Romantic* and Dalia Nassar's *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804*.⁶⁹ There have, of course, been a few very important exceptions to the general trend of declining (if not failing) to consider how significant the influence of Eastern texts and traditions was on Romantic thinkers. These include A. Leslie Wilson's *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism*, Wilhelm Halbfass's chapter "India and the Romantic Imagination" in his authoritative *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, René Gérard's *L'Orient et la pensée romantique allemande*, and Raymond Schwab's seminal mid-century *La Renaissance orientale*. Schwab's book, despite first being published in French a full generation before Edward Said's *Orientalism* shook up the academic world, successfully shows Orientalism at work among German and other European Romantic minds, chiefly in aspects or modes that Amartya Sen has termed the "exoticizing approach" and "the curatorial approach" rather than along the lines of the belligerent cultural imperialism with which Said was primarily concerned, which latter roughly corresponds to the "magisterial approach" for Sen.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. by Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Allison, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983).

⁶⁹ University of Chicago Press, 2014.

⁷⁰ Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Paris: Editions Payot, 1950), trans. by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking as *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). This is not to say that Said's work was derivative or unoriginal. For one thing, Schwab does not use the term "orientalism," at least not in the

Romantic interest in India, whether acknowledged by later scholars or not, was not drummed up by members of the Jena circle entirely on their own in the very last years of the eighteenth century. As early as the 1500s, with Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit missionaries following on the heels of Portuguese traders who reached the South Indian coast in search of commerce, efforts were being made by western Europeans to grasp Indian languages.⁷¹ Some missionaries even strove for deeper cross-cultural and hermeneutical engagement, although over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the ultimate intent was typically still to preach the gospels and spread Christianity more effectively. And while the English and French outpaced Germans through the eighteenth century in terms of language acquisition and linguistic research, German enthusiasm grew steadily, even increasingly. Herling draws attention to Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) as the first in a lineage of German Romantic and other thinkers to give serious weight to India's philosophical endeavors and contributions to the world. Before Herling, A. Leslie Wilson had also identified Herder as the thinker to whom the "mythical image" of India that captivated the minds of so many 18th- and 19th-century

specific Saidian sense of the ideology that created and sustained "the Orient" as a monolithic cultural entity distinct from "the West," yet subject to classification and control, intellectually administered by a disciplinary field that itself was labeled and spoken about by its representatives as "Orientalism." For another, Said sets his critical sights on European dealings with the Middle East rather than India, whereas Schwab's "Orient" is more general and refers to a larger geographical region. Third and finally, Said makes his own indebtedness to Schwab clear in his Foreword to the 1984 English translation of Schwab's book.

For Sen's tripartite classification of Orientalist attitudes, see his *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), particularly Chapter 7, "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination," 139-160.

⁷¹ Among other illuminating studies, see Joseph Velinkar, *India and the West, The First Encounters: A Historical Study of the Early Indo-Portuguese Cultural Encounters in Goa* (Mumbai: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, 1998); Ramakrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company: A Sociological Appraisal* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Sinners and Saints: The Successors of Vasco da Gama* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India, 16th-17th Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); E.F. Oaten, *European Travellers in India during the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, the Evidence Afforded by Them with Respect to Indian Social Institutions, & the Nature & Influence of Indian Governments* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991 [repr.]); and Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 36-53.

Germans could ultimately be traced. Herder, following Voltaire and Englishmen such as John Zephaniah Holwell and Alexander Dow⁷², postulated that human culture had originated near the Ganges and that all the world's mythology, cosmology, religion, and wisdom derived from primeval Indian civilization. In most respects Herder was positive, enthusiastic, even emphatic about the goodness of Indian character, although as both Wilson and Herling attest he found the doctrines of caste and transmigration morally repugnant. It is also worth noting that Herder's student, Friedrich Majer, produced the first full German translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, albeit from Charles Wilkins' 1785 English rendering and not directly from the Sanskrit itself (or even Persian). As Schwab puts it, Herder, "in rekindling for a deciphered India the enthusiastic interest that had been felt for an imagined India, spread among the Romantics the idea of placing the cradle of the divine infancy of the human race in India..."⁷³

That Herder's was already a significantly romanticized and exoticized India is obvious in such ingenuous and fantasizing projections as, "The Indian establishes his bliss in dispassionate repose, in an undisturbed enjoyment of serenity and peace...[H]e swims in a sea of sweet dreams and invigorating fragrances."⁷⁴ It was nevertheless influential for a number of younger German intellectuals, including representatives of Jena Romanticism such as Novalis and the Schlegel brothers. Novalis, whose *Die Christenheit oder Europa (Christendom or Europe)* appeared in 1799, depicted India as a place where human beings existed "in an original state of harmony and a childlike,

⁷² According to Halbfass, even the European Enlightenment itself "was characterized by a very distinct association between a general interest in non-European traditions and the motif of criticizing Christianity and Europe." *India and Europe*, 69.

⁷³ Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 58.

⁷⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, vol. 13 of *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877-1913), 295. Quoted in Herling, *The German Gītā*, 83.

unbroken wholeness.”⁷⁵ Novalis made clear that this way of being was a stark contrast, and a challenge, to the superficial sophistication of Enlightenment Europe, which belied its stagnant rationality and spiritual bankruptcy. Friedrich Schlegel, who studied Sanskrit in France for several years, initially lamented Europe’s fallenness and fragmentation and suggested that all that was good and pure could be sought and found in India, where pristine teachings had existed since time immemorial and the pinnacle of human religious development had been attained. By 1808, however, when his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians)* was published, Schlegel was already distancing himself from his earlier enthusiasm while still allowing that India possessed importance for the student of philosophy even if its transmitted texts offered more evidence of the distortion and corruption of originary wisdom than of faithful preservation and propagation of it. So Schlegel moved, in other words, from a firm conviction about India as the locus of human wisdom in “undistorted pristineness” to the position that “the Indian material...now appeared, as it were, to illustrate the origins of error, and to provide an opportunity to observe how the processes of obscuration and decay had affected the initially god-given clarity in even its oldest and most original phases.”⁷⁶ This coincided with Schlegel’s conversion to Catholicism, and in this context Hegel’s marked antipathy to Schlegel should be remembered. Viyagappa notes that “Hegel’s attitude towards [Friedrich] Schlegel is one of disparagement. Whenever he mentions the name of Schlegel in connexion with the Orient in general, or India there is a tone of criticism and even cynicism.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 74.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁷ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 44.

German Romantic preoccupation with India, then, took various forms: Herder's enthusiasm for India as the cradle of all humankind, Novalis's idealization of a primitive humanity filled with a childlike trust, Schlegel's shifting allegiances, even "'the spirit of infancy' which Schelling evoked in his early programmatic work *Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt* ('On Myths, Historical Legends and Philosophemes of the Most Ancient World, 1793')." ⁷⁸ Importantly, however, emergent understandings about classical Indian traditions, and the claims and conclusions—however overwrought—that were made on the basis of them, dovetailed conveniently with certain aspects of Spinoza's philosophy (and Lessing's endorsement of it, as revealed by Jacobi), so that the support of some prominent intellectuals for a rejuvenated Spinozist pantheism in a way fused with, or at least was connected with, ideas about the redemptive or transformative value of Indian religion and philosophy. For instance, Herder's *God, Some Conversations* is precisely the work Beiser claims is "far more important" to the Spinoza revival than Jacobi's *Briefe* (see footnote 8 above). Yet there Herder was already making "explicit philosophical associations between his own vision of modified Spinozism...and the doctrines he discerned in the Indian context," associations that he expanded and refined up to 1792 when in the fourth collection of *Scattered Leaves* he "finally forged his philosophical conception of Indian thought that had not quite blossomed in *Gott, Einige Gespräche*. ⁷⁹ The final product, Herling offers, "might ultimately be characterized as a positive connection between 'vitalist pantheism' and foundational Indian views." ⁸⁰ And so, especially in light of Halbfass's observation that Herder "did not just pioneer the Romantic movement in general, but also broke

⁷⁸ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 72.

⁷⁹ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 91-92. See also vol. 23 of Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

ground precisely in terms of its awareness of India”⁸¹, it can be seen that during the Romantic period “Spinoza” and “India” were not always clearly demarcated territories.⁸² Admittedly, this adds a layer of complexity to the situation and thus a degree of difficulty to the effort to achieve some clarity on Hegel’s role and his motives in debates concerning both Spinoza and pantheism on one hand, and Romanticism and India on the other.

Halbfass, and others such as Bernasconi and Park, have suggested that at least part of the basis for Hegel’s keenly felt need to critique the Romantic obsession with India was that he had a deep and longstanding infatuation with Greece and so wanted to accord it primacy of place. He could not accept that a distant land such as India should either come to dominate the minds and sentiments of the German people, or indeed inspire their artistic, literary, and philosophical endeavors, since he believed, “The name of Greece strikes home to the hearts of men of education in Europe, and more particularly is this so with us Germans.”⁸³ Hegel’s Grecophilia is legendary. He has often been referred to as “the German Aristotle.” Certainly this is due in the main to the philosophical similarities between his thought and Aristotle’s, for his appropriation and transformation of the method of dialectic, and to his penchant for systematizing, for

⁸¹ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 69.

⁸² Further evidence of this can be found in Herling’s assessment of Schlegel: “Schlegel’s early thought reframed Herder’s myth of ‘Indian origins’ as part of the emerging Romantic program in an explicit attempt to establish Indian culture and religion as a source for European cultural renewal. As a part of this narrative, Schlegel continued to utilize an important conception of foundational Hindu doctrine that began to emerge in Herder’s thought: at its core, Hinduism was pantheistic. In the wake of the *Pantheismusstreit*, however, one has the sense that this conception became something of a slogan in the reading of Indian religion and philosophy; it hovers over India in Schlegel’s texts, vacillating from an enthusiastically positive association in his early Romantic years to a negative libel in the pages of *Über die Sprache*.” Herling, *The German Gītā*, 119.

⁸³ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy vol. I: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. by E.S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 149. Park comments, “This statement was more prescriptive than descriptive since, in Hegel’s time, Germans’ ideas of their roots were divergent and competing.” *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 114.

attempting to formulate a comprehensive theoretical structure of knowledge that would allow all practical matters to be decided on its basis. Yet it is still significant and quite telling that the philosopher with which the nickname connects him was a Greek one. Hegel lastingly extolled the value and example of ancient Greece: the beauty of its institutions and aesthetic and other cultural productions, the importance of its contributions to European civilization and political life, and the significance of its achievements in philosophy for the thought of contemporary Europe and Germany. This is detectable even in Hegel's earliest fragments and draft essays, in some of which he poses Greek folk religion as a foil—and at times even seems to think it could be a practicable alternative—to the “positive” legacy of Christianity as a statutory and institutionalized religion that imposes laws, doctrines, and practices on its adherents and depends on their obedience to them for its very existence.⁸⁴

Hegel's respect and admiration for Greece are also conveyed in the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly throughout the sections on “Reason,” Spirit,” “Religion,” and “Absolute Knowing” in the latter half of the text. Where the discussion is explicit, but also and perhaps even more so where it is not, Hegel indicates that the initial beauty of Greece could be found in the fact that human beings were fully immersed in “ethical substance,” a socio-symbolic universe in which morality was experienced as a substantial existence with which they were fully identified. In other words, at first the Greeks just were their roles, stations, and relations to other members of the community, and had no conception of being anything else, i.e., free individuals or independent beings possessing subjectivity and agency. Transgression, when it took place, was thus inevitably felt not as individual choice but simply as objective violation of the laws of the

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Hegel, *Three Essays*, 3-4, 52-58.

moral universe. Punishment was less a corrective directed at the offending individual as such and more a simple restoration of order, a balancing of the moral scales: “Because we suffer, we acknowledge we have erred,” as Hegel quotes from Sophocles’ *Antigone*.⁸⁵ For Hegel, Sophocles’ tragic depiction of Antigone, who was torn between two equally prescribed, equally moral duties and painfully experienced the state of being unable to satisfy them both—unable not to do wrong—exquisitely exemplifies both the naïve innocence of ethical substance and the dialectical necessity of the emergence of free subjectivity out of the irreconcilable conflicts of competing moral demands that these roles generated, an impossible and unstable situation. Though Hegel has a certain nostalgia for the innocent state of immersion in a pre-subjective moral order, the further and “absolute” accomplishment of Greece is the development there of free subjectivity, the thought that “I am, as an individual,” which is a crucial step in the coming-to-self-awareness of spirit in history. This constitutes the moment at which, Hegel would later say simply in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, “the light of thought dawned among the Greeks.”⁸⁶

“On Classical Studies” (1809), Hegel’s year-end address to students of the gymnasium in Nuremberg where he was rector at the time, also provides ample evidence of the high regard in which he held Greek culture. After acknowledging that the school’s very “spirit and purpose” is a preparation for “learned study” that is founded on the knowledge attained and the treasures produced by Greece and Rome, Hegel engages the question of whether the achievements of modern Europe have surpassed those of

⁸⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 284.

⁸⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. III, 548.

antiquity and “can now advance on their own territory without hindrance.”⁸⁷ His answer is worth quoting at length for the flight of its rhetoric in defending a curriculum of Greek and Latin studies. If, Hegel says,

we agree that excellence should be our starting-point, then the foundation of higher study must be and remain Greek literature in the first place, Roman in the second. The perfection and glory of those masterpieces must be the spiritual bath, the secular baptism that first and indelibly attunes and tinctures the soul in respect of taste and knowledge. For this initiation a general, perfunctory acquaintance with the ancients is not sufficient; we must take up our lodging with them so that we can breathe their air, absorb their ideas, their manners, one might even say their errors and prejudices, and become at home in this world—the fairest that ever has been. While the first paradise was that of human *nature*, this is the second, the higher paradise of the human *spirit*, the paradise where the human spirit emerges like a bride from her chamber, endowed with a fairer naturalness, with freedom, depth, and serenity. The first wild glory of its dawn in the east is restrained by the grandeur of form and tamed into beauty. The human spirit manifests its profundity here no longer in confusion, gloom, or arrogance, but in perfect clarity...I do not believe I claim too much when I say that he who has never known the works of the ancients has lived without knowing what beauty is.

If we make ourselves at home in such an element, all the powers of the soul are stimulated, developed, and exercised; and, further, this element is a unique material through which we enrich ourselves and improve the very substance of our being.⁸⁸

Frequently Hegel’s affinity for Greece is simply accepted as a matter of course, but at least one pair of scholars has recently suggested that Hegel “was fascinated by Greece in an exaggerated way” that “makes him idealize Greece.”⁸⁹ That is not to say that Hegel was altogether in the wrong in according a degree of philosophical importance to Greece that reflected his fondness and love for its culture, a culture that he felt was beautiful in its natural innocence or “immediate” pre-subjective participation in ethical substance, honorable in its tragic discovery that subjective freedom must clash with the harmony of a pre-subjective moral order, and invaluable in bequeathing the legacy of that

⁸⁷ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 324.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 325-326.

⁸⁹ Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, “What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 84 (2002) 1-36, 12.

discovery to its descendants among all humanity.⁹⁰ There is no question that from the days of the pre-Socratics through at least Socrates's death at the hands of his fellow Athenians, a spirit of philosophical inquiry pervaded the polis and the life of the mind enjoyed a perhaps uncommonly privileged stature. It must also be pointed out, however, that from youth Hegel was educated and even immersed in Greek life and culture, becoming well-versed in the language (and in Latin, French, and English, for that matter). On the other hand, Hegel learned little if anything during his school days about Indian civilization and never attained any facility in Sanskrit, indeed never even sought to learn it, unlike many of his immediate contemporaries among the Romantics. He did, of course, begin to study India and Asia more generally quite widely in later years. As will be seen in the following chapters, however, his conviction about the cultural superiority of contemporary Europeans and Germans kept pace with this learning even as facets of Indian thought and culture that were revealed to him served to challenge Hegel's perspective on a basic level. Ultimately, it created a deep perplexity that he was able only to stifle, or in a way to abide by altering some of his language, and not to truly resolve.

Hegel, then, shared with many of his Romantic contemporaries a deeply-ingrained and abiding love of ancient Greece and its philosophical offerings, yet he diverged distinctly from some of them on the subject of India. He stridently opposed the prioritization of India, whether as a pristine paradise of early humanity, a sort of Eden (if

⁹⁰ It is also not to say Hegel was univocal in his praise of Greece; again, as in all matters, Hegel sought to avoid "one-sidedness," as well as to insist on the critical observation that true philosophy in the present age must and did press beyond the stage the Greeks reached, at which their philosophical strivings culminated but also stopped. This is clear from the classic declaration in the *Philosophy of History*, "[T]he Eastern nations knew only that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world only that *some* are free; while *we* know that all men absolutely (*man as man*) are free"(19). Cf. also *Lectures on the History of Philosophy vol. I*, 100, 153. In this regard, Kroner writes that Hegel is "anti-Romantic in glorifying the present as the fruitful moment or *kairos* given to his generation that it might consummate the work of earlier periods." Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 16.

not, indeed, the literal one) from which humankind had since fallen but to which it could and should seek to return, or as an apex of civilizational development, from which contemporary German culture ultimately derived but in comparison to which it represented deterioration or decay. To him, both of these alternatives were unacceptable since they involved wrongheaded glorification of an exoticized India. Hegel's conviction on this point was motivated partly by his admiration for Greek culture, partly by his belief about what the available literature showed (translations, studies, and European travelers' accounts, as will become clear), and perhaps also partly by other indirectly-related philosophical problems about which he found himself in disagreement with members of the Jena romantic circle—such as its subjectivism, which seemed to him a vain, shallow overemphasis on the subjective point of view of the individual. On one hand, Hegel can be respected for his consistency in contesting the legitimacy of latching onto an idealized or fetishized version of a culture as apparently foreign to his fellow Germans as India was. It might be said in his favor that in doing so he was providing a corrective to the “exoticizing approach”—to the extent that Romantics were taking that approach—and in a sense rendering a service to future European thinkers attempting to engage cross-culturally. On the other hand, however, the importance of this contribution is somewhat overshadowed by the fact that Hegel's opposition to the exoticizing approach was accompanied, as the next two chapters will show, by a marked tendency toward the “magisterial approach,” which “sees India as a subject territory” and “assimilates a sense of superiority.”⁹¹ It perhaps also constituted a kind of “negative exoticism” of its own: it attempted to “fix” the problem of Romantic fascination with India by keeping the latter foreign, insisting that Indian religion, thought, and culture

⁹¹ Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 142.

were irreducibly alien to Western consciousness (and, somewhat contradictorily, that India as object is thus fully knowable and known by the European as, and in its very, strangeness and inscrutability). Figueira observes, in the context of discussing Romantic exoticism as a “decadent quest,” that Hegel’s putatively no-nonsense alternative “is equally sterile from a hermeneutical point of view. By attempting to demolish the lure of the exotic, Hegel does no more than close India off to dialogue. By denying India any vision of universality, Hegel squandered a unique opportunity to define Indian thought as anything but a Greek appendage. His determination to establish his own system and ‘save’ the intelligibility of history precluded a true interpretation of Indian metaphysics.”⁹² It is now time to examine in more detail the texts that contributed to this dubious accomplishment, beginning with Hegel’s earliest surviving statements about India and “the Orientals.”

⁹² Figueira, *The Exotic*, 166-167.

Chapter Two

Hegel's Estimation of India: Development, Maturation, and Crisis

Throughout his life as a philosopher Hegel grappled with various problems related to Spinoza (an “Oriental” or Eastern thinker, for Hegel⁹³) and Romanticism, themselves emblematic of even larger theological and philosophical debates about Christianity, the Enlightenment, and faith and reason. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the Eastern or “Oriental” world broadly and India specifically were present for Hegel’s thinking and hence presented in it; and to explore the extent to which they functioned instrumentally for him and the extent to which he deemed them worthy of consideration in their own right. This will be accomplished by cataloguing and analyzing some of Hegel’s earliest surviving written statements concerning the region; his occasional, typically minor but sometimes substantive references in publications from the first years of the 1800s; and the more extensive treatments that featured in his later lecture courses. The picture emerges of an early period of formation of certain views and attitudes that persisted largely unchallenged until the 1820s, followed by an interval of comparative turmoil during which some of the beliefs Hegel had held with relative confidence and consistency up to that point were seriously called into question. The final section of this chapter opens the examination into the years of Hegel’s perplexity. It focuses on the changes to lecture material and the revisions of previously published texts

⁹³ In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, for example, Hegel writes: “Spinoza was a Jew by descent and what found expression in the form of thought in his philosophy is in general the oriental intuition according to which everything finite appears merely as something transient, as something vanishing.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 224.

and sets the stage for Chapter 3, which takes Hegel's largely-overlooked *Bhagavadgītā* essays as its point of departure for pressing the analysis further.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that not only the few existing studies of Hegel's engagement and appraisal of India, but even the bulk of analyses more widely treating non-European cultures in Hegel's writings, tend to focus heavily or even exclusively on the texts of his lecture courses: those on the philosophy of history (or world history, *Weltgeschichte*) and the history of philosophy most of all, but those on the philosophy of religion and on aesthetics as well. It is true that these lectures contain Hegel's most-voluminous discussions of India, after the two *Bhagavadgītā* journal essays. Yet not only are the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia* of major importance, since Hegel added substantive and pointed comments regarding India to them while revising the texts for new editions late in his life, but even texts such as the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the 1821 *Philosophy of Right* (which was published later than the first editions of the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia* but which Hegel did not rework during his lifetime) contain passages which are indicative or reflective of Hegel's views about Indian culture, religion, and philosophy and thus relevant to a comprehensive account.

The most obvious departure from the norm of reliance on Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy is Ignatius Viyagappa's published dissertation, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*.⁹⁴ In this regard Viyagappa's groundbreaking book, which still remains the lone English-language monograph devoted to Hegel's understanding and characterization of Indian thought, is notable for two

⁹⁴ Ignatius Viyagappa, S.J. *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980).

reasons. First, it divides Hegel's works into two "kinds," those published during his lifetime and those published posthumously, and treats them separately. Second, it subdivides each set of works into those dealing with "the Orient" in general and those that discuss India specifically, then focuses on the latter only. On these grounds Viyagappa leaves aside the fragments and early essays, as well as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (because passages there are "so general that they do not exclusively refer to the Orient") and *Philosophy of Right* (because only one paragraph "properly speaking" has to do with India).⁹⁵ The present chapter, without disdaining or purporting to correct Viyagappa's choice of approach, nevertheless supplies an extended account of earlier appearances of India or the Orient in Hegel's work, which Viyagappa passes over. Viyagappa is primarily at pains to show *that* Hegel conceptualizes Indian philosophy as a philosophy of substance and of abstract unity. As a study avowedly limited to the specific question of how Hegel understood or interpreted Indian thinking, Viyagappa's is painstaking and helpful; the present work is indebted to and effectively in agreement with it, but also attempts to interrogate and contest Hegel's readings, which Viyagappa elects not to do. In examining early and problematic instances where Hegel refers to India passingly or discusses the Orient in general, then, this chapter prepares the way for further critical engagement in Chapters 3 and 4 that moves beyond the pure exposition of Viyagappa's study. And it pays closer attention to the mentions in the *Philosophy of Right*, as these will be relevant to the question of Eurocentrism that will be addressed at length in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the discussion here and in Chapter 3 brings a combined topical and chronological approach to bear; this permits the interplay between the published texts and the lectures to appear clearly and in a sense more holistically, and

⁹⁵ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 7.

along with it, the turns of thought regarding India that Hegel experienced through the 1820s and up until his death in 1831 as he lectured frequently and worked on revised editions of the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia*.

I. India in Hegel's early writings

A. "Brahma" in "The Tübingen Essay"

What appears to be Hegel's earliest surviving word on India is just that: a word. In an untitled draft piece on religion known as "The Tübingen Essay" (since he composed it there in 1793), Hegel begins a paragraph approvingly paraphrasing Lessing's 1779 *Nathan the Wise*—"What makes me a Christian in your eyes makes you a Jew in mine," Nathan says—to illustrate his distinction between objective religion and subjective religion. For Hegel the former refers to a corpus of mandated beliefs, dogmas, ritual observances, etc., while the latter denotes the "heart," i.e., the humane sensibilities and practical wisdom that individual adherents exhibit in the exercise of their religion as they understand it. Subjective religion is what animates a body of doctrines, gives it vitality, and allows it to persist. Lessing's ecumenical observation indicates how little real difference there is between subjective religions when it comes to moral conduct, according to Hegel, who then takes the point even further by asserting that a person fundamentally misunderstands religion who derives a sense of superiority and self-satisfaction from the "absurdity" in "other people's modes of representation—heathens, as they are called...".⁹⁶ He adds: "Someone who calls his Jehovah Jupiter or Brahma and

⁹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, ed. and trans. by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 38.

is truly pious offers his gratitude or his sacrifice in just as childlike a manner as does the true Christian.”⁹⁷

This first instance of the term “Brahma” is quite isolated; Hegel offers no immediate context for it, and none can be gathered from elsewhere in the essay. As a result, from Hegel’s mere use of the word little can be inferred about his understanding or his opinion of India at the time. It is difficult to say with certainty what, if anything, Hegel may have read about Asia (“the Orient”) and India in his earliest years, and impossible to know what he heard from teachers or friends. In either case it is again hard to determine the likelihood that what might have been conveyed to him was at all accurate.⁹⁸ Perhaps all that can be said is that by the early 1790s he had acquired an impression that “Brahma” was a name for the divine creator in Indic lands and, as an object of worship, could roughly be equated with the Jehovah of the Jews, the Jupiter of the Greeks, or the God of the Christians. More generally, from the discussion in “The Tübingen Essay” it appears that at the time Hegel possessed a youthful conviction, motivated by human fellow-feeling, that all religious representations and expressions that flow from the heart are on basically equal footing: they are “for the heart and are meant to be enjoyed by it with simplicity of spirit and feeling, rather than be criticized by the cold understanding.”⁹⁹

B. “Spirit of the Orientals” (“*Geist der Orientalen*”)

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸ It is worth reiterating that the situation concerning ancient Greece is much different, because sources were abundant, more direct, and largely reliable, and Hegel began learning from them as a young child, studying first at a Latin school and then a *Gymnasium* in his hometown of Stuttgart. The Western-classical education he received at these institutions was extensive; in early adolescence Hegel began keeping a bilingual journal in German and Latin. In sum, there is simply better documentation available for his studies and opinions of Greek and Roman civilization than for his ideas about India and Asia.

⁹⁹ Hegel, *Three Essays*, 38.

Between 1793 and 1806-1807—when Hegel labored over and then published the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—several noteworthy references to India and “the Orient” appear in his work.¹⁰⁰ Some are little more than a brief phrase or sentence, but even as such these do matter to a comprehensive account of Hegel’s attitude toward India in its full complexity. Others are more substantive, including the four-page fragment “Spirit of the Orientals,” which is part of the “Fragments of Historical Studies” that Hegel composed sometime between the mid-1790s and the early 1800s. Experts continue to debate the proper dating of Hegel’s early output, especially various fragments, from Tübingen through the Jena period; after Tübingen (1788-1793), Bern (1793-1797), and Frankfurt (1797-1800), Hegel lived in Jena from 1801 to 1806, just missing the headiest years of early German Romanticism and departing for Bamberg shortly after Napoleon’s occupying army marched into Jena (which, famously, happened as Hegel was putting the finishing touches on the *Phenomenology*). Hegel scholar Jon Stewart places “Fragments of Historical Studies” in the Bern period in his recent English-language anthology *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, but notes that previous Hegel biographers and commentators have suggested dates ranging from 1795-1798 to 1801-1806.¹⁰¹

Introducing the fragments, Stewart draws attention to their resonance throughout Hegel’s main body of work, and despite suspecting that one fragment was written as early as 1792

¹⁰⁰ The few pieces of Hegel’s writing prior to 1793 that have been preserved do not make mention of India, the Orient, the East, or Asia. They do, however, take Greek and Roman poetry, religion, and philosophy for their thematic focus and show the teenage Hegel’s keen, perhaps yet-untamed admiration for Greece in particular. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 3-18, and also G.W.F. Hegel, *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung*, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1936).

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, xiv-xv, 89-90. Stewart points out that these fragments “constitute a very heterogeneous body of material,” were composed at two or more different times, probably did not form any kind of series in Hegel’s mind, and were first grouped together under the heading “Fragments of Historical Studies” by his student and biographer Karl Rosenkranz on the basis of “Rosenkranz’s knowledge of Hegel’s mature philosophy of history, not by any ideas that he had about the context in which they were written.”

or 1793 and others as late as 1801-1803, he concludes that he “cannot” firmly fix any of their dates “because they are not ‘dated’ in themselves. The themes that were of continuing interest to Hegel are of perennial interest to us.”¹⁰²

Whatever its precise date of composition might be¹⁰³, the fragment “Spirit of the Orientals” presents a rather dramatic contrast to the lone mention of the single word “Brahma” in “The Tübingen Essay,” in terms of enabling insights into the nature, extent, and quality of Hegel’s early understanding of India as part of “the Orient.” And it deserves to be discussed in some detail, for it sheds light on other, roughly contemporaneous references that Hegel makes to the Orient generally and India particularly, which will be registered and briefly discussed before moving on to the *Phenomenology* and Hegel’s later publications and lectures. “Spirit of the Orientals” begins with a phrase stating directly, yet in characteristic fashion cryptically, what the spirit of “the Orientals” is: “Reverence for the actual in its actuality and embellishment of it in fantasy.”¹⁰⁴ By this, Hegel apparently means—for the bulk of the fragment constitutes argument and explanation to this effect—an attitude of straightforward, even strict acceptance of the brute, implacable facts of (what “Orientals” take to be) the external, non-human real world independent of consciousness, with a corresponding (though, for Hegel, merely opposing and so not complementary or satisfying) tendency to

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 90. Elsewhere, however, Stewart admits it is “more probable that all of the fragments belong to the Frankfurt period than that any of them originated during the following years when Hegel was at Jena” (121, n.5).

¹⁰³ In fact Stewart believes that “Spirit of the Orientals” specifically is part of the manuscript Hegel wrote in the latter months of 1800, shortly after completing “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (which he had begun in 1798 or 1799) (*ibid.*, 105 n.3). Thus, despite appearing first in “Fragments of Historical Studies,” it would be several years older than the fragment that is placed last there, which is the one Stewart thinks belongs to 1792 or 1793 (but see the previous note).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

resort to imagination to enrich these realities *for* human consciousness. The line of reasoning is rather abstruse but proceeds roughly as follows.¹⁰⁵

First, Hegel asserts that “Orientals” have “fixedly determinate characters” (*festbestimmte Charaktere*), unchangeable and never “depart[ing] from a path once embarked upon,” ignoring whatever is not on that path but treating anything that poses an impediment to their movement as “hostile.” Their character is “incapable of taking up and reconciling itself with what stands over against it”—therefore, they are only able to enter into relations of force, being either dominant or dominated.¹⁰⁶ Fixedness of character also means that “the relations in which [Oriental] man stands are very few,” since a person who possesses “fixedly determinate” character “has no dealings with whatever is not of the same kind as he.” This one-track-mindedness of sorts, or in Hegel’s terms “immutability,” the inability to be affected in a variety of ways by “the many-sidedness of things” (*die Mannigfaltigkeit der Dinge*), “secures for the Oriental his repose” (*Ruhe*).¹⁰⁷ Yet, because “the world to him is a collection of facts which appear only in their naked power as mere opposites devoid of a soul and spirit of their own,” he “seek[s] to make up for what they lack in inherent content by means of a *foreign, borrowed brilliance*” (*fremden, erborgten Glanz*), i.e., through imagination. The facts of

¹⁰⁵ Quotations in the following two paragraphs can be found in *ibid.*, 90-94, in consecutive order.

¹⁰⁶ What Hegel says next is worth quoting at length as much for its opacity as for its invocation of love, the first of three in the fragment: “A fixedly determinate character allows nothing apart from itself except what it dominates, or what dominates it in the same manner as it would dominate. For there are limits, actual facts in it that cannot be transcended [*aufgehoben*], which, [in order to] exist beside other contradictory facts, beside what is hostile, can stand in no other relation. Since the limits of character yield facts which love cannot unite, these limits must be bound *objectively*; in other words, they must stand under law. The equality of the actual is necessity; it is, consequently, the law which governs all. That is why in the Oriental character two apparently contradictory determinations are bound up with each other: *the will to power over all* and voluntary surrender to *every form of slavery*. Both conditions, domination as well as slavery, are legitimate here because the same law of force rules in both” (91).

¹⁰⁷ Hegel says nothing more about this “repose” or tranquility, so it is difficult to tell whether he is referring simply and generally to the perceived idyllic aspects of life in Asiatic lands relative to European ones, or more specifically but obliquely to a quality associated with meditation or contemplation in Asian philosophical traditions.

the world are made “poetic” through the images by which they are adorned or embellished, but even though the “noble splendor of their images astounds; the sun-like brilliance of their pictures blinds,” this is because there is a kind of violence at work. Ultimately¹⁰⁸ “feeling goes out empty, and the delicacies, the pearls of the Oriental spirit, are but a wildly beautiful monstrosity.” At this point Hegel’s analysis reaches its greatest height of abstraction, in the span of a paragraph which he ends by claiming that from “the blind passivity” of the dominated toward the dominant “arises...the *importance* and thus *economy of oratorical solemnity*” (*die Wichtigkeit und darum die Sparsamkeit und der Ernst der Rede*).¹⁰⁹

What precisely Hegel means by “oratorical solemnity” or seriousness of speech remains unclear, but he is perhaps referring to a sort of “return of the repressed” whereby (as he sees it) the vivacity and activity of those “Orientals” who are subordinate and dominated nevertheless manifest, but in distorted form: as sparsity and gravity in discourse, a phenomenon that speaks to (because they are unable to speak directly of) a life that cannot be lived or even known under the condition and relations that structure Indian society. At any rate, from here the fragment goes on to discuss a few other topics relevant to the habit “the Orientals” have of “adorn[ing] the naked reality of other things with fantasy.” The first, dress, reflects this habit and the fixedness of character that

¹⁰⁸ For Hegel, there is a specific reason for this eventuality: it comes about because “love has not done the connecting” of the facts to the images. This is Hegel’s second mention of love in the fragment (see note 12 above).

¹⁰⁹ In the interest of corroboration, the full paragraph reads as follows: “The determinateness of character permits no great manifoldness of characters. The manifoldness of determinatenesses would destroy itself. But what is beyond these determinatenesses, what indeed in the nature of the matter is of the same kind as they but of greater and deeper force, must operate miraculously as something invisible and higher. In the mode of composition of the Oriental empires, enduring or ephemeral, in the system of obedience and subordination in such untamed masses, the might is clearly displayed which Oriental characters—characters thus similar and yet bound by strength, depth and stubbornness—practice on other Orientals, the blind passivity, verging almost on annihilation, of the latter against the former. There arises also therefrom the *importance* and thus *economy of oratorical solemnity*, of the utterance of an invisible and in itself unknowable life” (92).

generates it: since Orientals “have such imperfect consciousness of themselves” and “in the exposition of their nature can find no satisfying unity,” they “overload themselves so much with foreign ornamentation,” e.g., clothing “which receives its form and beauty [not] from the human form in its own proper free play, but rather from completely foreign things,” and other accoutrements, items that they put on not “out of love, thus adorning oneself more with one’s own feeling, but rather dazzling things stripped of a life of their own and of a form shaped by life¹¹⁰—gold dressed perhaps in borrowed forms, jewelry united in flowers, and so on.” The second, the treatment of women, is unique: “Womanly feeling and *love of women* alone remained a passion the enjoyment of which was not domination.”¹¹¹ Hegel is not sure whether the explanation for the fact that in some “Oriental nations” it is considered dishonorable to speak of “women and what relates to them” is that the subject reminds men of their weakness, or that they “honored the feminine as something foreign to the remainder of their spirit.” In any case, however, because they “feel that the relation to women can never be what the relation to all other things is, can never be lordship or bondage¹¹², because women unlike other things are to them something which does not admit of being manipulated, and of which they can never become assured,” when it comes to women Orientals often “know no other counsel than

¹¹⁰ That the clothing and bodily ornaments of “Orientals” do not have a form “shaped by life” clearly implies the possibility that dress and accessories can and should have such a form among people whose consciousness of themselves is more developed. This is consistent with Hegel’s mature view that every *Sittlichkeit* or life-world—every spirit of a people as a stage of Spirit, so to speak—has a unity, which is not merely a chaotic aggregate of atomic individuals, but which might be only dimly apparent because it has yet to be made “for itself” as well as “in itself” for that life-world. Hegel’s reasoning here verges on a circularity, however: the gaudiness and artificiality of “Orientals” clothing, jewelry, etc. appear to be proved by as well as the proof of their fixed character and their incomplete consciousness of themselves.

¹¹¹ Since it is so strongly asserted earlier in the fragment that might, force, and domination structure human relations in the Orient, this later remark seems to create an inconsistency; perhaps for Hegel it is just the exception that proves the rule.

¹¹² As it is between men and other men, presumably; this is a rather strange choice of words since Hegel seems to have relations between human beings chiefly in mind when discussing force and domination, not humans’ attitudes toward inanimate objects, where the dynamic of “lordship or bondage” seems inapplicable. In any case, note the remarkable early use of the phrase *Herrschaft oder Knechtschaft*.

to seclude them!”¹¹³ The third and final topic, beards and hygiene—on which the fragment concludes—is related to the character of Orientals for Hegel in the same way that dress and jewelry insofar are. The common and even “very sacred” practice of allowing a beard to grow is “a great act of arbitrariness.” Since cutting the nails is “just as great a mutilation” and circumcision an even worse one, “respect for the perfection of the human form” cannot be claimed as the basis of the custom of beard cultivation. Instead, for Hegel the real reason also lies in the very nature of the fixed Oriental character: “Because in the Oriental mind all worth and value lie in the Infinite Object, because it can attach no value to something existing for itself and having its own life in itself, it must doll itself up from the outside by means of tinsel in which there is no life; it must despite everything make itself into something too, and thus also must seek to hold on most dearly to the beard, which is least essential to its organic totality; it must honor most highly what in itself is most indifferent.”

With respect to Hegel’s emerging philosophy, a few features of “Spirit of the Orientals” that can be discerned in the foregoing account are quite striking. First, Stewart

¹¹³ Hegel’s word is *einzusperren*, “imprison,” which suggests he means physical exclusion from public life, confinement to the home. It should go without saying that insofar as men are responsible for the notion that it is dishonorable to discuss women, that men are the primary actors in society to whom the option presents itself of consigning women to private spaces and who can enforce such a restriction, etc., a relationship of domination—substantial even if not absolute—is rather obviously in effect. Equally importantly, it simply must be recognized that Hegel’s own language points to a fundamental understanding operative for him: it is a given that men are (and are to be understood as) the subjects of discussion, while women are the objects, here being contrasted with “other things” in a way that suggests they themselves are things. This is also evident in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where, as translator H.B. Nisbet acknowledges, “By present-day standards, Hegel’s views on women, like those of many of his contemporaries, are highly discriminatory and even offensive.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1991]), xlv. For important feminist engagements with Hegelian philosophy, see Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jeffrey A. Gauthier, *Hegel and Feminist Social Criticism: Justice, Recognition, and the Feminine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Kimberly Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); Dorothy G. Rogers, *America’s First Women Philosophers: Transplanting Hegel, 1860-1925* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Judith Butler and Catharine Malabou, *Sois mon corps: une lecture contemporaine de la domination et de la servitude chez Hegel* (Paris: Bayard, 2009); Paddy McQueen, *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

observes in a note that one of Hegel's aims in "Spirit of the Orientals" is "to place his particular conception of the Jewish spirit within his wider conception of Oriental culture."¹¹⁴ Since Hegel explicitly mentions Jews in the discussions of women and beard-growing, this is certainly true, yet there is also some apparent incongruity: Hegel claims that Jews lacked other Orientals' "timidity" in discussing sexual relations, which suggests Jews may be a group or people unto themselves, but in the very next paragraph he draws special attention to Jews in the context of beards and circumcision in such a way that it is clear he does consider Jews to be part of the broad class of "Orientals." Second, in "Spirit of the Orientals" Hegel is continuing to develop the idea that "peoples" or "nations" have a particular Spirit, are characterized—even constituted as such—by their distinctive Spirit. This idea, typically associated with Hegel's mature account of world history, is already present in nascent form even in "The Tübingen Essay," where Hegel (clearly under the influence of the pioneering work of Herder) writes, "The spirit of a nation is reflected in its history, its religion, and the degree of its political freedom; and these cannot be taken in isolation when considering either their individual character or their influence on each other. They are bound together as one, like three companions none of whom can do anything without the others even as each benefits from all."¹¹⁵ Finally, the fragment also finds Hegel following a line of thought that over the next few years he would develop into the now-classic account of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology*. Here Hegel is working out the idea perhaps not as prominently but still

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105 n.3.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, 56.

quite overtly: primarily, as Stewart notes, in terms of (his belief in) “the voluntary acceptance of serfdom by Oriental peoples.”¹¹⁶

Arguably, to the modern-day reader of this fragment Hegel’s account of the “Oriental Spirit” may partly appear an honest anthropological and philosophical attempt to understand and portray the distinguishing characteristics of another civilization, but is also a rather plain case of confident if not arrogant overgeneralizing. The latter impression derives markedly, though certainly not exclusively, from the fact that Hegel indeed lumps together distinct and widely varying Asian cultures under the taxonomic label “Oriental” (which is effectively a geographic designation) yet conceives them all as possessing a uniform “character”: fixed, inert, understanding nothing but force or the opposition between submission and mastery in human relationship and interaction, incapable of reconciling the facts of “naked reality” with human consciousness or inner life, and so instead inevitably resorting to “adorning” or “embellishing” that reality in beautiful, astonishing, but ultimately “violent” and “monstrous” ways. It is unclear to what extent Hegel’s pronouncements and his certainty about their accuracy were motivated by the simple self-assuredness of youth, and to what extent they might already reflect rising European chauvinism of a recognizably modern cast—an incipient sense in the general culture and in Hegel personally that the scientific, technological, military, economic, social and political, intellectual, literary, even religious achievements of post-Renaissance Enlightenment Europe were unique and unsurpassed, so unheralded that

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 106 n.4. In the intervening years, Hegel would also write in the *Differenzschrift* that Fichte’s philosophy “offers us a picture of the complete lordship of the intellect and the complete bondage of the living being. It is an edifice in which Reason has no part and which it therefore repudiates. For Reason is bound to find itself most explicitly in its self-shaping as a people (*Volk*), which is the most perfect organization that it can give itself.” G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 148.

they marked the members of the civilization that conceived, pursued, and attained them as superior to all others, apparently necessarily and intrinsically so, perhaps even created separately by God for that purpose and with that destiny. Still, whatever might be ventured from a present-day vantage point about proto-colonialist Eurocentric stereotyping or Orientalist essentializing in “Spirit of the Orientals,” what is perplexing even on the terms of Hegel’s own engagement is the relationship between the “Spirit” and the “character” of “the Orientals.” Is it the Spirit unique to “the Orientals” that conditions or creates their character, for Hegel? Seemingly not, for according to the fragment it is on the contrary their fixed and unchangeable character that causes them to act and think in specific ways, and thus results in their spirit having the quality of, or just *being*, “reverence for the actual in its actuality and embellishment of it in fantasy.” But then what evidential basis is there for this deep, essential fixedness of Oriental character? In the fragment none is offered, so the declaration has the status of an assumption, one that Hegel either makes unwittingly or thinks is a self-evident fact in no need of justification. Someone who, like Hegel, is not in a position to recognize this assumption or simply agrees with it might have no problem allowing it and no trouble taking the rest of Hegel’s reasoning seriously; on the other hand, anyone who does not find there to be a compelling reason to accept that all “Orientals” just are a certain way may find that Hegel’s argument never gets off the ground.

C. Other fragments and unpublished essays: “The Life of Jesus,” “The Positivity of the Christian Religion,” and “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate”

From a collection of early theological fragments separate from the “Fragments of Historical Studies” and believed to date to 1793-1794 when Hegel was in Bern, three

additional references to the Orient can be gleaned.¹¹⁷ The first comes as Hegel is arguing that the conception of God in some religions reflects “the original childlike spirit” of the people even if the nation has since matured. The “naïve religious consciousness” sees God as powerful but also, anthropomorphically and in keeping with behaviors of terrestrial rulers, occasionally moody or capricious, whose favor can be curried and who is best approached with care: “And as has long been done with oriental potentates,” Hegel continues, “and as the guileless still do with patrons and benefactors, one sacrifices to him a portion of the gifts (the happiness and satisfaction) that nature bestows on mankind, culling one’s first or finest fruits as voluntary payment for whatever trust or joy one experiences.”¹¹⁸ The second comment is made in the context of a discussion of the merits of subjective religion relative to objective religion: “So long as no provision is made for the imagination (contrary to the Greek practice), the Christian religion remains a dreary and melancholic affair—something oriental, neither grown in our soil nor readily assimilable.”¹¹⁹ The third and final reference is merely a casual geographical mention, but comes at a very interesting moment. Hegel has yet again been discussing the “respect for the morality of the Christian religion” shown by non-believers and even those opposed to Christianity through their behaviors and conduct, their “practical moral doctrines” (as the subheading of the fragment goes).¹²⁰ After communicating a preference for Christianity à la John the Baptist and Jesus, i.e., “Repent and believe in the good tidings,” over that of

¹¹⁷ In Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, translators Peter Fuss and John Dobbins call these simply “Berne Fragments,” though they select them from Herman Nohl’s 1907 collection *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* where they are grouped under the title “National Religion and Christianity” (see Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, v). Fuss and Dobbins cite multiple sources in dating the Bern fragments to the years 1793-1794. See Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, 6-13 and 59-103, especially 59 n.1, 65 n.9, 101 n.28.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

the apostles, i.e., “Believe in Christ,” Hegel suggests the latter has been much more dominant in subsequent centuries. He then, rather disappointedly and disparagingly, casts the history of Christian proselytizing in such terms: “[The apostles] were satisfied when a multitude of generally ignorant people allowed themselves to be so bedazzled by an hour or two of oratory that they believed the apostles’ words outright and let themselves be baptized; thus were they instantly made Christians for life. Having been carried on for centuries, this manner of conversion is practiced in essentially the same way even today on the banks of the Ganges, the Orinoco, and the St. Lawrence River.”¹²¹

In 1795, possibly shortly after but perhaps as much as a few years before composing the “Spirit of the Orientals” fragment¹²², Hegel drafted “The Life of Jesus,” an essay on Jesus’ life and moral teachings that combines what he initially found compelling about Kant’s ethical philosophy with the views on Christianity and folk religion that he had been refining since coming to them in the course of his theological studies at the Tübingen *Stift*.¹²³ It is also clear that the Lessing-inspired ecumenicism and

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 90-91. In this critical remark about proselytizing Hegel also seems to have colonialism in mind, since India and the “New World” were still the focal points of the European colonialist project in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Juxtaposing this statement with the following one, also in the Bern fragments, provides an intriguing sketch of Hegel’s early views about colonialism, treatment of “natives,” and slavery: “How little [objective religion] has been able to overcome the corruption of all classes, the barbarity of the times, or the crude prejudices of the common people. Opponents of the Christian religion, whose hearts were moved to pity for their fellow men by the history of the Crusades, the discovery of America, and the current slave trade, and whose hearts bled when, after reading of these shining events, they weighed the long chain of royal corruption and wholesale national decay in which the Christian religion has played such an outstanding role, even while its teachers and servants indulged in all sorts of declamations concerning the excellence and general usefulness of their services—these opponents must have been filled with a hatred so bitter that her [Christianity’s] defenders were prompted to ascribe to them a demonic malice of heart”(69).

¹²² See notes 8, 9, and 10 and corresponding text above.

¹²³ The exact nature of Hegel’s aim in attempting this combination or synthesis—not to mention the extent to which it achieved the desired effect—is debatable. T.M. Knox did not include the essay in his English translation of Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings* “because it is little more than a forced attempt to depict Jesus as a teacher of what is in substance Kant’s ethics”(v). Fuss and Dobbins, however, argue that the Kantian overtones of the essay may be misleading. That Kantian philosophy and ethics influence “The Life of Jesus” cannot be disputed, but, “As Hegel’s careful restructuring and rewording of one episode after another makes abundantly clear, his Jesus is meant to be a universal representative of universally valid

inter-religious tolerance of “The Tübingen Essay” were still on Hegel’s mind, since in “The Life of Jesus” he reiterates the sentiment about the moral equality of different faiths from the former essay, complete with the reference to Indian religion. This time, however—rather improbably, because anachronistically, and so perhaps consciously on Hegel’s part—Jesus himself utters the term in Hegel’s creative retelling of his life. Yet, again, the word “Brahma” appears exactly as it had in 1793, merely one in a list of gods of various faiths. Hegel has Jesus say, in response to being asked whether many human beings can attain happiness:

“Each individual struggles on his own to find the narrow path of a good life, and many who make the attempt miss it. But once the innkeeper has locked his doors, and you come knocking and calling out for him to open up, he will answer that he does not know you. And if you then remind him of a time when you did eat, drink, and listen to his tales with the other guests, he will say: ‘Yes, you ate and drank with me, and listened to what I had to say; but now you’ve turned so rotten that you’re no friend of mine. Go away!’ Thus many who hail from morning or evening, from noon or midnight, who worship Zeus or Brahma or Odin, will find favor; but among those who are so proud of what they know of God, yet whose lives do dishonor to this higher knowledge even as they imagine themselves to be first and best, many will be rejected.”¹²⁴

The admonition that would-be Christians must make their faith a matter of act and practice, not merely of creed and doctrine, is unique to this version of the passage.

Besides the above, there are two other passing, partly parenthetical remarks concerning “the Orient” in “The Life of Jesus.” They are notable because they indicate that Hegel’s conception of “the Orient” is loose or shifting, but they can be listed without further comment:

truths. From Hegel’s own point of view, he is not so much Kantianizing the New Testament as debarbarizing it.” Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, 14-15.

¹²⁴ Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, 136.

1) “Jesus rode (as is quite common in the Orient) on an ass.”¹²⁵

2) “Then in the manner of the Orientals (or the Arabs, who to this day promote lasting friendship by sharing the same piece of bread and drinking from the same chalice), Jesus served bread to each of them...”¹²⁶

A few brief passages occurring in two remaining early essays that Hegel did not publish should be acknowledged at this point. The first, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion,” which Hegel began writing in Bern in 1795-1796 and finished in Frankfurt in 1800, contains two references to India. In the first of these, after quoting from Lessing’s *Nathan* once again—here making mention only of Jewish-Christian fellowship, no Brahma (or Zeus or Odin)—Hegel comments on the modern decline in missionary zeal in Christianity, as an objective or “positive” religion that has spread worldwide:

...the efforts directed against the heathen in India and America can only be called inadequate in comparison with what might be expected from the multitude of nations who together make up Christendom... Even though this extraordinarily swift spread of Christianity constitutes a great proof of its truth and of divine providence, still it is not uncommonly the case today that the edifying stories of conversions in Malabar, Paraguay, or California do not arouse interest because of the pious activities of their authors, because of the preaching of Christ’s name on the Ganges or the Mississippi, or because of the increase in Christ’s kingdom; on the contrary, they are valuable in the eyes of many who call themselves Christians rather for what may be drawn from them to enrich geography, natural history, and anthropology.¹²⁷

In the second, as a rationale for rejecting the idea that ancient German mythical and religious imagery can be revived as “national” imagery for the modern-day “Teuton” people, Hegel insists, “The old German imagery has nothing in our day to connect or

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 155. “Them” refers to Jesus’ friends, the disciples; the occasion is the Last Supper.

¹²⁷ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 94.

adapt itself to; it stands as cut off from the whole circle of our ideas, opinions, and beliefs, and is as strange to us as the imagery of Ossian or of India.”¹²⁸ The other draft essay, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” dates to 1798-1799 and contains just one reference to “the Orient” in the broad sense. There, Hegel depicts Judaism (“the religion of Abraham”), or more precisely the spirit of the society or the people among whom the Jewish religion arose, in a manner quite similar to that of “the Oriental” in general in “Spirit of the Orientals”: in terms of might and force, domination and submission, mastery and slavery, and mere “opposition.” Hegel describes Moses’ giving of laws to the Jewish people as freeing them from one yoke but putting them under another, nevertheless fittingly enough since the Jewish people were slavish and passive even upon their liberation from Egyptian bondage. “Moses,” Hegel writes, “sealed his legislation with an orientally beautiful threat of the loss of all pleasure and all fortune. He brought before the slavish spirit the image of itself, namely, the terror of physical force.”¹²⁹

Finally, a note on Hegel’s earliest printed writings: *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (1801), Hegel’s “first acknowledged publication”¹³⁰, contains no explicit references to India, nor even any clear implicit ones. In *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), however, Hegel does make one passing mention of India in the context of his critique of Jacobi. Alleging that an essay of Jacobi’s on Kant “proceeds like a burlesque display and delights itself in the cooking up of absurdities,”

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 149. This statement corroborates the idea that Hegel regarded India as truly foreign to Germanic peoples and Romantics’ captivation by its culture therefore disappointing and indefensible.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹³⁰ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, 1. That is, it was the first publication that Hegel put his name to; he had anonymously published his translation of a tract on Bernese politics, with an introduction and notes, one year earlier.

Hegel takes issue with Jacobi's "conception of the relation between the so-called faculties" as Kant presents it.¹³¹ As Hegel sees it, Kant's account amounts to an "authentically rational construction" of reason: it "posits all of [the 'faculties'] in *one* identity," so that reason is truly a unity, a "higher level of the preceding relative anthithesis." Jacobi, however, fails to grasp this and instead takes Kant to be claiming that multiple different faculties "*rest* upon one another." This notion motivates Jacobi's critique but, because it is a misconception, simultaneously disables it. Hegel first quotes Jacobi speaking directly to Kant, then skewers Jacobi's view. The reference to India occurs in this context, and the relevant passage needs to be quoted at some length in order for the full sense to be clear:

"You [Kant] let Reason *rest on* the intellect, the intellect *on* imagination, and imagination *on* sensibility; the sensibility in turn rests *on* imagination again as a faculty of *a priori* intuitions; and this imagination finally rests—on what? Plainly on nothing. Here then is the true turtle, the absolute ground, that which gives being to all beings. From itself alone, it produces itself and being itself the possibility of everything possible [...] it produces not only what is possible but also—perhaps!—the impossible." What a beautiful bond Jacobi establishes between the faculties! The idea that there is something which rests on itself—though certainly it is not the imagination in so far as it is isolated from the totality—seems to Jacobi to be as unphilosophical as the image that those foolish Indians invented, who let the world be carried by a being that rests on itself; and not only is it unphilosophical, it is also sacrilegious. Everyone knows from his earliest years and from psychology, that imagination, after all, is a faculty for making things up, so Jacobi would have it that philosophy seeks to convince us through an imagination of this sort that the whole of human life is actually nothing but a fabric without beginning and end, a fabric made of mere delusion and deception, of phantoms and dreams; and that men have invented and fabricated for themselves religion and language, etc. He scolds and orates interminably on this theme in the *Pocketbook*. In brief, Jacobi takes [the transcendental] imagination and self-originating

¹³¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 125.

Reason to be something arbitrary and subjective, and he takes sensuous experience as eternal truth.¹³²

Here Hegel is evidently affirming “self-originating Reason” as a kind of emergent phenomenon, which arises out of the self-sublating antitheses of “lower-level” processes but does not rely on any of them for ontological grounding or as its substrate. By scorning both Jacobi’s mistaken idea that imagination is “the true turtle, the absolute ground” on which Kant makes reason rest, and Jacobi’s attempt to repudiate reason on the basis of this erroneous claim, Hegel also seems to be stressing the wrongheadedness of insisting on a first cause, unmoved mover, or “final turtle,” at least in the domain of mind (i.e., human reason) but perhaps even in metaphysics in general. So it is far from obvious that he actually means to show respect for Indian thought in the passage above. Hegel might intend the phrase “those foolish Indians” to be taken as an epithet Jacobi would use in his ignorance. It seems equally likely, however, that he is employing it straightforwardly: Indians *are* foolish for positing a self-supporting cosmic tortoise as the scaffolding for the world, but in imagining that Kant’s account of reason resorts to a similarly silly hypothesis Jacobi is only demonstrating the extent of his own philosophical incompetence.

II. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and later published works

A. The Phenomenology

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, scholars who have discussed Hegel’s attention to India or Asia have typically focused largely or entirely on his lectures. In doing so, it seems, they implicitly share Viyagappa’s view that passages in the

¹³² *Ibid.*, 126.

Phenomenology of Spirit cannot be taken as obviously referring even to “the Orient,” let alone India proper, due to their breadth and generality. Though Viyagappa specifically calls attention to several sections of the *Phenomenology* as “correspond[ing] to Hegel’s description of the spirit of the Orient in general, such as the passages on ‘Lordship and Slavery,’ ‘The Unhappy Consciousness,’ ‘The Self-estranged Spirit,’ ‘Natural Religion,’ and ‘The Plants and Animals,’” the matter ends there.¹³³ Perhaps Viyagappa’s position finds a measure of support in Wilhelm Halbfass’s remark that references to India in Hegel’s early writings “do not demonstrate any specific interest, nor a level of information which would be in any sense remarkable.”¹³⁴ Yet Halbfass immediately introduces a counterpoint that complicates the picture: “However, from an early time on, we notice a negative attitude to Romanticism, and this includes a negative response to the glorification and mystification of the Orient. The anti-Romantic perspective provides the background and an important point of departure for Hegel’s approach to India. His initial response to the Indian tradition is an expression and continuation of his response to the contemporary Western phenomena of Romanticism and ‘Orientalism.’”¹³⁵ The account in Chapter 1 explored Hegel’s ambivalence toward Romanticism, and also sought to show how India for Hegel was bound up early on with the aims and ideas of the Romantics, some of which he shared and others of which he contested or rejected.¹³⁶ At the very least, then, the *Phenomenology* might be considered relevant to an account of Hegel’s

¹³³ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 7.

¹³⁴ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 85. Of course, the wager of the first section of this chapter is that while such early references may not show *Hegel* to be particularly interested in India or remarkably informed about it yet, they are—partly for that very reason—nonetheless interesting and informative.

¹³⁵ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 85.

¹³⁶ As Robert Cowan has put it, in the *Phenomenology* Hegel “both criticize[s] the Early Romantics and incorporate[s] much of their thought into his own system.” Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765-1885* (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), 131.

conception of India and Indian philosophy if in that text he levels a critique of Romanticism that anticipates, resembles, or is connected with his critical appraisal of India. In fact the *Phenomenology* does contain such a critique, and moreover at a few points in the text Hegel's discussion unmistakably proceeds with reference to Eastern cultures specifically, obscure and devoid of proper names as the language might be on the whole.

That Romanticism is a target of criticism in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is perhaps well enough known not to require a thorough rehashing here, but some discussion should still prove useful before proceeding to the instances in which Indian (or, generally, "Oriental") traditions receive mention in the text. After all, not just the extent of Hegel's Romanticism or anti-Romanticism but also the very purpose, structure, and contents of the *Phenomenology* remain subjects of serious debate for historians and philosophers. Hegel scholar and translator Richard Kroner indicates these multiple sites of controversy when he writes that the *Phenomenology* "is without doubt one of the strangest books ever written...[M]any obscure passages remain open to interpretation. The work claims to be rational, but it shows every evidence of having been written under inspiration. In fact, it unites extremes seldom or never before united. It is vehemently anti-Romantic, yet it is undoubtedly the most Romantic of all Hegel's writings."¹³⁷ One of the single most famous sentences of the *Phenomenology*, occurring first in the preface but recurring in slightly altered formulations at various points in the text, epitomizes the Hegelian absolute-idealist philosophy of the *Phenomenology* in distinction to competing strains of thought such as subjective idealism and Romanticism. Hegel declares, "In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on

¹³⁷ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 43.

grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.”¹³⁸

Subsequent philosophers and scholars have ascribed immense significance to this declaration, and with good reason. For one thing, the pair of terms “substance” and “subject” highlights the central importance of modernity for Hegel as the exclusive historical moment at which Spirit is poised to arrive at self-consciousness—or, more precisely, as the moment at which it has already succeeded in doing so. As discussed above, in ancient Greece, according to Hegel, Spirit existed immediately insofar as human beings were part of an “ethical substance,” within which they were wholly identified with and identifiable according to their social roles. Subjectivity resulted from the irreconcilable conflicts that these roles necessarily generated, exemplified for Hegel by the tragedy of *Antigone*. The emergence and intensification of the free subject as self-aware agent, which reached dizzying new heights in the early modern period with Bacon, Descartes, and the Enlightenment, marked a movement of Spirit that it would be futile to hope to undo or reverse. Self-conscious Spirit cannot be a return to pre-subjective ethical substance, a primordial oneness of everything, but must make room for independent individuality.

Moreover, the statement that “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject,” is key to understanding what Hegel took to be a fundamental philosophical difference between himself and his contemporaries. In the context of what was said about Spinoza and Romanticism in Chapter 1, it must be noted that on Hegel’s interpretation—however contestable it might be—Spinozism is perhaps unparalleled in articulating subjectivity as substance, but it is

¹³⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 1977), 9-10 (§17).

incapable of perceiving substance also as subject. Romantic thought, for its part, ends up (as the preface to the *Phenomenology* alleges) oscillating between two opposed but equally one-sided poles. One is an overemphasis on independent subjectivity, which insofar as it prioritizes subjective consciousness in aesthetic experience and as “intellectual intuition,” duly acknowledges and values the subjective, but in effect wants to do away with substance, or at the very least to relegate it to a mysterious, still all-too-Kantian “beyond” that is only dimly and periodically accessible, if at all, to the rational mind. The other, a Spinoza-inspired return to substance, commits the same mistake that Spinoza’s philosophy does in prioritizing the objective and leaving little room for the articulation of free, self-determining subjectivity.¹³⁹

For this reason (among many others that could be offered), it is credible that an occasional target of the *Phenomenology* is the high Romanticism Hegel detected in some of his contemporaries. He viewed the exaltation of subjective pure intuition as tantamount to abjuration of reason; Romantics’ common-enough fascination with the East or the Orient as an exotic source of poetic, aesthetic, and mystical insight facilitated this, and so only made matters worse. In effect, as Halbfass has observed, despite “the apparent inconsistency” between Romanticism’s vain, narcissistic emphasis on abstract subjectivity and its fascination with the exotic East, the truth for Hegel is that “the ‘Orientalizing’ attitude...only aggravates the condition” of the peculiarly Romantic ailment.¹⁴⁰ The *Phenomenology*’s preface, for example, in pointing out the “impoverishment” of Spirit in the modern world, declares that “whoever wants to shroud in a mist the manifold variety of his earthly existence and of thought, in order to pursue

¹³⁹ Additionally, of course, Hegel found the subjective idealisms of Kant and Fichte to be wanting.

¹⁴⁰ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 94.

the indeterminate enjoyment of this indeterminate divinity, may look where he likes to find all this.”¹⁴¹ It goes on, however, to insist that locating and partaking in such enjoyment cannot serve as a substitute for Knowing: “Still less must this complacency which abjures Science claim that such rapturous haziness is superior to Science.”¹⁴² The same train of thought concludes with a remark that charts the vast chasm separating such immersion in feeling from the rational life of Spirit, for Hegel. He writes, “Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.”¹⁴³ Here, clearly, edification and insipidity refer to bad tendencies to which Hegel thinks Romanticism is ever vulnerable—and which are only further enabled by fixation on the “mystic East”—while the sentence’s final phrase describes the virtuous activity of reasoning Spirit. Hegel’s aversion to the attempt to take refuge in pure intuition or feeling, which to him entails the effective abandonment of reason, is abundantly clear here.

The case could be made, then—and Halbfass for one has indeed made it—that Hegel’s desire to temper the Romantics’ exoticizing of the Orient therefore gives a sharp edge to his select few direct statements in the *Phenomenology* about the region. The most pointed references occur in §684, §689, and §803 of the book. In the first of these, which is the commencement of the first “sub-shape” of reason in religion, “natural religion,” Hegel says that whether a belief in a particular “determination of the religious Spirit” is true or false depends on the resemblance of Spirit as it really is to the representation given it in the religion (via founding narrative, iconography, doctrine, etc.).

¹⁴¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 5 (§9).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 6 (§10).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10 (§19).

Consequently, “the incarnation of God which occurs in oriental religion has no truth, because the actual Spirit of that religion is without this reconciliation” between Spirit and the determination of it via representation.¹⁴⁴ In other words, Hegel claims that Oriental culture in itself has attained to neither the reality nor the conception of Spirit as both substance and subject, and so its religion(s) cannot provide Spirit the opportunity to behold and comprehend itself *as* subject in substance, and thereby to be reconciled. The second remark occurs shortly after the first, and is noteworthy for equating “the innocence of the *flower religion*,” by which Hegel most likely means Buddhism (though he could be referring to Hinduism or even to some kind of generalized pan-Indian “religion”), with “the self-less idea of self.”¹⁴⁵ Finally, and similarly, in the section on Absolute Knowing toward the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel states that when once a religious community, “so far as it is at first the substance of absolute Spirit,” expresses that Spirit as the unity of extension and being, “and in so doing has revived in thought the *Substance* of the Orient, Spirit at once recoils in horror from the abstract unity, from this *self-less* substantiality, and against it affirms individuality.”¹⁴⁶ This further evinces Hegel’s view that Eastern religions accord no place to Spirit in its subjective capacity, and hence that even if a philosophy of pure, abstract, or undifferentiated substance seems on the surface to be a good antidote to the modern European overemphasis on free agency, subjectivity, and individuality, it nevertheless offers no lastingly satisfying solution.

Thus, in at least at a few places in the *Phenomenology* Hegel’s mind is on Eastern or Oriental culture generally and, arguably, even India specifically. Bradley L. Herling

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 420.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 488-489.

has claimed that §689 in particular is “Hegel’s first reading of Indian culture,” and that the section “introduce[s] many of the themes that would persist in Hegel’s interpretation of India: it is a realm of pantheism, passivity, selflessness, and amorality.”¹⁴⁷ Nicholas A. Germana has gone even further in a recent essay, echoing Herling’s ideas but adding the contention that “the basic place of India in Hegel’s philosophical system was laid out in the *Phenomenology*, and did not change in any fundamental way over the course of the next twenty-four years.”¹⁴⁸

B. *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia*

Viyagappa has examined in detail the lengthy “exoteric” notes concerning India and pantheism that Hegel inserted into the 1831 second edition of the *Science of Logic* and the 1827 second edition of the *Encyclopedia*. Since these important remarks were only present in the revised editions, they will be taken up in section 4 below and also in Chapter 3—though it is worth noting here that the remark Hegel added to the *Encyclopedia* appears in a prominent place, namely at the very end and culmination of the work: in the last subsection, “Philosophy,” of the last section, “Absolute Mind,” of the third part of the text, the *Philosophy of Mind* (*Philosophie des Geistes*). Hegel’s two texts from the 1810s otherwise contain little more than passing references to India.

Specifically, there are two in the *Science of Logic*:

- 1) “As we know, in the oriental systems, principally in Buddhism, *nothing*, the void, is the absolute principle.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 220-221.

¹⁴⁸ Nicholas A. Germana, “India and Hegel’s ‘Scientific’ Method in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” in Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T. McGetchin, eds., *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 25-36, p.26.

¹⁴⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 83.

2) “With this wholly abstract purity of continuity, that is, indeterminateness and vanity of conception, it is indifferent whether this abstraction is called space, pure intuiting, or pure thinking; it is altogether the same as what the Indian calls Brahma, when for years on end, physically motionless and equally unmoved in sensation, conception, fantasy, desire and so on, looking only at the tip of his nose, he says inwardly only *Om, Om, Om*, or else nothing at all. This dull, empty consciousness, understood as consciousness, is—*being*.”¹⁵⁰

Across the three volumes of the *Encyclopedia* there are also just two, if considering only Hegel’s own “remarks” (*Anmerkungen*) following numbered paragraphs of the text and leaving out pupils’ later “additions” (*Zusätze*)¹⁵¹:

1) “The Orientals sought to overcome the first defect [from which predicates used to characterize God suffer, namely that they have a limited content and are thus inadequate], in the determination of God, for instance, by means of the many *names* they attributed to him. At the same time, however, there were supposed to be *infinitely* many of those names.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵¹ See note 65 below. There indeed are additional references in *Encyclopedia Zusätze*: e.g., 113 (§63), 120 (n.17 to §71), 175 (§112), and 224 (§151) in the *Logic* (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010]); 88 (§275) in the *Philosophy of Nature* (G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, Part II: Philosophy of Nature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970]); and 31 (§389), 39 (§392), 43-44 (§393), 46 (§394), 116 (§406), and 149 (§411) in the *Philosophy of Mind* (G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part III: Philosophy of Mind* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971]).

¹⁵² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 70 (§29).

2) “The cow, the monkey, or the Brahman or Lama do not count as God for the Indian thanks to so-called mediated knowledge, reasoning, and syllogism; instead he *believes* it.”¹⁵³

C. *Philosophy of Right*

On Viyagappa’s interpretation, §355 of the *Philosophy of Right* (1821) is “properly speaking” the only passage in any text published during Hegel’s lifetime “which dwell[s] upon the character of the Orient in general.”¹⁵⁴ This paragraph appears in “Ethical Life,” the third, final, and largest part of the *Philosophy of Right*. It is the sixth-to-last numbered paragraph in the book and, unlike many of the numbered sections, features a specific subheading—“The Oriental Realm.” For Hegel the Oriental is the first of four “world-historical realms” that Spirit enters upon, or in (as) which it manifests, over the course of its “gaining absolute knowledge of itself and thereby freeing its consciousness from the form of natural immediacy and so coming to itself.”¹⁵⁵ These realms have four corresponding structuring principles. Social organization and life in each of the four realms follow the ordering principle of each realm. The principle of the Oriental realm is “the shape of the *substantial* spirit as the identity in which individuality is submerged in its essence, and in which it does not yet have legitimacy for itself.”¹⁵⁶ The worldview that is based on this “shape” of Spirit is “inwardly undivided and substantial,” affirming and reflecting that shape. The consequences are diverse but quite profound, and it is worth quoting the paragraph at length to gain a clear sense of Hegel’s convictions regarding “the Orient” in the early 1820s:

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 121 (§72).

¹⁵⁴ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 6-7.

¹⁵⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 376 (§352)

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 376-377 (§353).

According to this view [i.e., the one proper to the Oriental realm], the secular government is a theocracy, the ruler is also a high priest or a god, the constitution and legislation are at the same time religion, and religious and moral commandments – or rather usages – are also laws of right and of the state. Within this magnificent whole, the individual personality has no rights and disappears altogether, external nature is immediately divine or an adornment of the god, and the history of the actual world is poetry. The distinctions which develop between the various aspects of customs, government, and the state take the place of laws, and even where customs are simple, these distinctions become ponderous, elaborate, and superstitious ceremonies – the accidents of personal power and arbitrary rule – and the divisions of social estates harden into a natural system of castes. Consequently, the Oriental state lives only in its movement, and since nothing in it is stable and what is firmly established is fossilized, this movement turns outwards and becomes an elemental rage and devastation. The inner calm [of such a state] is that of private life and of submersion in weakness and exhaustion.¹⁵⁷

In the remark to the paragraph Hegel writes, interestingly, that this first world-historical “moment,” i.e., the principle of the Oriental realm, “at which *spirituality* is still *substantial and natural* constitutes, as a form, the absolute beginning of every state’s history.”¹⁵⁸ A few things about the foregoing passage are notable: for one, the claim that “the history of the actual world is poetry” anticipates Hegel’s later claims, in his lectures on the philosophy of history and elsewhere, that Indians have no history.¹⁵⁹ For another, with the exception of one earlier mention in the *Philosophy of Right* (see the following paragraph) this is the first time Hegel mentions caste explicitly, and it is already presented as something “hardened” and rigid in the Eastern world. Finally, the last two sentences recall the viewpoint of the “Spirit of the Orientals” fragment, but they are difficult to understand even dialectically: why, for example, does the “movement” of the

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 377-378 (§355).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ E.g., Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 61-62.

Oriental state turn outwards in rage and destruction on the basis of there being “nothing...stable” in the state (except, apparently, what is “firmly established” and “fossilized”)? And why, even if there *is* a corresponding “inner calm,” must it be one of “submersion and weakness in exhaustion”?

While the discussion in “The Oriental Realm” remains quite general—Viyagappa is absolutely correct in this regard—and thus involves a broader geographical and cultural domain than India alone, Hegel does bring up India several times elsewhere in *The Philosophy of Right*. In the remark¹⁶⁰ to §5, discussing the will in the aspect of abstract indeterminacy, Hegel says that the only kind of freedom proper to will in this aspect is negative freedom; he continues, “This is the freedom of the void, which is raised to the status of an actual shape and passion. If it remains purely theoretical, it becomes in the religious realm the Hindu fanaticism of pure contemplation; but if it turns to actuality, it becomes in the realm of both politics and religion the fanaticism of destruction...”¹⁶¹ At §206, in the context of a wider treatment of estates as a development in the sphere of civil society, India comes up as a contrasting example to modern western societies where individuality, or in Hegel’s words “the principle of particularity and subjective arbitrariness,” is given its proper due. “The division of the whole into estates,” Hegel

¹⁶⁰ The *Philosophy of Right*, like the *Encyclopedia*, consists of numbered sections, *Anmerkungen* or “Remarks,” and *Zusätze* or “Additions.” The legitimacy of the latter is contested—though they supposedly reproduce Hegel’s own words during lectures, through which he elaborated further on obscure or condensed articulations in the paragraphs and remarks, they are actually taken from the lecture notes of two of his pupils. This in itself is perhaps less a problem, though, than the method that a third pupil of Hegel’s, Eduard Gans, used in incorporating the additions into his 1833 and 1840 editions of the *Philosophy of Right*; as English translator H.B. Nisbet observes, the additions “should, in fact, be treated with caution, not so much because they are based on the notes of students (which actually seem to be conscientious and reasonably accurate in this case), but because Gans’s extracts are highly selective, combining material from two distinct lecture series and consisting largely of paraphrase rather than verbatim quotation” and at times even adding “comments of his own for which there is no precedent in the sources” (Nisbet, “Translator’s Preface” in Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, xxxvi). Hence, although there are also *Zusätze* in the *Philosophy of Right* that discuss India, out of an excess of caution only those mentions occurring in the main text—that is, in numbered sections and remarks to them—are enumerated here.

¹⁶¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 37 (§5).

writes in the remark, happened in the East and the ancient world “*objectively and of its own accord*, because it is rational *in itself*; but the principle of subjective particularity was at the same time denied its rights, as when, for example, the allocation of individuals to specific estates was left...to birth *alone*, as in the *Indian caste-system*.”¹⁶² Subjectivity denied in this way “consequently shows itself – since it likewise appears as an essential moment – as a hostile element, as a corruption of the social order” and ultimately “either overthrows the social order...or if the social order survives as a ruling power...appears as inner corruption and complete degeneration, as was to some extent the case in *Sparta* and as is now entirely the case in *India*.” Finally, in an unusually long remark to §270, which deals with the universality of the state, Hegel discusses the relation between the state and religion. Introducing the complexities of the issue, Hegel warns that “it should not be forgotten that religion can take on a form which leads to the harshest servitude within the fetters of superstition and to the debasement of human beings to a level below that of the animals (as among the Egyptians and Indians, who venerate animals as higher beings).”¹⁶³

III. Lectures

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 237-238 (§206), emphasis in original. This appears to be the first time Hegel speaks about caste in India explicitly; this mention and the one in “The Oriental Realm” (§355) may be the entirety of his published direct statements on the subject outside the *Bhagavadgītā* review essays.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 291 (§270). Hegel’s reminder here suggests not only that “advanced” religions like that of the Greeks and even Christianity pass through such phases in their development, but perhaps even that no religion can ever be entirely clear of the danger— that each one remains on some level vulnerable to such perversions or regressions into superstition and dehumanization regardless of its achievements. This may serve to temper accusations of Eurocentric or racist bias; in this statement Hegel appears to acknowledge and accept the basic humanity of all peoples. On the other hand, the debased religions of Egyptians and Indians—with their animal worship—somehow mark them off as both static and inferior, almost categorically, belying the apparent sympathy in the “everyone has gone, or could go, through this” sentiment.

The preceding two sections of this chapter have dealt with both published and unpublished works of Hegel's up to the early 1820s. The decade of the 1820s, or more precisely the period of his tenure in Berlin from 1819 to 1831, was a busy one for Hegel in terms of lectures. Many, indeed the majority, of his lecture courses on aesthetics, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of history or world history, and the history of philosophy were delivered in Berlin: aesthetics four times (1820-21, 1823, 1826, 1828-29), philosophy of religion four times (1821, 1824, 1827, 1831), philosophy of (world) history five times (1822-23, 1824-25, 1826-27, 1828-29, 1830-31). An important exception is the history of philosophy; Hegel lectured on the history of philosophy a total of ten times in his life, but three of these were before taking up tenure in Berlin—1805-06, 1816-17, and 1817-18. From 1819 on, he gave a course on the history of philosophy every other year: 1819, 1820-21, 1823-24, 1825-26, 1827-28, 1829-30, and 1831 (a course that was cut short by Hegel's death).¹⁶⁴

All of Hegel's lecture manuscripts and notes remained unpublished during his lifetime, although student transcripts of his lectures were circulated and even sold on occasion. The story of their editions by various figures (often involving decisions to combine portions of manuscript from separate courses), their appearance in print, and their translation into English (often with further editing and combining) is long, incredibly complex, and still far from completed. It is thus unfeasible to offer a course-by-course analysis of even one of Hegel's Berlin lecture series, let alone all four, in spite of the fact that it has typically been with reference to these lectures (whether direct or only secondhand) that charges of Eurocentrism and racism in Hegel have been leveled.

¹⁶⁴ See Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 116.

For the same reason, however—i.e., that so much more attention has been paid to Hegel’s lectures than to his other works—there is less need to devote a great deal of space and time to a painstaking review of the lectures. For the purpose of providing a general picture of Hegel’s ideas, opinions, and judgments about India and Indian philosophy, a representative sampling of remarks both will have to, and can, suffice here.¹⁶⁵

A. Aesthetics

In *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, which incorporates material from the 1823, 1826, and 1828-29 lecture courses, Hegel has a fair amount to say about India in the course of presenting a philosophy of art that accords with his speculative idealism as the latter had taken shape into the 1820s. The first part of the lectures articulates the idea or concept, in the precise Hegelian sense, of artistic beauty. Here, it is worth noting, Hegel insists that the “highest content which” can find expression in art is freedom, since this is in fact “the highest destiny of the spirit.”¹⁶⁶ Freedom, which is also final or absolute truth, i.e., truth according to the concept of truth, is likewise the standpoint of religion and philosophy (as well as what is communicated by them), but art nevertheless “belongs to the absolute sphere of the spirit” and in terms of its content “stands on one and the same ground” as they do.¹⁶⁷ Art properly speaking expresses the Idea, which “is alone the genuinely actual,” as beauty; or, to put it another way, art is the self-realization of the Idea of beauty in a “sensuous” medium, for “when truth in this its external existence is

¹⁶⁵ In addition to the four sections of the third and final chapter in Viyagappa’s study on Hegel and Indian philosophy (128-243), which analyze the lecture courses extensively and are crucial to the present account, Tibebu’s *Hegel and the Third World* makes frequent and effective use of all four series of lectures and is a helpful source. It should be kept in mind that despite lecturing many times on these subjects, Hegel never prepared any of his manuscripts for publication and may not have wholeheartedly approved of any of the editions that did see the light of day following his death.

¹⁶⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., trans. by T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), I: 97. Henceforth *LA*.

¹⁶⁷ *LA*, I: 101.

present to consciousness immediately, and when the Concept remains immediately in unity with its external appearance, the Idea is not only true but beautiful. Therefore the beautiful is characterized as the pure appearance of the Idea to sense.”¹⁶⁸ The remainder of the lectures present, or embody, a schema that follows this conceptualization of the Idea of beauty, with the second part tracing the historical-logical development of the ideal of beauty through particular forms of art (the “symbolic,” “classical,” and “romantic”), and the third part systematizing the Idea of beauty in art also in terms of specific arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry).

The three discussions of India that are of considerable length fit, apparently neatly enough, into this account. In the first of these, Hegel argues that the Indian conception of Brahma as an abstract or indeterminate Absolute results in art that must be understood as a confused “symbolism of the fantastic,” where consciousness has progressed out of immediate identification of the Absolute with externally existent phenomena but has not yet advanced to “conscious” symbolism, and instead is only capable of trying to “heal the breach again by building the separated parts together in a fanciful way.”¹⁶⁹ The discussion runs to fourteen pages of text, and cannot be analyzed here with sufficient attention to its depth and complexity. In the course of it, however, Hegel describes the state of Indian consciousness and imagination categorically as one of “continuing intoxication, this crazing and crazedness,” which veers between wild sensuous excess and the extreme abstraction of an “undetermined and therefore empty universality utterly devoid of content.”¹⁷⁰ Again: “Indian imagination is in general caught in the steady

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 335, 347. Tibebu’s gloss on the first of these phrases is difficult to deny: “In short, Indians are crazy!” *Hegel and the Third World*, 265.

process of introducing into the midst of external appearance whatever is most non-sensuous and, at the same time, conversely, of obliterating again the most natural and sensuous realm by the most extreme abstraction.”¹⁷¹

In the second discussion, having proceeded from unconscious symbolism to the symbolism of the sublime, which “lifts the Absolute above every immediate existent and therefore brings about the liberation which, though abstract at first, is at least the foundation of the spirit,” Hegel identifies pantheism as the first art-form of sublime symbolism and Indian poetry as “the first example of such pantheistic poetry.”¹⁷² He reiterates his earlier claim that Brahma is an abstract universality to which all other gods in the Indian pantheon revert despite their apparent individuality and specificity. It is “the formless One which, only when transformed into the infinite multiplicity of terrestrial phenomena, provides an opportunity for the pantheistic mode of representation.”¹⁷³ In other words, as a result of their struggle to make individual existents hold up in the face of an absolute that swallows all determinacy, Indians end up with poetry that involves litanies of such individual “terrestrial phenomena” that are ultimately transcended by an asserted substantial unity. After giving one example of this in a description of Krishna from the *Bhagavadgītā*, Hegel declares, “But this recitation of the height of excellence, like the mere change of shapes in which what is to be brought before our eyes is always one and the same thing over again, despite the wealth of fancy which seems at first sight

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 362, 366. In fact, *only* poetry can artistically express pantheism according to Hegel: “Where pantheism is pure, there is no visual art for its representation”(366).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 366-367.

to be deployed there, still remains, precisely on account of this similarity of content, extremely monotonous and, on the whole, empty and wearisome.”¹⁷⁴

These first two treatments are placed in the section on the symbolic form of art, which is developmentally earlier than both classical and romantic art according to the lectures’ structure. The third and final major discussion comes much later in the lectures, when Hegel is working through an account of poetry, the fifth and final individual art that features in the lectures. Here, however, rather than speaking on Indian poetry specifically, Hegel subsumes it under the general heading “The Oriental Epic” as he outlines the “historical development of epic poetry.” Acknowledging that at this point he will only provide a “fleeting and sketch survey, whatever that may be worth,” he reminds his audience that Eastern or Oriental poetry is “generally rather primitive because it always keeps closer to viewing things in terms of the substantive whole and to the *absorption of the individual consciousness in this one whole.*”¹⁷⁵ After arguing that China has no true epic poetry, Hegel states that “from the little so far made known to us from the Vedas,” religious views in the remote past of India constituted the basis of a mythology that could be rendered in epic form. The epics that resulted, however, were heavily religious and hence stood “only half at the level of poetry and art.” As Hegel writes,

Above all, the two most famous of these poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, explain to us the entire outlook of the Indians in its whole splendour and magnificence, its confusion, fantastic flabbiness and lack of real truth, and yet, on the other hand, its overwhelming delightfulness and also the individual fine traits of the feeling and heart of these spiritual but plant-like beings. [...] The substantive foundations of the whole thing are of such a kind that our Western outlook can neither be really at home there nor sympathize with it because we cannot resolve to abandon the higher demands of freedom and ethical life. [...] ...the spirit which has produced these enormous poems gives evidence throughout of an imagination which

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 367-368.

¹⁷⁵ *LA*, II: 1094, emphasis added.

not only preceded a prosaic social organization but is absolutely incapable of the prosaic circumspection of the intellect. It could give shape only in primitive poetry to the fundamental tendencies of the Indian mind...¹⁷⁶

To these more extended reflections on India should be added a few of the many statements that appear at various places elsewhere in the lectures yet are nonetheless highly significant. For example at one point Hegel asserts, “In India everything is miracle and therefore no longer miraculous.”¹⁷⁷ At another he comments on “Indian feebleness and loss of self.”¹⁷⁸ He says the Greeks “did not persist...in the un-free Oriental unity which has a religious and political despotism as its consequence; this is because subject, losing his self, is submerged in the one universal substance, or in some particular aspect of it, since he has no right and therefore no support for himself as a person.”¹⁷⁹ Concerning poetry, he states that “the Eastern mind is on the whole more poetic than the Western, Greece excluded. In the East the chief thing is always the One, undivided, fixed, substantive...”¹⁸⁰ Concerning historical sensibility, he flatly announces that “the Indians, Orientals in general indeed, except perhaps the Chinese only, have not prosaic sense enough to give us an actual historical narrative because they run off into either purely religious or else fantastic interpretations and transformations of the facts.”¹⁸¹ Lest this begin to seem like a simple catalogue of errors and embarrassments, however, two final remarks pose an important contrast. The first is taken from the introduction:

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1095-1096.

¹⁷⁷ *LA*, I: 374.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 436-437.

¹⁸⁰ *LA*, II: 978.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 987. Compare with I: 332: “Therefore the Indians have proved themselves incapable of an historical interpretation of persons and events, because an historical treatment requires *sang-froid* in taking up and understanding the past on its own account in its actual shape with its empirical links, grounds, aims, and causes. This prosaic circumspection is at variance with the Indian pressure to refer each and everything back to the sheerly Absolute and Divine, and to contemplate in the commonest and most sensuous things a fancifully created presence and actuality of the gods.”

From this foundation of a genuine spiritual art [in contemporary Germany], and the sympathy it has received and its widespread influence, there has sprung a receptivity for and freedom to enjoy and recognize great works of art which have long been available, whether those of the modern world or the Middle Ages, or even of wholly foreign peoples in the past, e.g. the Indian. These works, because of their age or foreign nationality, have of course something strange about them for us, but they have a content which outsoars their foreignness and is common to all mankind, and only by the prejudice of theory could they be stamped as products of a barbarous bad taste.¹⁸²

The other appears much later, in the section on poetry. Hegel says that “even Indian poetry, despite all its distance from our view of the world and from our mode of portrayal, is not wholly strange to us, and we can laud it as a high privilege of our age to have begun more and more to unveil its sense for the whole richness of art and, in short, of the human spirit.”¹⁸³

B. Philosophy of religion

The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are perhaps most interesting in that they provide clear evidence of Hegel’s turns of thought regarding India as the decade of the 1820s proceeded. Several scholars, including the editor of the definitive English-language version of the lectures, have expended patient efforts to pull apart the threads of individual lecture courses, which had become tangled together through the collation of student transcripts of various courses.¹⁸⁴ The result is a valuable outline of the differences and commonalities in Hegel’s account of Indian religion across the four courses, from the first one in 1821 to the final one in 1831. The precise details of the reconstruction and

¹⁸² *LA*, I: 20.

¹⁸³ *LA*, II: 978.

¹⁸⁴ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion vol. II: Determinate Religion*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1-3; and G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 8-20 and 33-52. Henceforth *LPR*.

even a summary comparison of the changes are beyond the scope of the present work.¹⁸⁵

One thing that can be said is that the entirety of Hegel's treatment of Indian religion in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is contained in Part II, "Determinate Religion," which is—as Peter C. Hodgson rightly terms it—Hegel's attempt at "work[ing] out an adequate philosophical conceptualization of the history of religions."¹⁸⁶ In the 1821 lecture manuscript, which unlike the later versions of the lectures is not fleshed out with additional material from student transcripts, the discussion of India is highly condensed, even fragmentary. It is notable for remarks such as, "The haste and restless activity of Europeans [is], on the whole, entirely foreign to Orientals, who comport themselves as a universal essence, not as a contingent, wholly indifferent free will," and for the claim that Hindus' chief aim is "annihilation."¹⁸⁷ The 1824 and 1827 lectures, where the discussion on Hinduism runs to nearly 35 pages in translation, present it as the "religion of phantasy" (*die Religion der Phantasie*) whereas in the 1831 lectures it is "the religion of abstract unity." While, again, there is much more to the matter, the 1824 and 1827 lectures cast *brahman*, the Indian absolute, as an "absolute unity as neuter principle," which in its abstract indeterminacy whips back and forth between the universal One that absorbs all things into itself and needing to proceed to particular determinations (e.g., lesser gods and deities) that each take on the aspect of *brahman* before again vanishing into the unity. The result is "confusion marking the

¹⁸⁵ For useful comparative analyses, see Louis Dupré, "Transitions and Tensions in Hegel's Treatment of Determinate Religion," and Stephen Dunning, "Particularity not Scandalous: Hegel's Contributions to Philosophy of Religion," both in *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* ed. by David Kolb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 154-169; and especially Herling, *The German Gītā*, 225-234, 249-253.

¹⁸⁶ *LPR* II: 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 115, 125.

Hindu presentation,” and “shocking inconsistency.”¹⁸⁸ The 1831 course focuses more than earlier ones on *brahman* as “thinking [which]...is known as thinking in self-conscious beings, in *human* beings”¹⁸⁹; Herling concludes that—given the final lecture’s unique emphasis on thinking and thought in Indian religion—although other elements of Hegel’s late conception of India remain “both dangerous and retrograde,” “For a worldview that was supposedly so far away, the recursive movement within Hindu religious thought is so Hegelian, recalling the very ‘summum of the idea [*the* concept,’ that it almost seems, in 1831, to be a kind of secret sharer: India as the semblance or *Schein* of Hegel’s system. At the very least, the difference of Indian thought made its presence felt” to Hegel.¹⁹⁰

C. Philosophy of history

It has been suggested that Hegel’s philosophical account of world history as communicated in the lectures on the philosophy of history is a minor part of his system, simply elaborating on what is “thematized only by a few paragraphs” in the *Encyclopedia* and *Philosophy of Right*.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, it has also been claimed that even according to Hegel himself “the philosophy of world history is not merely one among the many disciplines of his system, but ‘the’ system in its entirety.”¹⁹² Whatever the case, possibly more than anywhere else Hegel displays in the lectures on history a rather backward-looking attitude toward India (and the East or Orient generally), that fixes it in a position of permanence and stasis despite Hegel’s frequent praise for the originary

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 328, 585.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 732.

¹⁹⁰ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 252-253.

¹⁹¹ Walter Jaeschke, “World History and the History of the Absolute Spirit,” in *History and System: Hegel’s Philosophy of History*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 102.

¹⁹² Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 223. Viyagappa attributes this idea to Michael Theunissen rather than directly to Hegel himself.

achievements of its spirit.¹⁹³ In the introduction, for instance, in an infamous formulation that Hegel repeats in other places, the audience learns that Eastern peoples only know that *one* is free, while the Greeks discovered that *some* are free, and only in the modern Christian-Germanic world is it known, both for the first time and finally, that *all* are free. “Orientals” specifically, Hegel says, “do not yet know that Spirit—Man as such—is free. And because they do not know it, they are not free. They know only that *one* is free; but for this very reason such freedom is mere caprice, ferocity, dullness of passion, or, perhaps, softness or tameness of desire—which again is nothing but an accident of nature and thus, again, caprice. This *one* is therefore only a despot, not a free man.”¹⁹⁴ In a comment that elicits a multitude of mixed impressions regardless of how nonjudgmentally Hegel may have intended it, he states, “It strikes every one, in beginning to form an acquaintance with the treasures of Indian literature, that a land so rich in intellectual products, and those of the profoundest order of thought, has no History... India has not only ancient books relating to religion, and splendid poetical productions, but also ancient codes; the existence of which latter kind of literature has been mentioned as a condition necessary to the origination of History—and yet History itself is not found.”¹⁹⁵ As a result, India must be non-dynamic, an unchanging society, for, “A culture which does not yet have a history has made no real cultural progress, [and this

¹⁹³ That is not to say Hegel exhibits no such tendency elsewhere. Hodgson observes that Hegel’s discussion of Hinduism in *LPR* indicates that he accepted East India Company members’ “description of conditions in India during the latter part of the eighteenth century as valid for the whole of its history,” in spite of the clear political and economic ends such descriptions were meant to serve. Hegel’s habit of viewing India as relegated to the past, or as ahistorical, is evident also in *LA* where he says, for example, that “the epics of the past describe the triumph of the West over the East, of European moderation, and the individual beauty of a reason that sets limits to itself, over Asiatic brilliance and over the magnificence of a patriarchal unity still devoid of perfect articulation or bound together so abstractly that it collapses into parts separate from one another”(II: 1062); see also p. 37 above.

¹⁹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. by Robert S. Hartman (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 23.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

applies to the pretended history] of India over three and a half thousand years.”¹⁹⁶ To take just one more example from among numerous others, in the excursus on India in the portion of the lectures dealing with “The Oriental World” Hegel attempts to explain that as a consequence of its merely preliminary understanding of the true absolute, which it conceives only as undifferentiated substance, Indian consciousness is tantamount to dreaming. In dreaming, one’s waking consciousness dissolves into the dream, and correspondingly Hegel asserts that the Indian’s loftiest aspiration is annihilation, immersion into substantial spirit. Spiritual power, then, is (believed to be) acquired through the negation of one’s finite existence, which is a dubious achievement, since, “In its highest degree this negation consists in a sort of hazy consciousness of having attained perfect mental immobility—the annihilation of all creation and volition,” but nevertheless Indians “make it their aim to reach the highest degree of abstraction—the perfect deadening of consciousness.”¹⁹⁷

Again, critical and reductivist comments in the *Philosophy of History* are accompanied by, and for Hegel do not seem the least bit incompatible with, praise for the inaugural and inventive aspects of the Eastern spirit. “In Asia arose the Light of Spirit, and therefore the history of the World,” Hegel states in the introduction to the lectures.¹⁹⁸ Shortly afterward he adds, in a geographical statement that is also unmistakably metaphorical, “The *Sun*—the Light—rises in the East.”¹⁹⁹ At times, as in the quotation above where he acknowledges works of Indian literature as being “of the profoundest order of thought,” Hegel even appears to accept more specifically that Indians might be

¹⁹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 13.

¹⁹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 149-150.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

capable of the same kind of rationality as Europeans. Nevertheless, “Europe is absolutely the end of history; Asia the beginning,” and the East “is the childhood of History.”²⁰⁰

When the European West reflects on the East, then, it looks back upon its childhood or its past; it does not look at a peer, a contemporary. So India, like Asia generally, despite still being a geographical place, the home of many human beings, and a living land, is not fully present. It is in the past; its culture may persist, but that is all it does: persist—static, unchanging, lifeless.

D. History of philosophy

Given the position of India in world history, one might think it obvious that Hegel would have a consistent standpoint concerning the place (or non-place) of India in the history of philosophy. Yet here too Hegel appears to have experienced difficulty. From the 1805-1806 lectures in Jena to the first Berlin course of 1819, Hegel’s remarks on India and the East were incredibly brief, amounting to a scant few paragraphs.²⁰¹ By the 1825-1826 course, however, Hegel had added a substantial section on “Oriental Philosophy,” placing it after the introductory section but outside Part I, “Greek Philosophy.” Philosopher Robert Bernasconi believes that Hegel’s exposure to the work of H.T. Colebrooke between 1824 and 1825 led him to think the matter over and consequently expand the portion of the lectures dealing with Indian and Oriental philosophy prior to delivering the 1825-1826 lectures.²⁰² This accords with the positions of Halbfass and of Viyagappa, who claims that Hegel “almost translated” Colebrooke’s

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁰¹ See Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 116.

²⁰² Bernasconi has written several articles critically analyzing Hegel’s pivotal role in the nineteenth-century debate about where philosophy began (who did and who did not invent it, have it, etc.), and thus has done a great deal to bring the conversation to the fore in the first decades of the 21st century after a century of unquestioning presumption in Euro-American mainstream academic philosophy. His efforts will be explored further in Chapter 4.

essays for the lectures, so heavy was his reliance on them.²⁰³ Both Bernasconi and Halbfass take the shift in the length and nature of Hegel's post-1826 material on India to attest to a learning process, "an increasing readiness to differentiate, to await the results of further research, and perhaps even to reconsider some of his earlier generalizations."²⁰⁴ At no point did Hegel reorganize the lectures to incorporate Indian philosophy into the main narrative of the history of philosophy, however, nor did he ever publicly proclaim its inclusion. Instead, as Bernasconi puts it, "The evidence is that Hegel at the end of his life seriously considered beginning the history of philosophy with India, but that he nevertheless rejected the idea."²⁰⁵

For Bernasconi, Hegel's explanation in the 1825-1826 lectures for why a substantive discussion of Eastern philosophy appears for the first time is telling. Hegel says it is due to the fact that it has only become possible recently to make confident judgments concerning it. Yet this is simultaneously an admission that the choice to exclude Asian philosophies previously "was made largely in ignorance and that the justification, such as it was, was provided mainly after the fact."²⁰⁶ Relatedly, Park and Viyagappa both show that in terms of form as well as content, Hegel's approach to the history of philosophy was greatly influenced by certain of his contemporaries.²⁰⁷ He was of course also contending with Romanticism, but not only that, Hegel was shoring up his own philosophy against attacks. The theologian August Tholuck compared his thought

²⁰³ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 41 n.75.

²⁰⁴ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 97.

²⁰⁵ Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin? Hegel's Role in the Debate on the Place of India within the History of Philosophy," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. by David A. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 36.

²⁰⁶ Robert Bernasconi, "Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism: The Reinvention of Philosophy as Greek," in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), 212.

²⁰⁷ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 122-131; Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 197-203.

with “Arab and Muslim theosophers on the one hand and Spinoza on the other,” which opened Hegel up to charges of pantheism and atheism.²⁰⁸ According to Park, Hegel wrote Africa and Asia out of the history of philosophy as a way of defending himself against these attacks.

Returning to the structural position of Asian thought in the lectures, Hegel’s decision about it and his way of accounting for it are indeed cause for further reflection. Park asserts that putting “Oriental Philosophy” in an unnumbered section prior to Part One demonstrates that for Hegel “the Orient is literally not part of the history of philosophy.”²⁰⁹ This is undeniable, since for one thing the lectures’ introduction includes a short statement explaining why the philosophy of the East is separated out. For another, in setting down his division of the history of philosophy, Hegel says, “Speaking generally, we have properly only two epochs to distinguish in the history of Philosophy, as in ancient and modern art—these are the Greek and the Teuton.”²¹⁰ The point could not be made more clearly. As Bernasconi sees it, “It is as if the very status Hegel gave to philosophy made him especially reluctant to expand its boundaries” to include India, even as in his last years he increasingly made approving remarks about the presence of philosophy there.²¹¹

Such remarks, as already indicated, were never entirely unambiguous. To take a sampling, just in the introduction to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel variously says the following: 1) “In the Persian and Indian religions very deep, sublime, and speculative thoughts are even expressed;” 2) “it is said that such races [as the

²⁰⁸ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 148.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²¹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, vol. I: Greek Philosophy to Plato* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 101. Henceforth *LHP*.

²¹¹ Bernasconi, “With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin?”, 44.

Indians] have also had a Philosophy proper to themselves; but the universal thoughts of interest to Indian books limit themselves to what is most abstract...;” 3) “The conclusion to be derived from this is that no philosophic knowledge can be found here;” 4) “The Eastern form must therefore be excluded from the History of Philosophy, but still, upon the whole, I will take some notice of it.”²¹² All this is coherent enough, and Hegel’s characterization of Indian thought in the “Oriental Philosophy” section is consistent with it on the whole. Still, certain passages there are more difficult to reconcile with one another than the above. Consider the following trio, for instance:

- 1) “The first philosophy in order is the so-called Oriental, which, however, does not enter into the substance or range of our subject as represented here. Its position is preliminary, and we only deal with it at all in order to account for not treating of it at greater length, and to show in what relation it stands to Thought and to true Philosophy.”²¹³
- 2) “It is quite recently that we first obtained a definite knowledge of Indian philosophy; in the main we understand by it religious ideas, but in modern times men have learned to recognize real philosophic writings.”²¹⁴
- 3) “The Idea has not become objective in the Indian Philosophy; hence the external and objective has not been comprehended in accordance with the Idea. This is the deficiency in Orientalism [i.e., Oriental philosophy].”²¹⁵

²¹² *LHP*, 64, 90, 98, 99.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 146. Viyagappa provides a fitting label for the habit of using the term “philosophy” only to insinuate or declare that Indian thought is not properly philosophical: Hegel’s “policy of discernment of ‘the philosophical spirit’ in Indian ‘philosophies.’” *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 197.

Bernasconi and Halbfass have identified additional comments in the manuscripts of the 1829-1830 lectures where Hegel appears to accept that there was or is philosophy in India. Bernasconi points simply to Hegel's "momentous admission" that "Oriental philosophy could be treated as 'actual philosophy.'"²¹⁶ Halbfass provides a lengthier quotation that includes in part the sentence, "In the formation of the Oriental world, we do find philosophizing, too—indeed, the most profound philosophizing..."²¹⁷ There is some apparent terminological confusion; Bernasconi uses "actual philosophy" to translate *wirkliche Philosophie* in contrast to "philosophy proper," *die eigentliche Philosophie*, which might suggest that Hegel never claimed the latter could be found in India. Halbfass, on the other hand, uses "real philosophy" for *eigentliche Philosophie* and "truly philosophical systems" for *wirklich philosophische Systeme*, indicating that both phrases are Hegel's. Whatever the case, the deep ambiguity regarding Indian philosophy persists. Along with the periodic alternations between cautious openness to Indian thought and declarations of its pre-philosophical status, it is characteristic of the Hegel of the 1820s in contrast to the Hegel of previous decades.

IV. Hegel's perplexity: crisis and response, 1821-1831

From the foregoing it is possible to argue, if not absolutely plain to see, that Hegel's general position and specific ideas concerning India did not remain exactly as they had been when first formed in his youth; rather, it appears that they underwent modification and revision over time. Beginning at least with Halbfass in *India and Europe*, certain scholars have asserted that this is only natural given Hegel's historicist

²¹⁶ Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin?", 42.

²¹⁷ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 97.

sensibilities and sensitivity to the latest information and scholarship available. Significantly, with the arrival of famed linguist Franz Bopp to Berlin in 1821 after spending several years in Paris studying Sanskrit at the expense of the kingdom of Bavaria, Hegel began to follow developments in several European fields of study quite closely. Bopp, who remained at the University of Berlin for the rest of Hegel's life, continued to conduct research into comparative grammar and linguistics. It was arguably owing to his genial acquaintance with Bopp that Hegel came not only to appreciate and speak about the links between Germany (and Europe more broadly) and India, but also to learn much about India that challenged his early views. Perhaps, as a result, his irritation at certain Romantic appropriations of India was tempered by a dawning respect for its cultural and intellectual traditions and productions.

That there appear to have been shifts and nuances in Hegel's orientation toward India over time is a fact the implications of which are not immediately clear. Certainly, it does not categorically invalidate claims that Hegel's philosophy was Eurocentric or even racist, which might still have a solid basis. (These will be elaborated and examined in Chapter 4). Nor would it, however, provide much confirmation for views of an exclusionary nature, such as "Indian philosophy is not real philosophy;" in fact it suggests the opposite, regardless whether Hegel did or did not arrive at an unfavorable final position on the matter. But it has perhaps done something different from, say, what the bare reality of globalization on its own might do, to draw in to the discussion of cross-cultural understanding those philosophers of European heritage who have an abiding respect for Hegelian thought.

Evidence that Hegel learned enough about India to have his early ideas challenged or unsettled seems above all to have fanned more fires than it has extinguished. Bradley L. Herling has recently offered a compelling case that between 1824 and 1831 especially, Hegel found himself profoundly challenged and questioned by what he learned about India, with the complexities of his encounter and negotiation being reflected in his output during the period. Herling states that “the usual treatment of Hegel’s observations in the [philosophy of] history lectures,” particularly if delivered in isolation from other lectures and works and using only the 1956 Sibree English translation, is insufficient for providing insight even into “the context for [Hegel’s] textual practices,” let alone the various profound considerations and reconsiderations Hegel undertook.²¹⁸ These “dislocations and disruptions” show that “Hegel’s reflection on India...was by no means monolithic or self-same,” and the lectures on the philosophy of history are “but one site in the development” of Hegel’s multidimensional account.²¹⁹ Herling focuses closely on the four versions of Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion (1821, 1824, 1827, 1831) to trace out the significant shifts in Hegel’s conception of India and Indian thought. Already in 1821 “the position of India, taken as pantheistic, was by no means simple; the difference of the Orient was already linked to a troubling, pantheistic alterity in Hegel’s own philosophical milieu—and perhaps in his own thought.”²²⁰ For 1824 Hegel greatly expanded the section on Indian religion, and posed elements of Hindu thought alongside Kantianism in order to critique the latter. The 1824 lectures thus “exhibit a strange rupture, where the alterity of the Indian Other tempted Hegel to use it in making potent judgments within his own intellectual community,” but in giving in to this temptation

²¹⁸ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 224.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

Hegel was unable to prevent Indian thought “from drifting dangerously close to the European present.”²²¹ 1827, however, was a “profoundly anti-Indian year” in which Hegel, sensing danger in having allowed “moments of cultural and philosophical proximity to creep into his system in 1824,” sought to re-establish the distance, foreignness, and inferiority (or primitiveness) of Indian thought with respect to Europe.²²² In the 1831 lecture course, finally, fresh changes in the ordering, categorization, and characterization of Hinduism and Buddhism show that Hegel locates Indian thought at “a higher level of conceptual development” than ever before; while the account still contains a critique of Asian and Spinozist thought as pantheist, Herling concludes, “we can only think that despite his objections, Hegel was coming to peace with these internal and external alterities by allowing them some higher dignity within his system.”²²³

Historian Lucia Staiano-Daniels²²⁴ contests Herling’s reading, but not in the way that might be expected, i.e., by altogether denying the dynamic trajectory that Herling charts. Rather, Staiano-Daniels argues that it is mistaken to regard Hegel’s position in 1827 as so intensely negative. Her article seeks to challenge in Hegelian fashion the one-sidedness of the received view (among postcolonial theorists particularly, it seems) of Hegel as completely derogatory and chauvinistic toward India. This is understandable, and it parallels Herling’s concern that reducing Hegel’s engagement with India to “an Orientalist straw man is not the best historical approach—and it hardly serves the theoretical interests of the present.”²²⁵ According to Staiano-Daniels, even in 1827 the

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

²²² *Ibid.*, 246-247.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 252.

²²⁴ Lucia Staiano-Daniels, “Illuminated Darkness: Hegel’s Brief and Unexpected Elevation of Indian Thought in *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the Name Bhagavad-Gītā* by Wilhelm von Humboldt.” *The Owl of Minerva* 43:1-2 (2011-12), 75-99.

²²⁵ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 221.

“darkness” of India proves to be illuminated by certain moments of approval and praise, with the result being “a brief and unexpected elevation of Indian thought” as per the article’s title.

Here should be mentioned the *Encyclopedia* and *Science of Logic* notes, which Hegel composed in 1827 and 1831, respectively, as he prepared revised editions of those texts for publication. Herling and Staiano-Daniels do not refer to them in their discussions; Viyagappa provides an extensive analysis of the *Encyclopedia* note, though not of the later *Science of Logic* note. Briefly, it can be said that the note added to the *Encyclopedia* at §573 strikes a tone consistent with the generally conservative and denigrating position Herling shows Hegel taking in 1827. After quoting, “amongst [the *Bhagavadgītā*’s] effusions, prolix and reiterative *ad nauseam*, some of the telling passages,” Hegel asserts they reveal that in Hinduism “the empirical everything of the world” just drowns or vanishes in the concept of Brahma, “the pure unity of thought in itself.”²²⁶ Hinduism may be a monotheism, Hegel allows, but “so little is concrete in this divine unity” of its One that “with a monstrous inconsistency, [it] is also the maddest of polytheisms.” So if it is a monotheism, then it is “an example of how little comes of mere monotheism, if the Idea of God is not deeply determinate in itself.”²²⁷ According to Hegel, Hindus’ consciousness of the One is “split between the featureless unity of abstract thought, on one hand, and on the other, the long-winded weary story of its particular detail.”²²⁸ In this respect the “Mohammedan” absolute is purer and more sublime, because it truly exalts and transfigures particulars into the universal that dwells in them, instead of just alternating back and forth from one to the other, between

²²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 305, 307.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 307-308.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 308.

proliferation and annihilation. But all the “oriental...modes of envisaging God” are in the end defective or incomplete, since “they stop short of defining substance as subject and mind.”²²⁹

The note in the *Science of Logic*, added to the section on “Measure” in the first book of the first volume of the work (“The Objective Logic”), brings up Indian thought in the course of once again addressing the charge of pantheism that has been leveled against philosophy. Hegel explains that Indian pantheism “in its monstrous fantasies has in an abstract way received this development [of a concept of the one substance] which runs like a moderating thread through its extravagances.”²³⁰ Interestingly, he admits that the Hindu trinity has been compared with the Christian and even that “in them a common element of the nature of the Notion can be recognized,” before still claiming that the difference between them must be understood because “not only is this difference infinite, but it is the true, the genuine infinite which constitutes it.”²³¹ The Indian doctrine fails to achieve the “the dispersal of the unity of substance into its opposite,” that is back out into external particulars, and like Spinozism it does not “exclude the unity” but in fact overemphasizes it at the cost of the finite—no lasting solution, since “this is only to submerge all content in the void, in a merely formal unity lacking all content.”²³² Perhaps nothing in this note is vastly different from Hegel’s earlier characterizations of India. What is deeply intriguing about the passage, though, is a certain contrast between it and the 1831 lectures on religion; there, as Herling points out, Chinese religion becomes “The Religion of Measure” and Hinduism and Buddhism occupy a still-higher stage, “The

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

²³⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 328.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

²³² *Ibid.*

Religion of Abstract Unity,” where the crucial development in them is “the move beyond many arbitrary ‘measures’...back into a rule of universality and singularity.”²³³ As mentioned earlier, Herling connects this placement to Hegel’s novel emphasis on “thinking” as an essential component of the Indian idea of substance. This means that in 1831 Indian thought apparently verges, more than ever, on the “thought thinking itself” that is characteristic of Hegel’s very conception of philosophy as the doctrine of the speculative reflection of self-conscious, self-determining spirit.

In his important 2014 work, Peter K.J. Park²³⁴ adopts a perspective that diverges from those of both Herling and Staiano-Daniels presented above. Park claims, “What the editors Walter Jaeschke and Pierre Garniron took to be Hegel’s increasing interest, over the decade of the 1820s, in Oriental philosophies I interpret rather as his increasing effort to counterargue the Orientalists’ claims about philosophy in Asia.”²³⁵ For Park, Hegel’s repeated denials that there was (or had been, or could have been) philosophy in the East were not simply the frank articulation of a passionate and genuinely-held conviction, but were part of a strategy to repel a competing claim made by certain individuals with whom Hegel did not (want to) find himself in agreement. Park’s case depends on showing that Hegel was part of a certain trend and had to contend with rival ones—that he was implicated in, and the status of his own philosophy was threatened by, debates in philosophy, theology, and historiography raging in his day. Park brings an immense amount of historical research to bear on his thesis and his case is far from weak, but still

²³³ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 251. On the same page Herling quotes Hodgson, editor of the University of California English translation of the lectures, as saying that “to conceive God as ‘measure’ is an advance beyond an undialectical view of substance, and an approximation to an understanding of God as ‘essence’ [the second moment of Hegel’s logic], since essence is already implicit in measure;” hence Indian religions occupy a higher stage of measure “at which substance takes the accidents back into an abstractly determined unity.”

²³⁴ See n.72 above.

²³⁵ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 151.

the fact remains that Hegel spent more time learning about India in the last decade of his life than he had in the first five combined. Not only Jaeschke and Garniron but a number of other competent scholars, Halbfass and Viyagappa among them, have interpreted this as evidence of increasing interest in Indian culture and thought, even partiality toward it on Hegel's part, rather than just a particularly impressive effort to "know the enemy."

In light of the recent and persisting scholarly difference of opinion concerning Hegel's increasing attention to India, a final point stands to be made here, namely that Germana's central claim in "India and Hegel's 'Scientific' Method in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*" turns out to be somewhat extravagant (see p. 25-26 above). Is it really the case that from 1807 "the basic place for India was laid out," and never really changed after that in Hegel's mind or work? From both the voracious reading and study Hegel undertook from 1822 onward, and the various revisions scholars have charted in his positions and views as reflected in modifications to the content—and sometimes also the structure—of his lectures (not to mention the 1827 reviews and the notes added to the revised editions of the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia*), it must be concluded that even if he did eventually reconsolidate his early impressions into a stance relegating India to a subordinate position in the hierarchy of peoples, cultures, or civilizations and excluding it from the history of philosophy proper, he did so only with certain reservations. He labored in progressive, and perhaps progressively uneasy, awareness of the challenge India posed to his characterization of it specifically, and to his encyclopedic classification and arrangement of peoples as moments in the progression of world-historical *Geist* generally.

Germana rightly observes that greater acquaintance with Indian thought was “destabilizing” for Hegel, particularly insofar as it might turn out that there were deep affinities between it and his own thinking. He also stresses that Hegel’s critique of Romanticism in the *Phenomenology* was leveled just as Romantic enthusiasm for India was swelling, and that this would become a constant concern. But Germana takes the fact that Hegel never explicitly “elevated” India—by admitting it into the history of philosophy proper, for example—to indicate that his response was effectively determined in 1807. According to Germana, if Hegel *had* engaged Indian philosophy on its own grounds at any later point, then he “might” have promoted it out of “Oriental stagnation” and connected it with the history—even the present—of the Greco-European West.²³⁶ Hegel’s account of India is static, however, and Romanticism (which glorifies India) is always characterized as a hopeless regression, a false move back toward an irretrievably lost immediacy. Germana contends that a true disruption of Hegel’s system could only be claimed *if* he had taken India on its own terms, which never happened (because if it had then India would have come to occupy a different place in his system), and thus that his “evaluation of Indian thought...changed very little (if at all) in its essence” over the quarter century from the publication of the *Phenomenology* to Hegel’s death.

Dorothy M. Figueira, also a perceptive yet severe critic of Hegel, shares with Germana the view that Hegel’s “idiosyncratic interpretation of Indian philosophy”²³⁷ was inextricably connected with his displeasure at the Romantic Indomania of Friedrich Schlegel and others. Her conviction that Hegel’s “determination to establish his own system and ‘save’ the intelligibility of history precluded a true interpretation of Indian

²³⁶ Germana, “India and Hegel’s ‘Scientific’ Method in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” 32.

²³⁷ Dorothy M. Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 78.

metaphysics” is well-founded.²³⁸ Yet it allows nonetheless for a more flexible, nuanced understanding of Hegel’s encounter with Indian texts and ideas—of his “rather complex negotiation of the nexus between Romantic thoughts and India,” to use Herling’s phrase²³⁹—than does Germana’s “fixing” of Hegel’s essential position in 1807 with certain passages of the *Phenomenology*. Kurt F. Leidecker, who noted some decades ago that Hegel may have used and indeed abused Indian thought in the service of certain ends, particularly “for the sake of historical and dialectical consistency,”²⁴⁰ still concluded that the “amount of elucidation and discussion” he offered in his lectures and writings “in itself shows that he was wrestling here with quite formidable problems.”²⁴¹ Moreover, argues Leidecker, there was so much appeal for him in the Indian philosophical works that were appearing “that Hegel himself came close to compromising his own convictions.”²⁴² Even if in the end he did not compromise them, there are nonetheless many indications that “the contrast between East and West, though frequently discussed with brutal frankness, might not have been conceived as absolute.”²⁴³ Hence, there should not be such a rush to conclude that after penning some early remarks in the *Phenomenology* Hegel had made up his mind for good, and could never seriously entertain alternative conceptions about India, Indian philosophy, or the relation between India and Europe. There is much that suggests otherwise.

The present chapter has attempted to gain some initial, limited clarity on a set of perplexing problems via a broad survey of Hegel’s writings and statements about India

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

²³⁹ Herling, *The German Gītā*, 236.

²⁴⁰ The question of whether Hegel’s very definition and conception of philosophy itself predisposed him to negative “ultimate” or lasting convictions about India and Indian thought will be explored in Chapter 4.

²⁴¹ Kurt F. Leidecker, “Hegel and the Orientals,” in *New Studies in Hegel’s Philosophy*, ed. by Warren E. Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), 164, 161.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 163.

throughout his lifetime. Further understanding, including a fuller picture of Hegel's ideas about various aspects of Indian philosophy, can now be sought through close scrutiny of the 1827 reviews, Hegel's longest and most thorough treatment of Indian thought.

Chapter Three

Hegel's Review Articles on the *Bhagavadgītā* and Indian Philosophy and Religion

In 1995, introducing his English translation of Hegel's two-part review essay of 1827, Herbert Herring explained that he was motivated to the work by Wilhelm Halbfass's observation in *India and Europe* (1988) that Hegel's review "has not found the attention which it deserves. It was never translated into English."²⁴⁴ Although Herring's translation is problematic for a number of reasons—one scholar has bluntly yet understandably deemed it "inadequate"²⁴⁵—it was the first English rendering of Hegel's text and remains the sole one.²⁴⁶ Thanks in no small part to both Halbfass's and Herring's efforts, some notice has been paid in the ensuing two decades to the review. More work is still needed, however, for three reasons. First, many contemporary Hegel scholars remain altogether unfamiliar with this important moment in his philosophical endeavors. Second, when scholars do tackle questions of race, culture, non-Western thought, India, etc. in Hegel they often, perhaps even typically, concentrate on his lectures and devote

²⁴⁴ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 481 n.16. Quoted in G.W.F. Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the name Bhagavad-Gītā by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Berlin 1826*, ed. and trans. by Herbert Herring (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1995), xxiv. Fifteen years after Halbfass, Robert Bernasconi reiterated that "the key text" for Hegel's negotiation with Indian philosophy "for the most part has not been given the attention it deserved."

²⁴⁵ Saverio Marchignoli, "Canonizing an Indian Text? A.W. Schlegel, W. von Humboldt, Hegel, and the *Bhagavadgītā*," in Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K.J. Park, and D.R. SarDesai, eds., *Sanskrit and 'Orientalism': Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750-1958* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 266 n.4.

²⁴⁶ Noted French comparatist Michel Hulin translated Hegel's reviews into French as an appendix to a careful investigation of Hegel's development and elaboration of a general concept of "the Orient." *Hegel et L'Orient: suivi d'un texte de Hegel sur le Bhagavad-Gītā* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1979 [repr. 2013]). Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra's new book *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation with Texts* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), which collects all of Hegel's India writings into one volume, simply reprints Herring's English translation of the review essays.

comparatively less (if any) attention to the review—this despite Halbfass’s considered opinion that the two articles are “Hegel’s testament, as far as his understanding of India is concerned.”²⁴⁷ Third, when the review essays are discussed there tends to be a specific focus.²⁴⁸ Some, like Helmut Gipper and Saverio Marchignoli, have carefully considered disputes between Hegel and his contemporaries concerning philology, terminology, and translation. Others, such as D.K. Prithipaul, have reflected specifically on the validity of Hegel’s critique of the ethical principles advanced in the *Gītā*. Only a few have offered general or overarching analyses; still, in some of these the spotlight is only trained on the review for a brief moment, as in Teshale Tibebe’s *Hegel and the Third World*. In particular, Viyagappa’s section “The Weakness of the Unity of Brahman,” in a study the stated goal of which is “to read and understand simply the texts which have not been so far exposed satisfactorily,” is supposed to be the place where the review is fully dealt with.²⁴⁹ Yet, while Viyagappa certainly does discuss the review there, he casts it largely in terms of Hegel’s critique of Hindu religious thought as a philosophy of substance, stressing the themes of Indian monotheism and polytheism present in Hegel’s account. Viyagappa’s analysis is sophisticated, lucid, and certainly quite valuable, but it is organized along particular interpretive lines rather than according to the article’s structure and sequence. The present chapter, then, supplies the detailed reading that is absent from Viyagappa’s book, and that is presupposed yet not provided in certain other

²⁴⁷ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 86.

²⁴⁸ There is a fourth and final reason, which concerns both Hegel’s treatment of the *Bhagavadgītā* in/as Indian philosophy and the neglect or obscurity of his reviews on the part of mainstream Western Hegel scholarship, in relation together to larger and deeper questions: about the discipline of philosophy, about a canonical or at least still-widespread narrative about the history of philosophy, and about Hegel’s role in the formation, consolidation, and dissemination of this narrative. These questions will be taken up in the concluding chapter.

²⁴⁹ Ignatius Viyagppa, S.J. *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980), 9; see also 112-127.

commentaries and critical analyses. After doing so, the chapter returns to critical and scholarly contentions surrounding Hegel’s review and his overall account and evaluation of Indian philosophy. First, some background is necessary for understanding the specific circumstances that prompted Hegel to compose his reviews.

I. Background

In addition to what was mentioned in Chapter 1 regarding European attention to India (see p. 34-37 and note 68), a further select chronology of key events in the transmission of Indian philosophy to early-modern Europe will be helpful here. As early as the sixteenth century, interactions between European Christian missionaries—Protestant as well as Catholic—and Indians in western and southern regions of the subcontinent yielded initial documents, such as translations into European languages (e.g., Portuguese, French) and manuals in local ones (e.g., Tamil, Marathi, Konkani).²⁵⁰ The year 1651 saw perhaps the first published translation of a Sanskrit text into any European language: an appendix of poems by Bhartṛhari included in the Dutch Calvinist missionary Abraham Roger’s *The Open Door to the Hidden Heathenism (De Open-*

²⁵⁰ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 37-38. Manoel d’Oliveira, who translated the *Jñāneśvarī* into Portuguese in the middle of the 1500s, was “an Indian convert” (37) as was Maridas Poulle (45). Amid the vigor of ongoing critiques of European colonialism, merited and effective to be sure, it is also key to keep in view the fact that colonialism was not a one-way imposition of European ideas and demands onto impressionable, powerless indigenous populations but a much more complex process of contestation. Moreover, Indian perspectives on, reactions to, and accounts of events such as the arrival and increasing presence of European missionaries, traders, visitors, and scholars in the centuries up to replacement of Company rule by Crown rule in 1858 at the time of their occurrence are, of course, of equal importance. While the tendency of Western scholars to focus on European accounts and perspectives (and on Indian negotiations only from around the mid-1800s with Rammohan Roy and “modern” reformers) persists, the imbalance has slowly been shifting toward balance, albeit arguably more so in fields such as history, sociology, and cultural theory than in those of philosophy and the history of philosophy.

Deure tot het verborgen Heydendom), published in Amsterdam two years after Roger's death.²⁵¹

Such efforts increased steadily into the 1700s, particularly as the English intensified their mercantile and commercial presence; Britain's East India Company, vying successfully against its French and Dutch competitors, gained a customs exemption from the Mughal empire in 1718 and then earned extensive land-use and legal-administration rights in 1765.²⁵² The Company had for a time an uneasy relationship with the proselytization work of various Christian missions, tending instead to "avoid or even prohibit missionary activities."²⁵³ (This policy would be reversed shortly after the turn of the century.) Missionaries nevertheless remained active, learning and writing locally and sending or carrying manuscripts back to Europe. Their contributions were formative and established the basis for serious European learning, which was then extended and developed through the endeavors of employees of the British East India Company, whose ranks swelled in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

While some missionaries came to respect Indian culture, traditions, and thought even as they sought to promulgate Christian teachings and produce converts, this was not typically the case. Among a number of eighteenth-century exploits worthy of note is the circulation in Europe of a text called the *Ezourvedam*, a fraudulent version of the Vedas concocted by French Jesuits near Pondicherry and possibly meant to be used to convert Hindus to Christianity. Voltaire, who had access to it by the 1760s, deployed it for exactly the opposite of its intended purpose: to extol the merits of Indian civilization,

²⁵¹ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 46. As the title indicates, Roger's work was decidedly disapproving, at least of contemporary Indian beliefs and practices, which Roger deemed idolatrous.

²⁵² Amit Ray, *Negotiating the Modern: Orientalism and Indianness in the Anglophone World* (New York & London: Routledge, 2007), 29.

²⁵³ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 49.

which he claimed had developed religion on the basis of universal reason, prior to and independent of any other human society.²⁵⁴ The “scandalous” text of the *Ezourvedam* was published in France in 1778, translated into German a year later, denounced as a forgery by the French scholar Pierre Sonnerat in 1782, and further discredited in an 1822 article.²⁵⁵

The last two decades of the eighteenth century saw an absolute flurry of India-related scholarly activity, much but not all of it based for the first time on direct and extensive knowledge of Sanskrit. Prominent among the productions of the period is Charles Wilkins’ full, direct English translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the first appearance of that work, and indeed of a major Indian philosophical text, in any European language. Wilkins went to India in 1770 and learned Sanskrit in the service of the British East India Company. His translation appeared in print in London in 1785 and quickly became known throughout Europe. While it may have been, as Figueira writes, that “40 years elapsed before the next significant treatment of Indian speculative thought in the West”²⁵⁶—that is, August Wilhelm Schlegel’s complete translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* from Sanskrit to Latin—a great deal happened in the meantime nonetheless. Wilkins also published a complete English translation of the *Hitodapeśa*, a classic of Sanskrit literature, in 1787. Having established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 while there in the service of the East India Company from 1783, William Jones also achieved a high level of Sanskrit ability and produced an English translation of the fourth-century play by Kalidasa, *Śakuntala*, in 1789. Georg Forster used it to make a German translation, which he published in 1791. The next year Herder published his German renditions of excerpts

²⁵⁴ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 58.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵⁶ Figueira, *The Exotic*, 64.

from Wilkins' two English translations. The first direct Sanskrit-to-English version of the *Manusmṛti* (or *Laws of Manu*) under the title *Institutes of Hindu Law: Or, the Ordinances of Menu...* was issued in 1796, a posthumous release of the work of Jones, who had died in 1794.²⁵⁷ A translation of the *Īśā-Upaniṣad* (or *Īśopaniṣad*) appeared in the six-volume edition of Jones' collected works brought out in 1799.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the frequency of significant moments in the European intellectual encounter with India did not abate. In 1801, Herder's student Friedrich Majer prepared the first full German translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, albeit using Wilkins' English translation rather than the original Sanskrit. Importantly, between 1801 and 1802 *Oupnek'hat*, the first considerable translation of some of the roughly 108 *Upaniṣads*, appeared in Europe. It was the work of French scholar Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, who had spent the years 1754-1762 in India seeking the "original, primal" sources of Oriental religion and studying Persian and Sanskrit, the former successfully, the latter much less so. As a result, he based the fifty Latin *Upaniṣads* he published (after testing out four of them in French in 1787) on the 1657 Persian translation of Dara Shikoh.²⁵⁸ A second edition of Forster's English-to-German translation of *Śakuntala* came out with a preface by Herder in 1803, the year of Herder's death. Friedrich Schlegel, who spent 1803 and 1804 learning Sanskrit in Paris with Alexander Hamilton (a British navy officer who had been stationed in Bengal and studied Sanskrit alongside William Jones and other Asiatic Society members), crafted

²⁵⁷ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 270. An English edition had appeared in 1776, as *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or Ordinations of the Pundits*, but its translator, N.B. Halhed, had based it on an intermediate Persian version. Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 70.

²⁵⁸ The phrase is from Halbfass. See Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 64-65; also Herling, *The German Gītā*, 59-62; Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 61; Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 21-28.

fragments of the *Bhagavadgītā* directly from Sanskrit into German in his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* of 1808.²⁵⁹ Thaddä Anselm Rixner ventured a German translation of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* from Anquetil-Duperron’s *Oupnek’hat* in the same year. Schlegel’s older brother August Wilhelm Schlegel, who began studying Sanskrit in Paris in 1815 under Antoine-Leonard de Chézy and along with his compatriot Franz Bopp, was called to Bonn in 1818 to occupy the first chair of Indology in Germany, assembled the first *Devanāgarī* (Sanskrit-script) printing press in Europe there, and then in 1823 published the *Bhagavadgītā* in full Latin translation with the Sanskrit text accompanying it.²⁶⁰ Finally, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, who along with Wilkins and Jones was a major early figure in British Indian studies, brought out two essays in 1824 in *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, the journal of the organization he had founded the prior year. Colebrooke had spent the years 1782-1814 in India—still more than half his life by 1824—and acquired an extensive amount of learning in Indian philosophical traditions. Full collections of his work would not appear until later in the century, but the 1824 essays “On the Philosophy of the Hindus,” like Colebrooke’s 1808 “On the Vedas, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus” (which had appeared in *Asiatic Researches*, the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal), were unsurpassed in their day and well known throughout Europe.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ See Figueira, *The Exotic*, 57-62; Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 43-45.

²⁶⁰ Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the name Bhagavad-Gītā by Wilhelm von Humboldt*, Berlin 1826, x; Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 51-54. Herling provides exceptionally detailed accounts of the Schlegels in *The German Gītā*, 159-170 and 183-198.

²⁶¹ Schwab notes that Colebrooke’s essay and Friedrich Schlegel’s 1808 *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* “set the seal on the discoveries of that initial period.” *The Oriental Renaissance*, 52. At any rate, as a recent account has emphasized Colebrooke’s essays were more respected on the continent than in his native England. He found himself “disappointed with Britain’s flaccid embrace of the riches its empire opened.” Rosane Rocher and Ludo Rocher, *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 131. Rocher and Rocher have also documented the extensive correspondence between Colebrooke and August Wilhelm Schlegel that Schlegel

Turning to the immediate occasion for Hegel’s reviews, three additional events are significant: the appearance of some articles critical of Schlegel’s Latin translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the participation of Wilhelm von Humboldt in defense of Schlegel, and Hegel’s co-founding of the *Jahrbücher für Wissenschaftliche Kritik* (*Yearbooks for Scientific Criticism*). The French Sanskrit scholar Alexandre Langlois was the author of the articles, which appeared in the French *Journal Asiatique* in 1824. Von Humboldt prepared a rebuttal article for Schlegel’s journal *Indische Bibliothek* (it appeared in 1826) and then gave two formal talks at the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin, on June 30, 1825, and June 15, 1826. In July 1826 Hegel and several friends launched their *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, with the intention of both offering cutting-edge philosophical and scientific “culture” to public servants, and also establishing a “counter-Academy,” a sort of protest against the Berlin Academy of Sciences’ neglect of such scientific-educational activities (as well as, not insignificantly, its failure to make Hegel a member).²⁶² When Hegel learned of von Humboldt’s lectures he immediately stopped working on the *Encyclopedia*, which he was partially rewriting for a second publication,

initiated in 1820, hoping to “consult the oracle of [his] lights” (*The Making of Western Indology*, 147). Rosane Rocher and Ludo Rocher, *Founders of Western Indology: August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Henry Thomas Colebrooke in Correspondence, 1820-1837* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013).

²⁶² There is a much longer story in the background here. As Terry Pinkard has explained, since being invited to Berlin in 1818 Hegel had been hoping an invitation to membership would come his way, but due in large part to a feud with Friedrich Schleiermacher none had (nor, in fact, ever would). This was disappointing, but it was not Hegel’s primary motive in creating the journal. Merely advancing his own philosophy was not the chief reason, either. Rather, Hegel believed the Academy to be failing well short in its own stated purpose, i.e., of advancing science. As Pinkard puts it, Hegel believed the Academy “had devolved into an academic clique devoted to the pursuit at best of ‘science’ for its own sake and neglecting the public role that ‘science’ had to play in modern life itself. Hegel thus never conceived of the new publication as a *Hegelian* journal; it was never intended to propagate Hegel’s philosophy but to propagate the ideal of *Wissenschaft*-connected-with-*Bildung* in general. Not surprisingly, Hegel’s opponents’ charges that the *Jahrbücher* were only ‘Hegel journals’ were immediately rebutted by members of the editorial board, who quite rightly pointed out that many of the key articles were written by people who by no stretch of the imagination could be said to have anything to do with Hegel’s philosophy.” See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 414, 445-447, 534-541, 613-614. The quotation is from pages 537-538.

to go through them and write his own assessment.²⁶³ He published the resulting text in the *Jahrbücher* journal in two sections, January 1827 (its inaugural edition) and October 1827.²⁶⁴

II. First article

Hegel begins his review with very brief general reflections on the European understanding of India and the state of Indian studies in Europe. India, he states, is typically thought of as being a source of philosophy: from ancient times in Greece and Europe there were legendary stories of Indian wisdom, and these have continued to circulate so that people associate the origin of philosophy with not just the Orient in general but India specifically. In the present day, however, real knowledge of India is finally becoming possible thanks to direct access to the original sources (i.e., texts). This knowledge renders prior information—legends, reports, and other talk—obsolete. So although Europeans know that India is very old, it is at the same time a “new world” in terms of its literature, sciences, and arts, since Europeans have only recently discovered and begun to understand these via direct examination. Hegel suggests that Europeans’ initial “joy at the discovery of these treasures did not let us accept them in a composed

²⁶³ In December 1826 Hegel wrote to a friend who was proofreading his drafts of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia*, “One of the many interruptions which has delayed this work is an article I had to finish for our critical journal on Mr. Wilhelm von Humboldt’s treatise on the *Bhagavad-Gita*. I shall have to save a second article on the same theme for later.” Hegel to Karl Daub, December 19, 1826, in *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. by Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 514.

²⁶⁴ Though von Humboldt’s articles are dated to 1827, they may have been published earlier; in any event, there is no question that Hegel had access to the text of his lectures by December at the very latest, in order to write the December letter mentioned in the previous note and to publish the first part of his review in January of 1827. It does not appear that he attended von Humboldt’s lectures, which would not be surprising since he was not a member of the Academy, but he may have been able to obtain unpublished versions of Humboldt’s lecture transcripts or prepublication versions of the articles. Perhaps, again, the lectures were published individually before being collected into the Academy’s *Abhandlungen* for the years 1825/6 (published with the date 1827).

and moderate way.”²⁶⁵ Here, in the very first paragraph of the review, Hegel indirectly (yet not so subtly) criticizes the Romantic reception of Indian thought as excessively enthusiastic.

Hegel goes on to observe that William Jones and other Europeans who first gained immediate access to the original works considered their value to consist not only in being the direct sources of ancient Asian traditions, but also in providing fresh authentication of both those traditions and even Western stories and “mythologies” (*Mythologien*) concerning Asia. Hegel disagrees, taking issue with the last aspect of this view in particular; for him attempts to locate in Indian texts corroboration of Greek, “Mosaic” (*mosaischen*), or European stories and ideas about India and Asia are easily corrupted. He mentions, providing details in a footnote, a “far-reaching deceit” in which “obliging Brahmins” embroiled Francis Wilford, a British researcher. (Hegel takes his version of events directly from Wilson’s, published in the journal *Asiatic Researches*.) First a pandit dutifully supplied, at Wilson’s request, excerpts from Indian works that reflected the accounts offered in Wilson’s European sources. When Wilford began to discern that the texts had been faked or were fraudulent, the pandit doubled down by “forging the manuscripts in a most shameless way” and producing “*ten Brahmins*” ready to stake everything holy in their religion on the truth of the passages the pandit had furnished (5, emphasis in original). This cautionary tale is not Hegel’s only rationale for claiming that rather than looking for convergences between Western legends and Indian records, it is better to use the original works for the purpose of studying “the peculiarity

²⁶⁵ Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahabharata known by the name Bhagavad-Gītā* by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Berlin 1826, 3. Parenthetical page numbers in the text of the present chapter refer to Herring’s English translation of the reviews; in fact it is a dual-language version, with German and English on facing pages.

of [the] Indian world-view and ideas”(5).²⁶⁶ He also believes that just by becoming more familiar with the originals one is led to focus on their content and what they reveal about the Indian mind. So in a sense the attempt to confirm European tales or reports with Indian sources is for Hegel completely beside the point, regardless of the nature or quality of Indians’ participation in such efforts. Yet the cumulative effect of the reference to the Wilford episode, together with Hegel’s elaboration in the footnote, in the very first paragraph of the review is to communicate that Hegel thinks (and wants his European reader to be aware) that Indians are obsequious, duplicitous, and unreliable—they should not be taken at their word.

At any rate, in Hegel’s view knowledge (*Kenntnis*) can only result from focusing on what is actually in the original texts. He praises von Humboldt for having done just that in his lectures and thus having “grossly enriched our insight into the Indian conception of the highest spiritual interests”(7).²⁶⁷ Hegel continues, “Real information can only derive from what has been achieved in the essay under consideration: the rare combination of a profound knowledge of the original language, intimate acquaintance with the philosophy and the wise reservation not to transcend the strict meaning of the original, to see nothing more than what is precisely expressed in it”(7). He declares himself in full agreement with von Humboldt’s claim that each Indian work must be studied on its own, and carefully, in order for a complete and unconfused picture of Indian thought to emerge. Often, Hegel laments, in German publications on Indian religion or philosophy and in histories of philosophy “a particular aspect, derived from a certain author, is presented as Indian religion and philosophy *in general*”(9, emphasis in

²⁶⁶ Hegel’s text reads “*der Eigentümlichkeit indischer Ansichten und Vorstellungen*” (emphasis in original).

²⁶⁷ “...*unsere Einsicht in die indische Vorstellungsweise von den höchsten Interessen des Geistes wesentlich bereichert.*”

original). This leads too frequently to disappointment: a person trying to become informed about Indian thought finds that names, terms, definitions, and the like differ widely from one author to the next, and that from all the partial presentations, idiosyncratic views, or particular conceptions no general understanding can be gained.

The *Bhagavadgītā*, on the other hand, unlike so many studies by European authors, appears to Hegel “specially suitable to grant us a distinct idea of the most general and most sublime in Indian religion. As an episode it serves in particular a doctrinal purpose and is thus freer of the wild, enormous phantastic compositions, dominant in Indian narrative poetry,” although “even in this poem it is necessary to cope with many things and to abstract much in order to emphasize what is interesting”(9). In these remarks Hegel manages to play up and put down the *Bhagavadgītā* at the same time, while disparaging Indian poetry on the whole. Perhaps he also senses the potential contradiction lurking in the claims that on one hand the *Bhagavadgītā* serves a doctrinal purpose (which must be specific to some degree, it would seem), that on the other it can on its own provide a general understanding of Indian religion and philosophy, and yet also that certain things need to be ignored and others “abstracted” (*abzuziehen*) in order for the true meaning of the text to be distilled. For he turns to some authorities to support his idea that this can be done, and indeed that von Humboldt’s essay facilitates the process. First he appeals to Governor General Warren Hastings’ foreword to Charles Wilkins’s English translation of the *Gītā*, which advises the Western-Christian reader not just to suspend expectations with regard to literary conventions, moral sensibilities, and textual religio-cultural references, but in fact to expect “*obscurity, absurdity, barbarian customs and a depraved morality*”(9-11, emphasis in original). Then he quotes Wilkins

and August Schlegel in turn to show that Indians think highly of the *Gītā* and Brahmins take it to encapsulate their religion. By masterfully condensing the poem's main ideas and teachings, von Humboldt's work "spares us especially from the exhaustions caused by the tedious repetitions of Indian poetry"(11) and "leads us automatically" to understand how important the text is to Indians, how completely and ideally it expresses the essentials of their religion. So, Hegel concludes, real knowledge of Indian religion and philosophy in general can be gotten from following von Humboldt's helpful account. In all this, however, not only does Hegel evidently sustain a pejorative tone toward Indian poetry, culture, and society, he also subverts von Humboldt's point in the passage he quotes. In fact, von Humboldt urges that major Indian texts be read and reflected on one at a time, then compared with others. Instead, it appears that Hegel is preparing or prepared to take the *Bhagavadgītā* as effectively the first and last Indian word on Indian religion and philosophy.

At this point Hegel offers a word on the *Bhagavadgītā*'s "situation" (*Situation*), which he says is "self-explanatory enough"(11). The great warrior Arjuna is on the battlefield, moments away from engaging the enemy, in whose number are many of his relatives, when he is "overcome with timid scruples"(11-13) (*gerät in zaghaften Kleinmut*). He sets down his weapon and engages Krishna—his charioteer and an incarnation of the god—in a dialogue that occupies the poem's eighteen hymns or lessons and "presents a complete philosophical system"(13). According to Hegel, it would never cross the mind of a European to frame in this way a poetic work whose purpose is to communicate a philosophy. For one thing, the idea that a warrior on the brink of battle would suddenly pause "is of course contrary to all conceptions we Europeans have of war

and of the moment when two great armies are confronting each other, ready to fight”(13). It is not entirely clear here whether Hegel is suggesting that Europeans do not know what it is like to experience hesitation before mortal combat, or that a superior would not solicit advice from a subordinate regarding conduct in war, or only that a single soldier would not be able to halt the onset of a massive battle this way—perhaps he means all of these. Whatever the case, it is difficult to avoid the inference that for Hegel the preposterousness of the *Bhagavadgītā*’s setting corresponds either to something in Indians’ character, which would cause them to really display such behavior on the threshold of the fight, or else to something in their imagination, which would lead them to concoct such an implausible scenario. For another thing, he adds, having a philosophical dialogue take place on a battlefield runs afoul of standards in poetic composition as well as habits in presenting philosophy; Europeans may “locate the meditation and presentation of a philosophical system in our study or elsewhere, yet certainly not in the mouth of the general and his charioteer at such a decisive hour”(13). Since the European would neither act as Arjuna does nor ever think to articulate a philosophy via conversation on the frontline of an imminent battle, the *Bhagavadgītā* will inevitably appear very strange. And for Hegel, exotic on the surface means unusual on the inside too: “This strange form of the introduction makes us prepared for the fact that also with regard to the essence, the religion and morality, we are to expect completely others [*sic*] than our familiar ideas”(13).²⁶⁸

Hegel now delves into the content of the dialogue and is occupied with philosophical analysis, particularly of the ethical theory Krishna promulgates in the text,

²⁶⁸ “Dieser äußere Eingang bereitet uns darauf vor, daß wir auch über das Innere, die Religion und Moralität, ganz andere als uns gewöhnliche Vorstellungen zu erwarten haben.”

for the rest of the first article of his review. He explains that the first lesson Krishna seeks to impart to Arjuna concerns the practical (or action) rather than the theoretical (or knowledge): the necessity of relinquishing attachment to the fruits or outcomes of actions. “We can recognize in this,” Hegel writes, clearly showing that he is thinking of Kantian morality and that at least on a superficial level there is a parallel, “the moral obligation to do the good for the sake of the good only and duty only for duty’s sake”(13-15). There is, however, a second and distinct necessity: “to know what aim action is to strive after, what duties it must fulfill or must respect” since interest is typically “determined by arbitrariness or circumstances” and since the principle of non-attachment to the fruits of action “like that of modern morals, does as such not yet lead to anything, and from itself there cannot result any moral duties”(15). Hegel proposes to look first into “the motivation of the whole poem” (*der Veranlassung des ganzen Gedichts*) for a concrete explanation of what the principle of nonattachment obliges one to do, and then to examine how the text relates duty and action to “the Yoga-teaching”(15) (*Yoga-Lehre*).

Arjuna’s very hesitation to do battle is a case in point for Hegel of the indeterminacy of a purely formal moral principle like the Kantian categorical imperative or the Indian renunciation of attachment to the results of actions. This is because his reluctance stems not from deep opposition to wounding or killing others but from just the “peculiar fact” (*Umstand*) that the forces he confronts in battle are his own kin and those of the army under his command. Does this situation even involve a moral consideration, then? According to Hegel it appears to, but whether it truly does depends on “the nature of that value which in the Indian Arjuna’s mentality is attached to family-ties”(15-17). In other words, if in India family bonds do constitute a properly moral (*sittliche*) domain,

then Arjuna's aversion to visiting pain and death upon his relatives could be said to have a moral basis. What makes for a moral conception of family relationships? As Hegel writes, "To the moral understanding of the European the sense of this tie is the moral in itself" (*das Sittliche selbst*) "so that the love for one's family is as such the completion, and morality consists only in the fact that all sentiments connected with this tie... have that love as their foundation and as a self-sufficient starting point"(17). Is the same true of India? How can this be determined? For Hegel, Arjuna's own justification for his resistance to engaging in battle reveals his understanding of the value of family bonds, which is by extension the understanding of Indian people and which does not have to do with love. As Hegel reads the *Gītā*, Arjuna's reservations are founded on something less than this truly "moral sentiment" (*diese moralische Empfindung*). The problem for him is not the killing of family members *per se*. Killing them would be a crime or evil deed, yes, but only because it would ultimately bring the entire people to ruin. Thus the value of family ties among Indians is not connected with morality according to Hegel, since the feeling of the family tie is moral "only in so far as it is retained in its purity or rather developed in its purity as love and when, as mentioned above, this love is preserved as basis"(19). Instead, in the *Bhagavadgītā* "great importance is attached to the conversion of this tie into a superstitious context, into an immoral belief in the dependence of the soul's fate after death on the cake and water-libations of the relatives, that is to say those who have remained true to the caste-distinction"(19). In other words, it is only his fear of upsetting the ancient ritual order, not love for his distant relations or respect for their innate worth as human beings, that explains why Arjuna is horrified at the thought of warring with them. While superficially pleasing to European ears, Hegel cautions, the

references Arjuna makes to religion and the dereliction of duty in justifying his “scruples” (here, *Zweifeln*) are misleading. The former involves primarily ritual offerings, the latter the preservation of caste distinctions and purity, and thus the terms have “a meaning for which we have neither religious nor moral respect”(21). To Hegel this shows that “the poet has not yet overcome the common Indian superstition in favor of a moral, truly religious or philosophical definition”(21).²⁶⁹

The sub-morality of the Indian viewpoint expressed in the *Bhagavadgītā*—or at least its first two chapters—is further confirmed for Hegel in Krishna’s rejoinder to Arjuna’s protest. Krishna first chides Arjuna, saying his hesitation is simply weakness and it is a soldier’s duty to do battle, but this has no effect on Arjuna. Indeed it is insufficient; Krishna has to answer for the “moral collision” introduced in the reference to duty. While his eventual way of doing so, Hegel explains, will “display the higher, all-surpassing metaphysics which on the one hand transgresses action completely towards pure intuition or knowledge and thus enters the innermost of Indian spirituality, and which on the other hand causes the more important collision between this abstraction and the practical and thereby evokes the interest to find out in which way this collision could be adjusted and solved,” at this early point in the work Krishna merely suggests this move. For the moment he confines his counsel “to common popular ideas only”(21-23). One of these is the dictum that the wise person does not grieve for either the living or the dead. After quoting several passages from Chapter 2 of the *Gītā* that follow the appearance of this famous line, Hegel again declares that Krishna’s advice does not constitute “a moral statement”(23) (*eine moralische Bestimmung*). Nor does Krishna’s

²⁶⁹ “Der Dichter hat sich hierin nicht über den gemeinen indischen Aberglauben zu einer sittlichen, wahrhaft religiösen oder philosophischen Bestimmung erhoben.”

further elaboration on Arjuna’s duty as a soldier, because it links his duty directly and totally to his caste membership rather than to his individual moral agency. Again, Hegel admits that Krishna’s comments superficially strike the European reader as involving ethical considerations, especially given the Latin terms Schlegel uses in his translation, but he reiterates his view that in truth they do not: the duty Krishna insists on is “natural destination” (*Naturbestimmung*) as opposed to “moral obligation” (*sittliche Bestimmung*) (25).

Hegel’s analysis turns finally, in the article’s last four paragraphs, to a comparison of Sāṅkhya and Yoga. For Hegel, in Krishna’s transition from the standpoint and principles of the former to those of the latter as a way to persuade and indeed enlighten Arjuna, “the entirely strange field of Indian world-view is revealed”(25) (*eröffnet sich erst das ganz andere Feld indischer Betrachtungsweise*). This has much to do with what is distinctive about Yoga: “The noble strains or rather the sublime profundity which are revealed here, makes us directly overcome the European contrast of *the practical* and the *theoretical* with which we had commenced this depiction; acting is being absorbed in knowing or rather in the *abstract meditation* of consciousness”(25, emphasis in original).²⁷⁰ The discussion is intriguing, even if frustrating—it somehow manages to be brief, condensed, complex, and meandering all at once. It is also very significant for two reasons. One is simply that it shows Hegel to be aware of both Sāṅkhya and Yoga as differentiated but related schools or systems of Indian philosophy, and interested enough

²⁷⁰ “Der höhere Schwung oder vielmehr die erhabenste Tiefe, welche sich hier auftut, führt uns sogleich über den europäischen Gegensatz, mit welchem wir diese Darstellung eröffnet, von dem Praktischen und Theoretischen hinaus; das Handeln wird im Erkennen oder vielmehr in der Abstrakten Vertiefung des Bewußtseins in sich absorbiert.”

in them as such to pay some attention to the details.²⁷¹ The other is that in the course of the discussion here Hegel seems to accept both Yoga and Sāṅkhya as philosophical doctrines; yet also, perplexingly, to say on one hand that Yoga is nevertheless the higher doctrine in Indian thought, while suggesting on the other that Sāṅkhya is on the contrary more valuable and more appropriately referred to as “philosophy” (apparently even going so far as to identify it *with* Indian philosophy itself)—all with his initial declaration of *das ganz andere*, “the entirely strange,” “completely different,” or “wholly other” nature of Indian thought echoing throughout. Closer scrutiny bears this out.

On Hegel’s account, along with (or because of) the way the distinction between the theoretical and practical is blurred in Yoga, with the practical being furled into meditative knowing, the boundary between religion and philosophy also appears undefined, which has led von Humboldt to say that the *Gītā* contains “a complete *philosophical system*” (*eine vollständiges philosophisches System*) (27, emphasis in original). Hegel neither accepts nor rejects von Humboldt’s claim explicitly. Instead, he remarks that in the history of philosophy, particularly when dealing with “the more ancient periods of a people’s culture,” there is “difficulty and confusion” trying to differentiate between religion and philosophy and to find a “special characteristic” (*eine Eigentümlichkeit*) in virtue of which the feature common to these two “modes of consciousness” (*Wiesen des Bewußtseins*) could be said to properly belong in or to one or the other. What is common to religion and philosophy, Hegel states, is “the highest and therefore most spiritual, dwelling in pure thought”(25) (*denen gemeinschaftlich das*

²⁷¹ This point could also be reversed: these paragraphs show Hegel to be interested enough in Indian philosophy to have read Colebrooke and other European expositors with sufficient care and sensitivity to gain an awareness of the existence of diversity in Indian thought and even an understanding (in basic though certainly not advanced detail) of some commonalities, differences, and specificities of Sāṅkhya and Yoga.

Höchste und darum das Geistigste, nur im Gedanken seinen Wohnsitz Habende). He then says, straightforwardly enough, that in the case of India the distinction between religion and philosophy can be made thanks to Colebrooke’s “extracts from truly philosophical works of the Indians”(27) (*eigentlich philosophischen Werken der Inder*). Where exactly Hegel takes the distinction to lie, however, is less clear. He goes on to say that in both the *Gītā* and “the philosophical systems” there is a difference between “Sāṅkhya doctrine and Yoga doctrine”(27) even if it may seem at first that Yoga is only a particular teaching contained within the more general Sāṅkhya system. He identifies calculation and reasoning as the hallmarks of Sāṅkhya; in this he follows Colebrooke’s view that Sāṅkhya philosophy values counting, number, and calculation “in the enumeration of its principles,” and von Humboldt’s definition of Sāṅkhya, which holds that “in it reasoning and philosophical reflection is intense” (*in ihr das rasonnierende und philosophierende Nachdenken rege sei*) (27-29). As for what Yoga itself is, Hegel provides an initial definition gleaned from von Humboldt, then promises to analyze in a second article what the Yoga system or school of thought (*Richtung*) says concerning “the definition of God and man’s relationship to God” and the relation between “action and morality”(31). He reiterates that the simplified, popularized pseudo-Sāṅkhya of the *Gītā*’s opening chapters poses this relation as a problem but fails to resolve it satisfactorily. Hegel’s von Humboldt-derived characterization of Yoga at this point—at the conclusion of the first article of his review—should be carefully noted and compared with the earlier phrase “*der Abstrakten Vertiefung des Bewußtseins*”: in Yoga “that kind of *reflection* (if it can still be called so) is at work which, without reasoning, through meditation strives after a

direct awareness of the truth, even after unification with primordial truth as such” (31, emphasis in original).²⁷²

The difference between Yoga and Sāṅkhya might seem to be relatively clear as it stands. But this is not all Hegel has to say about the matter, and what remains is the source of the biggest obstacles, both to the putative distinction between religion and philosophy and to an unclouded understanding of Hegel’s stance on philosophy in India. For Hegel’s final two moves here are, first, to unsettle the account just given by claiming that by virtue of a shared or single goal the difference is superseded, or disappears; and second, to insist that because religion and philosophy prescribe separate paths to this goal a distinction nevertheless remains. The relevant passage is worth quoting at length:

What has been stressed in the foregoing with regard to moral conceptions has appeared as very unimportant, and we would characterize these as popular, entirely common motives. Now, if what remains is the most interesting part where, as Herr von Humboldt points out p. 32, Krishna in his instructions obviously dwells upon the Yoga [*sichtlich bei dem Yoga stehenbleibt*], one must remark that from the highest Indian point of view [*auf dem höchsten indischen Standpunkte*]*—as this is expressed also in Bhagavad-Gītā, 5th lesson, 5th śloka—this difference disappears; both ways of thought have the one and only goal [haben Ein Ziel und]: The one who understands, that the reasonable (Sāṅkhya-Śāstra) and the religious (Yoga-Śāstra) are one and the same doctrine, is the one who verily knows (Schlegel’s translation). It should be remembered on the other hand that as much as in this final goal [in diesem letzten Ziel] Indian religion and philosophy agree, the unfolding of this same goal [dieses Einen Zieles] and essentially of the path to this goal, as it has been done through and for thought, has proceeded in a way which is quite different from the religious aspect [religiösen Gestalt], so that it would well deserve the name of philosophy. The path which philosophy is directed to, shows itself entirely peculiar and valuable [eigentümlich und würdig] when comparing it with the path which Indian religion partly prescribes, partly tolerates when*

²⁷² “...dasjenige Nachdenken (wenn es etwa noch so heißen kann) rege sei, welches ohne Raisonement durch eine Vertiefung zur unmittelbaren Anschauung der Wahrheit, ja zur Vereinigung mit der Urwahrheit selbst gelangen will.” Hulin’s translation of this passage more clearly attributes the definition to von Humboldt (Hegel’s text does not include quotation marks): “...la réflexion (si elle mérite encore ce nom) qui est à l’œuvre dans cette doctrine «tend, sans l’aide du raisonnement discursif, par une absorption méditative (Vertiefung), à l’intuition immédiate de la vérité et même à une union avec la Vérité Originelle elle-même». (Hegel et L’Orient, 156).

itself taking the turn to the elevation of the Yoga conception. Hence one would do utterly wrong to Indian philosophy, which is Sāṅkhya doctrine [*welche Sanc'hya-Lehre ist*], if one would judge it and its procedure by that what [*sic*] has been said above, what is called Sāṅkhya doctrine in the Bhagavad-Gītā and what does not go beyond the common, popular-religious views. (29)

It is helpful to weigh particularly the last two sentences of Herring's English translation against Hulin's French here:

En outre, la voie tracée par la philosophie s'avère originale et digne, comparée à celle que la religion indienne pour une part prescrit et pour une part admet – en une sorte d'amalgame – lorsqu'elle-même tend à s'élever aux idées du Yoga. Aussi serait-ce faire le plus grand tort à la philosophie indienne – qui est la doctrine du Sāṅkhya – et à sa méthode, que de porter un jugement sur elle en se référant à ce qui, dans la Bhagavad-Gītā, porte le nom de Sāṅkhya et qui ne va pas au-delà des représentations communes et de la religiosité populaire.²⁷³

All the same, the key phrase *der indischen Philosophie, welche Sanc'hya-Lehre ist*, remains puzzling. It is quite difficult to understand, in any language, what exactly Hegel is trying to say here. For one thing, it must be taken in the context of both his previously-stated claim that what religion and philosophy have in common is “dwelling in pure thought,” and his conviction that not only is there a “special characteristic” for determining what might belong to one domain rather than the other but also the “truly philosophical works of the Indians” make it possible to determine this in the case of Indian culture. The result seems to be that Yoga is a (or the) religious path to the one final goal, although the idea that Sāṅkhya is more deserving of the designation “philosophy” is hard to square with the fact that for Hegel it is only *when* Krishna “dwells upon the Yoga” in the *Bhagavadgītā* that the difference disappears and the fact of a single goal becomes evident. Moreover, then, and perhaps more importantly, the passage appears to adopt the position that Sāṅkhya is philosophy while Yoga is not. Then

²⁷³ Hulin, *Hegel et L'Orient*, 155-156.

why does Hegel talk about both as “philosophical systems”(27)? More to the point, why does he refer to Yoga as the “higher turn” and “more sublime and profound” development in Indian thought, if on the contrary he thinks that India reached its highest philosophical attainment in Sāṅkhya? Finally, what to make of the implications for the existence of philosophy in India? It may be that in equating Indian philosophy and Sāṅkhya Hegel is nevertheless still not claiming that there is proper philosophy in India. He may, in other words, be asserting that Sāṅkhya is where to look for the truest kind of Indian philosophy; or even be making the bolder statement that there is nothing *but* Sāṅkhya worthy of the name “Indian philosophy,” and thus that “Indian philosophy” just means Sāṅkhya and vice versa—but still it is only the most-advanced kind of *Eastern* philosophy, not yet “true” philosophy. Yet in rather clear contradiction to this stands the assertion in the paragraph above that the “unfolding” (*Ausbildung*) of the ultimate goal “as it has been done through and for thought, has proceeded in a way which is quite different from the religious aspect, so that it would well deserve the name of philosophy.”²⁷⁴

In sum, Hegel advances three main contentions in the first (and shorter) of the two articles that make up his review. First, he claims the *Bhagavadgītā* contains all that is needed for a full and accurate comprehension of Indian religion and philosophy, provided one can put up with “tedious repetitions” and other superfluous elements while drawing out what is essential, the core ideas. Next, he says that though the work seems to bear traces of developed morality in Arjuna’s reasons for not wanting to do battle against his kin and in the teachings Krishna provides in response, what is actually communicated is a

²⁷⁴ Hulin: “l’élaboration...qui y mènent s’étant opérée par le moyen de la pensée et en fonction d’elle, a abouti à se différencier de la figure proprement religieuse au point de mériter tout à fait le nom de philosophie.” *Hegel et L’Orient*, 155.

mix of content-less formal prescriptions and notions that, because they are grounded in superstition, tradition, ritual, “natural determinations” such as caste, etc., are therefore not properly ethical. Finally, he maintains—not altogether consistently or without tension, as has just been seen—that this lower level of moral reasoning concerning practical interest and action, as unconvincing as it is undeserving of the designation *Sittlichkeit*, gives over to a higher and more profound approach, Yoga, in which the distinction between the theoretical and the practical is collapsed into (or subsumed under) “reflection,” which seeks truth or *Ur-truth* via a method of meditative absorption that forsakes (or attempts to do without) reasoning or ratiocination.

III. Second article

As the second portion of Hegel’s review runs to nearly four times the length of the first, a few of its overarching concerns and key claims can be set down ahead of a detailed critical reading that calls attention to distinctive and previously unnoted moments. Without a doubt, the second article concentrates on a critique of *brahman* as both the core and the pinnacle of Indian thought and yoga as a means of grasping, attaining, indeed becoming *brahman*. It does so with continued reference to morality and caste, while also bringing the Vedas into the discussion at various points. Hegel argues that in terms of morality Yoga outstrips both renunciation of attachment to the outcome of action and steadfast devotion to Krishna. It is the method to the highest good or consummate perfection in Indian philosophy, i.e., knowledge of the fundamental oneness or unity of all existence. This knowledge, however, Hegel understands to be not purely intellectual; while it is theoretical (in the sense of being the outcome of *theoria*,

contemplation), it immediately leads to a transformation or (re)orientation with respect to action. Aware that the Sanskrit term for the result is *mokṣa*, Hegel nevertheless typically refers to it as “salvation” or “bliss” (*Seligkeit*) rather than “liberation.” Thus he understands Yoga to be the preferred or exclusive Indian path to the soul’s ultimate salvation, which consists in understanding that all things partake in the unity of *brahman*—including the soul itself, which loses itself or merges into *brahman* in the very realization of its nature. The crux of Hegel’s critique is twofold: on one hand, he insists that for Indians *brahman* is comprehended as an undifferentiated or purely substantial unity, and is grasped (so they believe) not via mediated knowledge but directly, by and in yogic meditation. So as a concept of the absolute, *brahman* is abstract, not concrete; subjectivity and objectivity are not recognized as equally essential and deserving of dignity in such a concept.²⁷⁵ On the other hand, he argues that yoga can be considered neither a process of nor a means to mediated knowledge of the concrete. As will be seen, the causality seems to cut both ways, or the two problems reinforce each other: for Hegel, because *brahman* is an incomplete or insufficient concept of the absolute the path that leads to “knowledge” of it cannot be truly scientific, and conversely because yoga is a content-less meditation it is abstract, empty, and incapable of producing or leading to the concrete concept, the true and scientific “absolute knowing” (*das absolute Wissen*) of the *Phenomenology* or “absolute Idea” of the *Logic*—and so of Hegel’s absolute idealism, his philosophy of speculative dialectics, more generally.²⁷⁶ Again, this is an outline and

²⁷⁵ To put this in slightly different but homologous terms that evoke Hegel’s critique of Spinoza and 19th-century Spinozists alike (see, e.g. and perhaps most famously, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §17-18, 25, 37), in the Indian philosophical notion of *brahman* the subject is not given adequate standing with respect to substance, but instead is reduced or collapsed into Substance as the absolute.

²⁷⁶ In other words, the yogic meditator is attempting to reach at worst “not-thinking” or total thoughtlessness, and at best pure thinking in its utter indeterminacy, which for Hegel is merely the beginning of the movement of logic but is not, cannot be, the end or completion of it. Hence, Hegel’s

rough characterization of Hegel's core position; various consequences, nuances, and related points, many negative but others notably positive, crop up in the essay and will also be attended to. For convenience, the account below is divided into three topical sections—yoga, caste, and *brahman*—that follow the general order in which these subjects come up in the second review article, although they recur once introduced and Hegel's text itself proceeds unbroken.

A. Yoga

From the outset of the second article Hegel's emphasis on Yoga is unmistakable, as is his skeptical attitude regarding it. He states his intention to look critically at "some fundamental categories" (*Grundbestimmungen*) of Indian religious belief, and observes that the "Yoga doctrine" (*Yoga-Lehre*) is "the nucleus of the religion of this people, which comprises the essence of their religion as well as its most sublime concept of God" and is the central idea of the *Bhagavadgītā* (33). Hegel hastens, however, to issue a caution: it would be a mistake to treat Yoga as "a science, a developed system [of knowledge]" (*ibid.*) (*eine Wissenschaft, ein entwickeltes System sei*). It is rather an "edifying" doctrine, comprising a relatively small number of statements and formulas intended to bring about the desired edification.²⁷⁷ And it is a mysterious or esoteric one, which can "not be objective for it has no developed contents that are grounded on proofs."

position even in the review essay is informed and structured according to the conception of logic advanced in the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia Logic*; to Hegel it is inevitable that thinking initially resemble something like (what he understands to be) the outcome or end state of yogic meditation or absorption, but this is certainly not to be prized as an ultimate goal since there is much more that thought can achieve.

²⁷⁷ There is a clear echo here of the preface of the *Phenomenology*, where "edification" refers to a doctrine that the absolute can be "felt" or intuited directly, without mediation. It is contrasted with science, which for Hegel involves mediation and is the only way to true knowledge of the absolute; Hegel intones that "philosophy must beware of the wish to be edifying." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 6.

Hegel does not further describe Yoga immediately, however, nor explain why it does not have “developed contents.” Instead, he first sets out to show the centrality and primacy of the Yoga doctrine in “Indian religion and philosophy”(39). He first notes that the Vedas (which he here terms “the most sublime doctrine in India,” *die höchste Lehre*, rather confusingly since he elsewhere says this of yoga itself) are also an esoteric doctrine. Only Brahmins have access to them, with other castes being limited to the epic poems *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*. He then recounts von Humboldt’s claim that it cannot be determined whether Krishna’s teaching in the *Bhagavadgītā* parallels the Yoga doctrine as presented in the *Yogasūtras*. For Hegel, despite the brevity of Colebrooke’s presentation of Patanjali’s *Yogasūtras*, a text which sets forth the Yoga doctrine in its fullness, “the essence of what is called Yoga and the final goals it aims at” are clearly discernible in both these Indian works. Interestingly, Hegel acknowledges that although Colebrooke’s portrait is not detailed this is probably *not* because “many other wild and superstitious things, strange to us” can be found in the *Yogasūtras* (37).²⁷⁸ The discussion returns to the relationship between Sāṅkhya and Yoga briefly examined in the first article; here the general idea is the same, although the emphasis on Sāṅkhya as philosophy is absent. Hegel writes, “Even Sāṅkhya, which is essentially different from the Patañjali doctrine, agrees with it as to the final and only aim and is in this respect Yoga. Only the way is different; whereas Sāṅkhya clearly gives the instruction to move towards that aim by means of reasoning reflection on the particular objects and on the categories of nature and mind, the proper Yoga doctrine of Patañjali is engaged to reach

²⁷⁸ “Daß Colebrooke von den special topics der Patanjali-Lehre nichts Näheres anführt, während er von den anderen Lehren sehr ausführliche und bestimmte Auszüge gibt, hat wohl seinen guten Grund; es ist nicht zu vermuten, vielmehr scheint es der Natur der Sache nach eher unmöglich, daß viele andere als uns fremdartige, wilde, abergläubische Dinge, die mit Wissenschaftlichkeit nichts zu tun haben, zu berichten gewesen wären.”

this centre without such mediation, vehemently and at once”(37) (*gewaltsam und auf einmal*). Again, with problematic repercussions for a stable distinction between religion and philosophy, Hegel concludes that because Colebrooke explains that the ultimate purpose of all Indian philosophical schools—“atheistic,” “mythological,” and others, including Vedānta and Nyāya—is salvation, “We may therefore legitimately consider what is called Yoga the focus of Indian religion and philosophy”(37-39).

Turning to an account of Yoga itself at this point, Hegel immediately mentions the various difficulties that expositors such as von Humboldt, Schlegel, Wilkins, and Langlois have encountered in trying to translate the term into European languages.²⁷⁹ Citing their descriptions of Yoga, Hegel claims that von Humboldt’s suggestion of the German *Vertiefung* accurately captures the general meaning of Yoga but that the term has a “characteristic meaning that is of interest for our knowledge of the extraordinary of the Indian religions”(43). Hegel claims that the key meaning of “yoga” does not have an analog in German (“our”) culture and religion; it goes beyond what is implied by *Vertiefung* and there is no German term to express it. For Hegel, what is particular and decisive about Yoga in Indian thought is that it is neither concentration on an object or thing nor active introspection, but rather

²⁷⁹ Several scholars have now explored the methodological, technical, conceptual, and philosophical disagreements that flared up among English, French, and German intellectuals over translation of Indic texts in general and translation of key words and terms in particular. Given the existence of such treatments, the focus on these figures and controversies can be diminished in the present exploration in order to focus on Hegel’s appraisal of Indian philosophy and religion in the text, as a major moment in his overall negotiation. Notably, though, Figueira has argued that the Hegel position takes in these debates effectively forecloses the possibility of cross-cultural hermeneutical inquiry, because it involves a claim concerning the inherent incommensurability of terms across cultures and hence inevitable inexactitude in translating (if not the outright impossibility of accurate translation). Perhaps most famously in this regard, in this section Hegel writes, “A word of our language gives us *our* distinct concept of such a thing and hence not that of the other people which not only has a different language but also another way of looking at things”(41).

a meditation *without any contents*, the abandoning of all attention towards external things, of the activities of the senses, it is the silence of any inner sentiment, of any sign of a wish or of hope and fear, the silence of all inclinations and passions as also the absence of all images, imaginations and concrete thoughts...Hence one could call Yoga only an *abstract devotion* because it ascends towards the complete emptiness of subject and object and thus towards unconsciousness. (45)

The state Hegel believes that Indian religion (philosophy?) prescribes, then, is not one that any German term can easily or elegantly convey. It is also one he takes the *Bhagavadgītā* to prize highly and to lay out a series of steps for reaching. The first is indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit, Absehen*) to the fruits of action and the second is devotion to Krishna, dedicating one's actions to him. Here Hegel enters on the review's second overarching theme: the caste system in its stasis, arbitrariness, foreignness, and unjustness.

B. Caste

Hegel's account of caste in the context of the yoga of the *Bhagavadgītā* proceeds with reference to three main subtopics: first, caste divisions, in terms of both their hereditary basis and their respective prerogatives and responsibilities; second, yogic exercises and mortifications undertaken by those who wish to gain salvation; and third, heightened or supra-natural powers attained and manifested by yogis on the path to the "absolute salvation" of *brahman*. Hegel introduces the caste system by asserting that Chapter 18 of the *Bhagavadgītā* links caste observances to the three qualities or categories "according to which [the Indians] systematize everything"(49). He takes issue with the translations of both Schlegel and Wilkins, which are too amenable to the view that caste positions might derive from natural inclination or temperament. For Hegel, "One should consider it rather important to show that also this poem, which is in such a

high repute as to Indian wisdom and morality, rests upon the well-known caste distinctions, without indication of any elevation to moral freedom”(51). By Hegel’s standards the *Bhagavadgītā* nowhere provides a truly moral teaching, and it cannot do so because it is grounded in the law of caste, “this institution that has made and still makes morality and real cultivated civilization [*Sittlichkeit und wahre Bildung*] for ever impossible among the Indians”(ibid.).

Hegel argues that Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna, to fight because it is his duty as a *kṣatriya*, has nothing to do with “inner right and conscience”(53), but is instead concerned wholly with preserving caste, which is Krishna’s own unending work in the world. This shows that caste is perceived as natural and permanent—dependent, again, on “nature” as the cosmic order and the facts of birth and heredity, rather than on “nature” in the sense of personal disposition. It is not otherwise, Hegel contends; for one thing, not just religious rituals but all sorts of “unimportant and superficial things” are governed by caste rules, and Brahmins especially are “subject to thousands and thousands of absurd regulations of a crude superstition”(55). For another thing, those who are not born Indian are members of the lowest class (*Klasse*) and cannot convert or join a church, but must wait to be reborn for a chance to enter the caste hierarchy.

The extended transition to the topic of yogic practices begins with a return to the idea of the three “perfections,” or stages on the path to salvation. Hegel notes that the intermediate stage of devotion to Krishna and consecration of one’s works to him has a sense of steadfastness, or perseverance, associated with it. The concept of devotion—the instruction to renounce action and focus on Krishna—and the injunction to act are in constant contradiction. In fact they cannot be resolved, Hegel declares, because “the most

sublime in Indian mentality, the absolute Being, Brahman [*Brahm*], is as such without qualities”(59). Attempting to unite the extremes of action and inaction on this basis results not in truly spiritual activity but rather, in this case, in “the well-known Indian practice of enforced withdrawal and the endurance of the monotony of a deed- and thoughtless state...the rigorism to maintain one’s life in empty absurdity”(ibid.).

Meditation in the sense of contemplative reflection, however introspective, on some topic, thought, or object is unknown in the “common Indian yoga” of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which “pronounces *to think nothing* as a necessity”(61).

After noting some of the “rules and characteristics” for yogic practice, including “uttering the famous syllable *Om!*”(63), Hegel insists that “the vacant gaze of the Indian wherein thought remains equally motionless and inactive as the senses and feelings should be forced to inactivity”(65) has no knowledge in it whatsoever. Instead, in a declaration memorable for its conviction as well as its presumption, he writes, “The Indian isolation of the soul into emptiness is rather a stupefaction which perhaps does not at all deserve the name mysticism and cannot lead to the discovery of true insights, because it is void of any contents”(ibid.). Hegel also adduces the report of an English traveler and recounts an episode of the *Rāmāyana* to further demonstrate the outlandish and shocking lengths Indians will go in their yogic exercises. Indeed, he concludes, the “most sublime in Indian religiosity”(69) is so intensely negative in nature that even “the direct killing” (*dem unmittelbaren Töten*), such as throwing oneself into the Ganges, or under the wheels of a giant chariot during the festival at a certain temple (where Hegel has it that “the bare seacoast...is covered for miles with the skeletons of pilgrims who

have succumbed to the pilgrimage and its exercises”), is an acceptable method of renunciation.

The austerities, mortifications, and other strange elements of Indian spiritual practice having been dealt with, Hegel’s focus turns to the third subtopic in the larger discussion of caste and yoga, the magical and heightened powers that are said to be acquired by a practitioner. After disagreeing with von Humboldt’s explanation for why the *Bhagavadgītā* does not describe any “superstitious tricks”(71) (*abergläubische Spielereien*)²⁸⁰, Hegel also seeks to clarify that belief in the existence of such powers is not exclusive to the Indian masses or common people but encouraged by the doctrines of Patāñjali and Sāṅkhya alike. This is, apparently, despite the fact that Sāṅkhya is “the specifically developed logic and metaphysics, and both doctrines *or philosophies* are on the whole a higher study which goes beyond and exalts the common people”(73, emphasis added). The “power of meditative contemplation”(75) (*die Kraft der Vertiefung*) attending yogic practice appears most exquisitely in the *Laws of Manu* and *Rāmāyana*. Hegel’s examples from the latter work include the story of Shiva and Ūma²⁸¹ and that of Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha, which he recounts in rather surprising length and detail (77-85). Given that, for Hegel, “the basic relation of all religion and philosophy is first the relation of the spirit in general to nature and then that of the absolute spirit to the finite spirit,” the *Rāmāyana* episode shows that the “fundamental Indian conception is

²⁸⁰ Von Humboldt, Hegel says, suggests this is because *vibhūti*, power, has to do with overcoming “doubt and the senses” on the path to God; Hegel rejects this, offering instead the explanation that if Krishna were to explain to Arjuna the various yogic powers and reveal them to him on the brink of battle, Arjuna would simply be able to use them to defeat his enemy. This would defeat the purpose of the poem and make “the position even more oblique than it is already”(71-73).

²⁸¹ Interestingly, Hegel circumspectly mentions the one-hundred-year “embrace” (*Umarmung*) between Shiva and Uma, then parenthetically adds, “to render in modern languages what happened can be an embarrassment for a translator; the English translators...mentioned...that the *gross indelicacy* had not permitted [them] to render literally the words of the original text”(75-77).

that the abstract spirituality, the concentration of the pure unmodified and unlimited abstraction [*bestimmungs- und schrankenlosen Abstraktion*], is the absolute power of the natural; it is the point of the negativity of thought, the pure subjectivity of the spirit in which everything specific and all natural power is reduced to something powerless, dependent and vanishing”(85).

Characterizing Indian spirituality in terms of abstractness, negativity, and subjectivity in this way anticipates the sustained critique of *brahman* soon to come, but the discussion first circles back to the ideas of caste essentialism and caste duties raised earlier. For Hegel, the story of Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra also provides further evidence of the birth-based nature of the system. Brahmins are the “*twice-born* [*Zweimalgeborener*], a name which in the Rāmāyana is attached to a Brahmin like a title”(85). Their position in society is determined from the fact of birth, and is preserved entirely and exclusively through adherence to caste obligations. Virtue and morality are not incumbent upon Brahmins in the way Europeans would expect; in many respects they are free to act as they wish, even to the extent of stealing and killing (or allowing to die, e.g. by declining assistance to a lower-caste person) with relative impunity. Instead, the compulsory activities of Brahmins “consist in an endless number of observations of the emptiest and absurdist rules and the reading of and meditation on the Vedas”(87-89). But in fact Brahmins have “transcendent power” just insofar as they are Brahmins: “the conception of that excessive power is part of the law itself”(91) in Indian society. Hence the fearful respect in which they are held by non-Brahmins. Even lackluster learning or reading of the Vedas does not diminish a Brahmin’s power; whether doing these things well or not, a Brahmin “is a perfect one and lives in perfection”(ibid.). Brahmins are not obliged to

undertake “rigid abstinences expected of the other castes for attaining perfection”(93). These intense deprivations are precisely the reason that it is rare for non-Brahmins to embark on the path to the highest perfection and ultimate salvation of God-realization. Even when a non-Brahmin “commits himself to a carefully planned self-immolation [*Selbsttötung*]²⁸² and to the state of conscious unconsciousness [*der Bewußtlosigkeit im Bewußtsein*],” such effort does not “effect the unity with God and transcendent power nor the liberation from the transmigration of the souls”(ibid.) that is its aim.

The “satisfaction”(95) (*Genuß*) of supra-natural powers, and likewise of the third stage or level of Yogic perfection where they occur, is not “the highest” according to Hegel, for this is the level of relative rather than absolute perfection and salvation. Hegel proceeds to depict this ultimate perfection, dismissing along the way (in an interesting and complex passage, which unfortunately cannot be delved into here) the idea that the *Bhagavadgītā* might fundamentally break with the Vedas in its position on who can achieve absolute or ultimate salvation and how it is to be reached. For Hegel, it is clear rather that “what is revealed in the Bhagavad-Gītā in general and of the core of Indian world-view is entirely grounded in the teachings of the Vedas,” where “it is Brahmā [*Brahma*] and the pure direction towards him that is praised as the most sublime, even as the only truth”(103).²⁸³ The highest perfection has a subjective and an objective form or aspect. Subjectively it is a state of isolation of or (self-)renunciation of consciousness:

²⁸² For unclear reasons, Herring uses “self-immolation” where Hegel has both *Selbstmord* and *Selbsttötung*, simply “suicide.” Hulin has “suicide” and “se macérer à mort” (*Hegel et L’Orient*, 182).

²⁸³ Additionally, echoing a comment so far made three times (11, 49, 57) and to be made at least once more (151, in the final sentence of the review) Hegel dwells on the structure and style of the text: “As an Indian poem the Bhagavad-Gītā can at the same time contain the difference of inwardness and outwardness as contrast only, as the highest contradiction without reconciliation. This being the case makes the tediousness of the presentation even necessary; when the one aspect, works and action in general, has come to life, the other one, abstraction from all ritual performances and actual facts, enters the stage. But this oneness necessitates on the other hand the challenge to act, especially to the Kṣatriya so that the presentation falls

This perfection is defined as the permanent state of renunciation, the subject matter of all preceding stages,—perennial solitude of selfconsciousness that has abandoned all sensations, all necessities of life and representations of external things, and is hence no longer consciousness,—also not a fulfilled selfconsciousness which would have spirit as its subject and still be consciousness; an intuition intuiting nothing, knowing of nothing—the pure emptiness of itself within itself. In modern [i.e., Hegel’s] terminology the definition of this state is to be called the absolute *immediacy* of knowing. For where there is knowledge of something, of some content, there is at once and already mediation; the knowing subject is knowing something only by means of this content which is its object, and the content is object only in as far as it is known. Consciousness, however, has contents only in as far as the content is its object, be it as feeling, intuiting or whatever; for feeling, intuiting, if it is not feeling of an animal, is feeling, intuiting of man, i.e. of a conscious being...(105-107)

Given these “simple, only analytical definitions”(107), on Hegel’s interpretation the ultimate subjective state is void of content, unmediated knowledge (which is to say not knowledge at all), and a kind of unconsciousness or consciouslessness. So “the renouncing concentration” (*diese abstrakte Konzentration*) of salvation is an annihilation, disappearance, or dissolution of consciousness into the “unity with Brahman” (*diese Einheit mit Brahm*) (*ibid.*).

C. Brahman

The concept of *brahman*, “the ultimate in the context of Indian religion” (*in dem Zusammenhange der indischen Religion der höchste ist*) is the primary focus of the remaining pages of Hegel’s review, along with the relation of this concept to the “meditative contemplation” (*betrachteten Vertiefung*) that leads to it. Some—but only some—of the details of this final and intricate section of argumentation can be provided in the present reading; in broad outline Hegel’s reasoning proceeds as follows. As a

automatically, by its context, into these annoying repetitions”(105). Hegel refrains from claiming that the repetitiveness of the *Bhagavadgītā* is directly responsible for his own repetitions; even as it is, he is perhaps protesting too much.

striving or search, contemplative meditation or absorption might be said to have *brahman* as its object. When contemplation is actually reached or consummated, however—where striving culminates (as a phrase of Hegel’s earlier in the essay has it) in “unity and dwelling with God, devoid of works and longing”(57)—it is objectless, but at the same time it becomes identified with or simply becomes *brahman*, the objective. *Brahman* has existence, then, but it is pure Being, undifferentiated substance. As the unity of the subjective and the objective, it is only an abstract or indeterminate unity. The notion of *brahman* fails to reconcile this universal, this absolute, with the finite or individual. Instead, *brahman* subsumes, swallows up, or takes into itself all finite things. This includes independent subjectivity, which is obliterated in substance, in the oneness of Being. The Indian conception of *brahman* therefore does not achieve the dialectical rectification of the individual and universal into the concrete that would be necessary to preserve both moments, the individual/subjective and the universal/objective, in and for themselves. Because it does not, the Indian worldview alternates endlessly between the most intense or extreme of abstractions—the undifferentiated unity of *brahman*—on one hand, and inexhaustible multiplicity—e.g. the pantheon of gods, fanciful expressions—on the other.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Again, this is markedly parallel to the critique of Spinozist substance that Hegel advances elsewhere. A number of additional commonalities can be seen in the ensuing pages (109-127). Though Hegel does not explicitly mention Spinoza or Spinozist thought, on pages 123-125 he briefly reflects on the pantheism-monotheism-polytheism-atheism dispute among Europeans, echoing the argumentative strategy he employs in the *Encyclopedia* and elsewhere with direct reference to Spinoza. Acknowledging these cross-references is crucial, since (questions of fairness aside) Hegel’s critiques are consistent with each other: the critique of Indian thought here, as the thought of pure Being in which all finite individual things and qualities are negated or dissolved, and Hegel’s critique of Spinoza are largely consistent with each other, and of a piece because they accord with Hegel’s conception of Science itself, and with his absolute as the dialectical mediation of substance and subject rather than the infamous “night in which all cows are black” where all things including, finite subjectivity, are (re-)submerged impossibly into undifferentiated substance. That Hegel finds Spinoza’s philosophy no less guilty of this mistaken attempt than Schelling’s is made clear in the *Encyclopedia Logic*: “Substance, just as it is immediately construed by Spinoza without the prior dialectical mediation, is, as the universal negative power, only this dark, shapeless abyss, as it were, that

Hegel is quick to acknowledge that thinking, albeit thinking that takes no object, is the condition of perfection in the subjective sense, and that it is a true achievement of India to have “raised to this separation of the spiritual from the sensuous”(109).²⁸⁵ Yet, stating his conclusion at the outset of the analysis, he finds it “peculiar” that “they did not proceed from the enormous abstraction of this extreme to the reconciliation with the particular, [that is] to the concrete; their spirit is thus only the unsteady reeling from one to the other and finally the misery to realize salvation only as the annihilation of the individual, which is the same as *nirvāṇa* in Buddhism”(ibid., translation modified). It is difficult to find this as peculiar as Hegel pretends to; the situation turns out so neatly in accordance with his philosophy that it seems to be more closely connected with a will to believe on Hegel’s part than with an approach involving openness, impartiality, and modesty. His claim is difficult to accept, for reasons including but not at all limited to the fact that shortly afterward Hegel adds that terms like “subjective” and “objective” are “inventions of thinking of modern times” and “should not be ascribed to the Indians”(111).

After calling *brahman* as an abstract unity or “indeterminate substance” “deficient” or defective (*Mangelhafte*) and “fictitious” (*Unwahre*) (113), Hegel also deploys a term for it that resonates deeply with the preface of the *Phenomenology* and

swallows up into itself every determinate content as vacuous [*nichtig*] from the outset and produces nothing that has a positive standing [*Bestand*] in itself.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 225.

²⁸⁵ “One must call it noble that the Indians have raised to this separation of the spiritual from the sensuous, the empirical manifold from the universal, of perceiving, desiring, imagining, willing, etc. from thinking, and that they have devoted themselves to the awareness of the supreme power of thinking.” “*Es ist für erhaben zu achten, daß die Inder sich zu dieser Absonderung des Unsinnlichen vom Sinnlichen, der empirischen Begehrens, Vorstellens, Wollens usf. von dem Denken und zu dem Bewußtsein der Hoheit des Denkens erhoben haben.*” Incidentally, the emphasis on Indian “thinking,” which Herling finds particularly pronounced in Hegel’s 1831 lecture course on the philosophy of religion, is already emerging in this passage. See Chapter 2, pages 37-38.

with his critiques of Spinoza and Schelling, among others: “*substance without subjectivity*”(115). For Hegel this fundamental conceptualization of *brahman* as indeterminate substance shows through in Indians’ methods of personalizing it. These result in “mere personification” as opposed to an adequate characterization of “the personality which God is by his essential nature,” which must include “the objective independence of God or the godhead in relation to the subject”(ibid.). Even when *brahman* is personified, as Brahmā for example, it/he is “only represented as the subject’s meditation, as neuter”(115); “One sees that even despite this outer formality of appearing Brahmā stays characterized as deep meditation”(117). What Hegel finds “most essential and interesting” about this “*metaphysical characteristic*” of *brahman* as universal, undifferentiated substantiality is that the Indian conception holds fast to it, preferring “Brahman merely as pure being, void of any concrete determinateness,” over a concept that finds “concrete fulfillment”(117-119). According to Hegel, Indians are unlike Europeans who “will normally conclude that with the word supreme Being or even God we have the idea of something concrete, of spirit, and that what is thought is much richer than what is said”(119).²⁸⁶ Indians, apparently, do not conclude anything similar regarding *brahman*; they do not (cannot?) think anything richer than what they say. *Brahman* is only a “category of pure Being” and, as a concept of God, nowhere near “the actual truth [*das wahrhaft Wahre*]”(121-123).

Hence the “long tirades” in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where Krishna asserts that he is the universality of all manifest things, “initially sound sublime [but] soon leave us

²⁸⁶ Here Hegel gives a kind of backhanded compliment to Kantian critical philosophy. He seems to accept that it is a “critical insight” of “reason-based metaphysics” to insist that there can be no true knowledge of God, that God passes beyond the understanding, so to speak, but his own point immediately compromises or subordinates such an “insight” in the face of what Hegel is indicating: the possibility of true, and truly rational, knowledge of God.

unconcerned”(127) (*die anfangs erhaben lauten, macht die Monotonie bald gleichgültig*]. Krishna’s identifications, like the many different names and characteristics of gods, are all truly and ultimately *brahman*. Hegel does believe (contra James Mill) that in Indian religion there is an idea of “the *one* God”(129), but this oneness is not yet conceived “as spirit”: “The thus inevitable inconsistency appears as the unsteady reeling, the subjective aspect of which we have mentioned above and which is equally inevitable with regard to its objective aspect,—as the flow from the One into the manifold of gods and the falling back from this abundance and splendour of fanciful imagination into the veil, dull oneness [*das leere, trübe Eine*]”(129). Invoking again the themes of reeling, fantasy (or phantasy), and “empty” oneness, here Hegel critiques the “objective” side of *brahman*, as not having true independent existence apart from the (finite) subject who thinks, who abstracts from all present content to the universality of *brahman* as substance, substantiality, or the Being of all beings. That is, it seems that for Hegel *brahman* is the *thought* of abstract or undifferentiated substance that Indians have, a “thing” that really exists not as a/the unitary and infinite material substratum of all phenomena but only as the idea they entertain of such an absolute.

A final feature of Hegel’s interpretation and judgment of the concept of *brahman* should be noted at this point, namely the relation between contemplative meditation and the realization of (oneself as) *brahman*. For Hegel, importantly, this relation is negation, and “productive activity”(139) follows from it immediately.²⁸⁷ There are many “theogonies” and “cosmogonies,” and a proliferation of deities and personified forms of *brahman*, but it is indeed *brahman* as abstract universality that is at the core of them all.

²⁸⁷ “Das Abstrahieren, wodurch das Vertiefen wird, ist für sich das Moment der Negation, des Opfern, und der weitere tiefsinnige Gedanke ist nicht zu verkennen, daß an diese Negativität, die Unendlichkeit, unmittelbar die Tätigkeit des Produzierens geknüpft wird.”

This is equally the case, then, of the trimurti or “Indian trinity,” which “contains at least the abstract form...for a concrete definition of spirit”(139-141). This abstract triune form would naturally need to be supplemented, or filled in, with concepts of divinities existing in and for themselves yet also truly unitary, moments of the godhead that are irreducible to mere abstract substance. For Hegel, however, Brahmā, Vishnu (“or Krishna”), and Shiva do not qualify, since they are in the final analysis arbitrary personifications of neutral, abstract *brahman*, which alone is the One and which has not been raised to the dignity of the notion or concept. So while “the more sophisticated form” of the trinity, i.e., the Christian, “proves that, when the idea of the spirit is elevated in thought to a concept [*wenn die Vorstellung des Geistes durch das Denken zum Begriff erhoben wird*], it is to be conceived of as three in one,” it is not to be anticipated that the less-sophisticated form of the trimurti would achieve the same. Instead, Hegel declares, “the rudiment of the triad which, for the first time, in Christianity has advanced to the true idea of God [*wahrhaften Idee Gottes*], in Indian world-view [*indischen Vorstellung*] has merely developed into something preposterous”(141). This analysis mixes praise with potent denigration, and leads Hegel (via some further and final considerations about the caste privileges of Brahmins) to a statement of summation that is often excerpted in part but worth noting here in its entirety:

The more the profound and critical diligence of the European scholars has provided us access to the Indian mind in its peculiar light, the more do the details of the theogonies and cosmogonies and of other myths lose their importance, for it already becomes obvious that the caprice of fancy imagination [*die Willkür der Phantasie*], being connected to the versatility of a subtle reflection, has expanded such material to a wild and inexpressible [*unsägliche*] variety. Thus one is automatically taken to a thorough investigation into the basic lines of what is common, the principles of Indian world-view [*indischen Bewußtseins*]. But the more those riches present themselves to us in their original colour, the more we

must abandon the superficial ideas of Indian religiosity and its contents, that originated partly from an application of the first best [*nächsten besten*] categories of our culture²⁸⁸, partly from a European philosophy which itself was often in a state of disorder. They must give way to the steadily growing documentation of the peculiarities of Indian spirit. But the task of the reception becomes at once all the more difficult not so much because of a thorough difference of Indian imagination and ours, but rather because it interferes with the most sublime concepts of our consciousness, but in the state of that wonderful profundity abruptly takes a rapid fall down to the most profane [*nicht sowohl um durchgängiger Verschiedenheit der indischen Vorstellungsweise von der unsrigen wegen, als vielmehr weil sie in die höchsten Begriffe unseres Bewußtseins eingreift, aber in der wundervollen Tiefe selbst ungetrennt in das Erniedrigendste verfällt*]. (149)

Concluding the second article, Hegel adds that von Humboldt has collected the “foundation stones” of the *Bhagavadgītā*, making it possible “to interrelate the scattered material and to investigate it more thoroughly”(151) (*anderweitiges Material in Verknüpfung zu bringen und in dessen näheres Verständnis einzudringen*).²⁸⁹ Finally, he admits that his two-part review has been limited entirely to the first of von Humboldt’s two lectures but says he will not discuss the second at all, partly because the review “is already lengthy enough” and partly because von Humboldt’s second lecture turns from the contents of the *Bhagavadgītā*, “of the system”(151), to its structure and arrangement.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Hulin translates this phrase “*catégories prises au hasard dans notre culture*”: “categories taken at random from our culture.” *Hegel et L’Orient*, 205.

²⁸⁹ Hegel rather obviously is saying that von Humboldt’s efforts provided the basis for the linking, investigation, and penetrating understanding that Hegel’s review has just achieved; Herring’s translation of *Wir wedanken ihm, daß er es uns damit möglich gemacht hat...* as “Thanks to him we are now in a position to...” misleads on this point. Hulin’s French is faithful: “*Nous lui savons gré de nous avoir par là-même ouvert la possibilité...*” (*Hegel et L’Orient*, 205).

²⁹⁰ Like other commentators, Herring finds that Hegel’s confident opinion about the unimportance of von Humboldt’s second lecture is “erroneous.” Von Humboldt, having been so gladdened by the first part of Hegel’s review that he wrote a letter thanking him for composing it, was deeply dismayed at the second part and in 1828 wrote to a friend complaining of Hegel’s injustices to India philosophically and von Humboldt personally. See Herring’s introduction to Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the Name Bhagavad-Gītā*, xv-xvi; Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 50.

IV. Appraising Hegel's appraisal

The foregoing account of Hegel's reviews, while intended to be representative, has no pretensions to being completely comprehensive. It also does not nearly exhaust the wealth of detail to be found in the text, particularly the second article. Still, from what has been said several things can be seen. For one, Hegel's review displays a degree of acquaintance with Indian culture and philosophy that is much greater than many contemporary scholars of Hegel and neo-Hegelian philosophers alike —perhaps even an anti-Hegelian postcolonial intellectual or two—appear to realize. Furthermore, Hegel's reading is noteworthy as an attempt to bring dialectic to bear on India, even if it might be argued that he represents the philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā* the way he wants it to be, focusing on what in Colebrooke or von Humboldt or Wilkins corroborates his characterization. An additional point, which has thus far not been highlighted in the secondary literature, is that Hegel is—certainly without having the slightest awareness of it—not radically far away from either criticisms of the early Vedānta conception of *brahman* made by Buddhists and other Indian philosophers, or critiques of later Advaita Vedānta advanced by Vedāntins and non-Vedāntins alike.²⁹¹ None of this is to say, of course, that the review is particularly sympathetic, judicious, or unprejudiced, even by the standards of Hegel's own time (at least those of nascent Indological scholarship that aimed at impartiality and objectivity; those of political administrators and the general public might be a different story). It is only to say that whatever Indian philosophy was or meant to Hegel, it was not something to be dismissed out of hand, without serious consideration. Hegel took an active interest in studying it. Even after he had done so and

²⁹¹ Of course, few if any Buddhists would say as Hegel does that “mokṣa...the annihilation of the individual...is the same as nirvāṇa in Buddhism”(109), especially when the latter is conceived as a nihilistic obliteration of consciousness.

arrived at some conclusions, as Bernasconi points out, “Hegel’s exclusion of India from the history of philosophy did not mean that Indian thought did not warrant the attention of the philosophers.”²⁹² Yet this “considered exclusion,” as it might be termed, is more than many Western philosophers have needed (or troubled themselves) to do in and from the comfort of the dominant Greco-Euro-Western paradigm. Hegel, it appears, knew more about India and Indian philosophy nearly two centuries ago than a significant number of European and American philosophers, if not the majority, believe is worth knowing today. A final insight, however, is that on the basis of what he learned and knew of India Hegel’s appraisal tended to be measured and ambiguous at best, consisting of occasional positive comments counterbalanced, even outweighed, by definitive statements subordinating India to the European understanding in a deeply objectifying manner.

Among other possible criticisms, then, it can be said of Hegel’s review that it displays a marked tendency toward an essentializing, overly simplistic, at times even careless fixing of one religious “essence,” concept of God, and so on to “the Indian people.” Partly this can be attributed to the newness, in Hegel’s day, of European understanding of Indian culture and thought in their diversity and variety, but it also seems to have more than a little to do with Hegel’s manner of attending to or handling what was already before him in Colebrooke and others. If it was becoming evident that true, profound philosophizing was to be found in India, and particularly in the *Yogasūtras* and the Sāṅkhya system, why persist in taking the epics and the *Gītā* as the definitive statement of Indian thought and pronounce Indian thought deficient on that basis? If, as

²⁹² Robert Bernasconi, “Krimskrams: Hegel and the Current Controversy about the Beginnings of Philosophy,” in C.E. Scott and John Sallis, eds., *Interrogating the Tradition: Hermeneutics and the History of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 200.

Hegel believed, it was wrong to judge Indian philosophy by what “is called Sāṅkhya philosophy in the Bhagavad-Gītā,” as opposed to what is called Sāṅkhya philosophy by Sāṅkhya philosophers or philosophical texts, why not wait until some number of actual Sāṅkhya texts were made directly available and then examine them carefully before reaching any definite conclusions? Schwab writes, “Whether through impeccable choices or infallible odds, the local tradition so guided European inclinations that, from the beginning and in rapid succession, texts destined to make India a miracle to the West were disclosed. They represented the distinctive forms of Hindu genius at the highest stage of its development: epic grandeur and metaphysical depth, classic grace and radiant moral purity.”²⁹³ Hegel, as has been seen, was reacting in part to what seemed to him the overly-credulous excesses of some Europeans’ admiring reactions to this “miracle;” nevertheless, perhaps partly in his haste to weigh in as debate raged in the mid-1820s, he too-confidently concluded on the basis of what was available that he not only could discern but indeed had discerned the true core of Indian thought.

Perhaps even more problematic, because more fundamental, is Hegel’s apparent sense as a European that India, Indians, and Indian thought are merely objects: specimens to be brought under the lens, handled this way and that, determined, understood, sorted, categorized, and placed in the system of European knowledge of the world. Indians as human beings are not obviously—Hegel seems hardly able even to imagine them as—subjects possessing their own authority for themselves, let alone possessing a lasting claim to the rational intellects of Europeans. Still less, then, does it appear Hegel could be interested in seeking to understand Indian ways of thinking and acting directly from Indian people themselves, or indirectly from trying as diligently and honestly as possible

²⁹³ Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 51-52.

to imagine himself an Indian. For at a bare minimum this would have involved the desire and, eventually, the attempt (perhaps even with the benefit of a Sanskrit lesson or two from a trained peer) to read much more in primary sources: more than only the *Bhagavadgītā* and parts of the *Rāmāyana* even within epic or classical literature, more than just the *Yogasūtras* or *Sāṅkhyakārika* as instances of philosophical texts (neither of which, to be clear, Hegel directly consulted). Hegel seems content to rely on his fellow Europeans, and seems to assume that nothing yet to be known by them could change the picture. Giving Indian culture a fair hearing would also involve supposing that in the many centuries since the production of those ancient texts much intellectual activity must have gone on, no matter what doctrines or dogmas might have become or remained dominant.²⁹⁴ Of course, such a realization is unlikely (not to say entirely impossible) if one possesses either an anthropologically deterministic view of “peoples,” by which they are indissolubly linked with and fixed by particular characteristics; or, relatedly, an ethnocentric developmentalist view of world history and of the emergence of philosophy over history. Whether such views can be accurately attributed to Hegel is a question that Chapter 4 attempts to answer, along with the related questions of whether Hegel was a Eurocentric thinker, what it might mean if he was, and how contemporary debates concerning Hegel and Eurocentrism in philosophy are structured and pursued.

Still, in the interest of doing justice to Hegel’s unique, influential, and still-underappreciated engagement with both the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular and Indian philosophy in general, it is crucial to pause and consider the insights he achieved, the

²⁹⁴ Yet Hegel apparently did not realize this; as Herring observes, it is disturbing that “Hegel dealt with Indian philosophy as if there were after and beyond the classical teachings no other aspects, doctrines or even systems worth the while.” Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata Known by the Name Bhagavadgītā* by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Berlin 1826, xx.

problems he identified, and the measure of truth in his critique. For it is notable that without the benefit of any real knowledge of or training in Sanskrit; without access to treatises, technical works, compendia of Indian philosophy, or voluminous histories of philosophy in India; indeed without even a very extensive understanding of the breadth and depth of philosophical culture in India's history up to his own time, Hegel succeeded in voicing a number of concerns that were and are common and pressing, not only in Europe and elsewhere among those exploring Indian ideas but even to an extent within India among Indian thinkers themselves down the ages (and certainly to a much greater extent from the eighteenth century to the present). Hegel addressed these concerns to his own satisfaction according to the dictates of his speculative-dialectical philosophy, showing that the concerns arose from within Indian philosophy but were not answered there. Put another way, Hegel believed that a number of features of the *Bhagavadgītā* and Indian thought made it abundantly clear that the development of philosophical thought in India, which seemed to him to have reached a certain level of insight but no further, was well surpassed by the achievements of contemporary European philosophy—naturally, his own articulation of it in particular—and he expected or hoped that anyone who examined Indian philosophy (or just read his work on it) would arrive at the same conclusion. Five such features are major topics of concern: morality, yoga, *mokṣa* or liberation, *brahman* or the absolute, and negation or (in Hegelian parlance) “the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.” For the purposes of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Hegel's analyses of the *Bhagavadgītā* and Indian philosophy, each of these can be put in the form of a question: 1) Is there an ethics in the *Bhagavadgītā*, and if so is it a respectable doctrine of morality, or is the text's

teaching amoral at best (and sub- or immoral at worst)? 2) Is the yoga of the *Gītā* just a kind of forced immobility, dissipation of the will, suppression of thought or mentation, and ultimately obliteration or “deadening” of consciousness into a state of utter unconsciousness? 3) Is the liberation that is the outcome of yoga—the liberation at which the practice of yoga aims—comprehensible only as annihilation of the embodied person, escape from lived existence, rejection of the reality of finite selfhood? 4) Is *brahman* as a concept of the absolute necessarily static, objective, and substantial, an immediate unity strictly opposed to (self-)consciousness and incompatible with the idea of subjectivity—that is, is it merely a submersion of the subject into substance and not a way, to use Hegel’s famous phrasing, of “grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*?” Finally, 5) do the *Bhagavadgītā* and Indian thought insufficiently comprehend or carry out the proper work of dialectical mediation, namely, the negation of the negation, the immanent movement by which Spirit becomes (self-)aware of itself as both substance and subject?²⁹⁵

1. Ethics

The first concern pertains to the morality or system of ethics communicated in the *Bhagavadgītā*: can it be said that the *Gītā* provides a sound moral teaching, or does the text adopt a finally amoral or non-moral standpoint? It is obvious enough that the work considers ethical issues, both on the level of Arjuna’s dilemma on the battlefield and on the level of the quest of every person (self or soul) after wisdom, knowledge, and the

²⁹⁵ See paragraph 37 of the *Phenomenology*, for example, where Hegel states that “the negative is the self,” initially appearing “as a disparity between the ‘I’ and its object” though ultimately being “just as much the disparity of the substance with itself”: “Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject. When it has shown this completely, Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence; *it has itself for its object just as it is*, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome. Being is then absolutely mediated; it is a substantial content *which is just as immediately the property of the ‘I’*, it is self-like or the Notion.” (PS 21, emphasis added).

good. The very fact that the *Gītā* contains these two levels means that answering the question about its moral status depends in part on whether one accords priority to the action interrupted by Arjuna’s hesitation and appeal to Krishna or, instead, to the contents of their discussion regarding *dharma*, *yoga*, *brahman*, and *mokṣa*. That is, if one believes that the true point of Krishna’s teachings is to convince Arjuna that he should engage in battle and kill his relations, and can do so without violating his *dharma* (or must do so in order not to run afoul of it), then it may appear that the text is of questionable moral value.²⁹⁶ Hegel spends a fair amount of space in his review essays deploring the caste-

²⁹⁶ This especially would seem to be the case if for a rationale it appeals to metaphysical monism entailing the unreality or illusoriness of separately existing beings, any of whom one can therefore fight, injure, or “kill” with full moral impunity. Krishna famously informs Arjuna, “The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead,” and declares, “One man believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. ..Realizing that which is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and unchanging, how can you slay or cause another to slay?” For one thing, however, the *Gītā* does not lay stress on the moral permissibility of homicide as a logical consequence of wisdom or realizing the eternal. Further, Kurukṣetra, the name of the plain on which the legendary battle occurs, is also referred to in the first verse of the text as “*dharma-kṣetra*,” i.e., “the field of *dharma*” (Stoler Miller: “field of sacred duty”). This suggests that the war scene of the epic is being exploited as a metaphor for the personal spiritual struggle for *brahmavidyā*—knowledge of *brahman*—and liberation. Indeed the text moves from battle as literal event to battle as metaphor in its second chapter, and Krishna refers directly to killing *people* just once in the entire text (XVIII:17). Instead the vast majority of his phrasings about battle either are general, e.g., “Arise with a brave heart and destroy the enemy,” or are clearly about *intrapersonal* spiritual conflict as opposed to *interpersonal* physical conflict. For instance, he urges Arjuna, “Use your mighty arms to slay the fierce enemy that is selfish desire” (III:43), and, “[C]ut through this doubt in your own heart with the sword of spiritual wisdom. Arise; take up the path of *yoga*!” (IV:42). Admittedly, where the *Gītā* leaves off the epic picks back up and bloody battle ensues, in which Arjuna does participate (after a second episode of disinclination). For Eknath Easwaran, contra Hegel who found the battlefield setting of the dialogue inexplicable and incomprehensible, “only a great genius would have placed the Gita in such a dramatic setting, but it stands out from the rest [of the *Mahābhārata*] as a timeless, practical manual for daily living” (Eknath Easwaran, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita* [New York: Vintage Books, 2000], xvii). See also *ibid.*, xviii-xix, regarding whether someone who succeeds would “find killing or hurting others compatible with its teachings.” Stoler Miller’s gloss is also lucid and helpful: “At every stage of Arjuna’s dramatic journey of self-discovery, the charioteer Krishna is aware of his pupil’s spiritual conflict and guides him to the appropriate path for resolving it. Krishna urges him not to resign himself to killing but instead to renounce his selfish attachment to the fruits of his actions. By learning how to discipline his emotion and his action, Arjuna journeys far without ever leaving the battlefield. Krishna draws him into a universe beyond the world of everyday experience but keeps forcing him back to wage the battle of life. He advocates, on the one hand, the life of action and moral duty, and on the other, the transcendence of empirical experience in search of knowledge and liberation. Though much of Krishna’s teaching seems remote from the moral chaos that Arjuna envisions will be a consequence of his killing his kinsmen, Krishna’s doctrine of disciplined action is a way of bringing order to life’s destructive aspect. When the puzzled Arjuna asks, “Why do you urge me to do this act of violence?” Krishna does not condone physical violence. Instead, he

derived and caste-affirming “morality” of the poem. His conviction that the *Bhagavadgītā* is amoral owes much to his sense of the centrality of caste in Indian moral life and thought; he says that the text “rests upon the well-known caste distinctions, without any indication of elevation to moral freedom,” and that the institution of caste “has made and still makes morality and real cultured civilization for ever impossible among the Indians”(51). However, he also acknowledges that Krishna’s discussion of morality takes a turn toward the spiritual, toward the idea of the aspiration for wisdom or illumination and the proper path for reaching liberation. Hegel, then, has an adequate grasp that the *Gītā* is largely (if not entirely) a work of practical spiritual instruction. As translator Eknath Easwaran puts it, the *Bhagavadgītā* ingeniously takes the whole *Mahābhārata* as “a metaphor for the perennial war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness in every human heart...the Gita is not an external dialogue but an internal one: between the ordinary human personality, full of questions about the meaning of life, and our deepest Self, which is divine.” The dialogue “takes place in the depths of consciousness and...Krishna is not some external being, human or superhuman, but the spark of divinity that lies at the core of the human personality.”²⁹⁷ Understood as a guidebook for meditative practice directed to the joint ends of knowledge of the real and of spiritual self-realization, which frequently has recourse to philosophical reflection, argument, and justification, the poem may be more easily accepted as having a defensible ethics. What positions the *Bhagavadgītā* takes on the nature of reality, the means by which it is known, and the state one reaches on achieving true knowledge, however, also

identifies the real enemy as desire, due to attachment, an enemy that can only be overcome by arming oneself with discipline and acting to transcend the narrow limits of individual desire” (12-13).

²⁹⁷ Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, xix.

bear on the ethical standing of the text. What does Hegel say of these three positions as he understands them?

2. Yoga

The second point of criticism Hegel raises concerning Indian thought in the *Bhagavadgītā* has to do with the second of these, namely the nature of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s yoga teaching as a solution to Arjuna's moral difficulty. Hegel regards the intended aim of yoga to be a quiescence through immobility and "enforced arrested thought"(109), and its result "submersion in weakness and exhaustion," tantamount to a loss of consciousness or reversion to unconsciousness as opposed to progress to higher consciousness. This is, Hegel claims, first of all because insofar as Krishna exhorts Arjuna to renounce attachment to the fruits of action, he is in effect recommending inaction; only—Hegel knows Krishna knows—he of course cannot truly do so, because it is impossible while living not to act at all. (As the *Bhagavadgītā* itself states, "Even a wise man acts within the limitations of his own nature," "It is not those who lack energy or refrain from action, but those who work without expectation of reward who attain the goal of meditation," and, straightforwardly, "As long as one has a body, one cannot renounce action altogether."²⁹⁸) As Hegel takes it, though, since purpose is inherent in and part of the very meaning of committing an action, any moral intent in renouncing the results of one's actions is offset by the "formal, even...dubious nature" of such indifference. For it turns out that renunciation of the fruits of one's action is wholly compatible with utter heedlessness: "[t]he more senselessly and stupidly an *action is performed*, the greater the involved indifference towards success"(47, emphasis in original). Given this somewhat unwelcome fact, there is a higher degree of perfection in

²⁹⁸ Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 20 (IV:33), 33 (VI:1), 90 (XVIII:11).

being constantly devoted to Krishna while one performs whatever few actions one cannot avoid (until, of course, achieving full “unity and dwelling with God, devoid of works and longing”[57]). And a better way, even the ideal way, of renouncing attachment to the outcome of one’s actions is simply to persevere in devotion or fixation on Krishna while doing as little as possible—hence, naturally and fittingly, yoga, “the peculiar mode of practicing assiduity...the well-known Indian practice of enforced withdrawal and the endurance of the monotony of a deed- and thoughtless state...the rigorism to maintain one’s life in empty absurdity”(59).

Hegel is without a doubt no early Western champion of yoga. His characterizations of it range from the perplexed to the denunciatory. A few additional examples will suffice:

- 1) He pronounces, “Although the meditation of one acknowledging the Patanjali doctrine as a philosophical system were only of a minor dimension, there is no place for such a kind of meditation in common Indian yoga. *All* descriptions and instructions depict it as an exercise or exertion for outer *and* inner impassivity”(61, emphasis added);
- 2) He states that yoga tries to attain the aim of liberation “vehemently and at once” without “reasoning reflection on the particular objects and on the categories of nature and mind.”(37);
- 3) According to Hegel yoga is “meditation *without any contents*, the abandoning of all attention towards external things, of the activities of the senses, it is the silence of any inner sentiment, of any sign of a wish or of hope and fear, the

silence of all inclinations and passions as also the absence of all images, imaginations and concrete thoughts”(45);

- 4) He disparages “the vacant gaze of the Indian wherein thought remains equally motionless and inactive as the senses and feelings should be forced to inactivity”(65);
- 5) For Hegel, yoga is esoteric and at best an “edifying” teaching, not even mysticism proper because “the mysticism of other peoples and religions has been rich in spiritual productions, often supremely pure, most sublime and beautiful ones...at once a self-reflection of the outwardly calm soul and an unfolding of the rich thing to which it is related and of its relations to this thing”(65). Yoga has no comparable richness, sublimity, or complexity; it is merely the “Indian isolation of the soul into emptiness”(65).

Regarding yoga as unthinking or “thinking nothing,” Hegel claims that the *Bhagavadgītā* “too often pronounces *to think nothing* as a necessity”(61). He is, it seems, rather eager to discover advocacy of thoughtlessness in the text. It is worth noting that for the verse he offers as an example of it (VI:25) he relies on von Humboldt’s German clause *irgend etwas denkend nicht*, supplemented by Schlegel’s Latin *nihil quidem cogitat*, but the original text arguably conveys the sense of thinking of nothing *else/other than* the self—not just as a stubbornly willed blotting out or suppression of thought but as the eventual outcome of an emphatically gradual process of consciously and intelligently training thought upon the true self.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, this example notwithstanding, in Hegel’s view yoga “ascends towards the complete emptiness of subject and object and thus

²⁹⁹ The Sanskrit verse reads *śanaiḥ śanair upamed buddhyā dhṛti-grhīṭayā ātma-saṁsthāṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcid api cintayet.*

towards unconsciousness”(45). It is “the state of conscious unconsciousness”(93), and as “perennial solitude of selfconsciousness...is hence no longer consciousness”(105).

Is Hegel’s an accurate characterization of the aim, method, or substance of yoga? If yoga, or yogic realization, is not simply forced stillness leading to impassivity and utter emptiness, can it still be criticized as a kind of deadening, obliterating, or effacing of consciousness, and on these grounds rejected? Hegel never read the *Yogasūtras*, let alone other classical Yoga texts or commentaries; he did not know or ever meet an Indian practitioner of yoga, or even a European who after traveling or living in India took to practicing yoga. In the 1820s there was certainly no local yoga studio or meditation center in his neighborhood in Berlin that he could drop into to corroborate his impressions about yoga. Certain lines of the *Gītā* accord with his interpretation; for instance,

- “[Y]oga is perfect/ evenness of mind”;
- “When you are unmoved by the con-/ fusion of ideas and your mind is completely/ united in deep samadhi, you will attain the state/ of perfect yoga”;
- “They live in wisdom who subdue/ their senses and keep their minds ever absorbed/ in me”;
- “Those who aspire to the state of yoga should/ seek the Self in inner solitude through medita-/ tion. With body and mind controlled they/ should practice one-pointedness...”; and,
- “Renouncing wholeheartedly all selfish/ desires and expectations, use your will to/ control the senses. Little by little, through/ patience and repeated

effort, the mind will/ become stilled in the Self.// Wherever the mind wanders, restless and/ diffuse in its search for satisfaction without,/ lead it within; train it to rest in the Self. Abid-/ ing joy comes to those who still the mind./ Freeing themselves from the taint of self-will,/ with their consciousness unified, they become/ one with Brahman.³⁰⁰

Yet Hegel arguably vastly overstates the extent to which yoga is immobility and enforced withdrawal, and is just wrong to describe it as a vacant gazing and as unconsciousness. It is also true, however, that were he to be told that meditation was much more than this—that, say, a yogin/i continues to be conscious and even achieves heightened consciousness through the practice of yoga—he would want (and be within his rights to ask for) not just an external formal demonstration of poses, breathing techniques, even deep meditative concentration itself (*samādhi*), but a reasoned explanation of how the content of such activity goes beyond the mere manipulation of inner subjective experience to effect dialectical mediation of the meditating subject and the meditative object (the true self, say, or the ground of being [*brahman*], or God [*Īśvara* in classical Yoga]). Importantly, however, his deprecation of yoga also has to do with the nature of the liberation that yoga supposedly brings about. In order to begin exploring this connection further it may be asked whether the state of attainment at which yogic practice aims rules out the possibility of reflective self-consciousness. Is it an immediate awareness only (if it is awareness at all)?

For Hegel, yogic perfection is “the permanent state of renunciation...perennial solitude of selfconsciousness that has abandoned all sensations...and is hence no longer consciousness,—also not a fulfilled selfconsciousness which would have spirit as its

³⁰⁰ Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 13 (II:48), 14 (II:53), 15 (II:61), 34 (VI:10), 36 (VI:25-27).

subject and still be consciousness; an intuition intuiting nothing, knowing of nothing—the pure emptiness of itself within itself”(105). This description, as Hegel well knew, has obvious implications for Indian philosophy vis-à-vis Hegel’s science of knowledge of absolute spirit accomplished by means of the mediation of dialectical negation. Importantly, Hegel saw that yogic powers or *vibhūti*s said to appear to the practitioner (35-37, 71-73) were regarded as trivial and a “sideshow” for serious inquirers; the point is to realize brahman, achieve liberation, and live in the attendant freedom—which is entirely beyond conventions of good and evil but, as many strains of thinking emphasize—indeed it can be gleaned from the *Gītā* directly—manifests to the unrealized as unmistakably humane, scrupulously ethical, loving, compassionate³⁰¹, patient, humorous, imbued with benevolent tranquility, etc. The fully realized or liberated person takes life as “the opportunity to love, to serve, and to give,” to which all naturally occurring human passions are annexed.³⁰² This is a “unification” in which “we can see not the extinction of personality but its full blossoming.”³⁰³ Incidentally, such a conception seriously problematizes claims that the *Gītā* is lacking in morality, has a poor ethics or value system, teaches or glorifies total indifference and detachment, asceticism or extremes of physical austerity and deprivation, that it valorizes ritual, caste hierarchy, war and slaughter, etc. It also leads to the question of whether the idea of the liberation achieved via yoga necessitates annihilation of the personality, rejection of the embodied state, and/or escape from existence as a finite individual self.

3. *Mokṣa*

³⁰¹ Cf. XII:13 and XVI:2.

³⁰² Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, xxv.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, xlv-xlvi. See also III:25-26, IV:22-23, and VI:28-32 of the text.

What is the liberation brought about by yoga? Hegel had (thanks to Colebrooke) a largely correct sense that “the acknowledged purpose of all schools...[all] philosophical systems of the Indians” had “eternal salvation” or bliss (*ewige Seligkeit*) as their final aim (37-39).³⁰⁴ For Hegel, such liberation could only be a cheap imitation of freedom if in order for bliss to be achieved the fundamental reality of the finite subject in its inescapable first-personal existence had to be denied or eliminated. In the *Bhagavadgītā* Krishna instructs Arjuna, however, that freedom is not found in renunciation of reality, flight from the world, or ascetic exercises aimed merely at effacing the personality or crushing the ego; rather, renunciation of selfish attachments to the results of the actions one must perform (because living means acting) prepares one for the experience of union with the divine, which is also the experience of one’s own divinity. Easwaran writes that the *Gītā* “does not even enjoin material renunciation, although it certainly encourages simplicity. As always, its emphasis is on the mind...It pleads, in a word, renunciation of selfishness in thought, word, and action—a theme that is common to all mystics, Western and Eastern alike.”³⁰⁵ The state reached through the gradual renunciation and de-habituation of selfish attachments is “marked by happiness, a calm mind, abundant vitality, and the concentration of genius.”³⁰⁶

Can such a realization be had without sacrificing self-consciousness? Arguably, yes, if the “self” that is transformed by knowledge of reality is merely the excessively analytic, rationalistic “mind” along with the petty, clinging, fearful “ego” that strives for selfish pleasure and gain in ignorance of the interconnectedness of all phenomenal things

³⁰⁴ This cannot be said accurately of Cārvāka, however, and possibly not of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā either; see Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 354, 486.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxv.

in the one field of the real. If this transformation or dis- and re-identification can take place while still permitting some form of subjective self-awareness—that is, without requiring the annihilation of all movement and process of reasoning and reflection, without entailing the reversion or regression to a state of unthinking unconsciousness—then liberation and self-conscious awareness can be coextensive. According to Easwaran, liberation (*brahmanirvāṇa*) on either the Hindu or Buddhist view is “the state of union with the divine ground of existence,” which, while it may mean “the mystic state of extinction of self in the union with God,” giving some plausibility to Hegel’s criticism, is “wrongly presented as a kind of empty nothingness, even a spiritual death. We get exactly the opposite impression if we approach the Hindus and Buddhists themselves. It is true there is much talk of extinguishing the petty ego and going beyond self-will, but this is just to say that it is necessary to jettison the limited, weak personality—the mask that hides the creative, wise, loving Self underneath. This ‘death’ of the old man to make way for the new is one purpose of spiritual disciplines. It can be painful, but the death of the old man leads not to annihilation but to a spiritual rebirth.”³⁰⁷ Hegel, however, argues that “the Indian isolation of the soul into emptiness [*Vereinsamen der Seele in die Leerheit*] is rather a stupefaction [*Verstumpfung*] which does not at all deserve [even] the name mysticism and which cannot lead to the discovery of true insights, because it is void of any contents”(65). Its lack of content has much to do with the fact that it is the dissolution of the self in the moment of unification with eternal, unchanging, objective *brahman*, the “Indian absolute.”³⁰⁸

4. *Brahman*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 100-101 n.72.

³⁰⁸ Hegel coins a term for this: *Brahmifikation* (132).

Hegel's critique of *brahman* is simultaneously the most central and the strongest of his philosophical moves with respect to Indian thought. In the second review article, Hegel states that not only is Krishna's contradictory "instruction to act and [instruction] to refrain from action and to firmly and solely concentrate on Krishna" not resolved in the text, but in fact a "solution is impossible because the most sublime in Indian mentality, the absolute Being, Brahman, is as such without qualities, and apart from Oneness, these qualities can only be external, natural ones"(59). On Hegel's analysis, *brahman* is simple undifferentiated substance: "unity as abstract universality only, as indeterminate substance"(113), "*pure Being*, pure universality, *supreme Being*, most sublime Being...*pure Being*, void of any concrete determinateness"(117-119, emphasis in original). *Brahman* is "*substance without subjectivity*...which is actually nothing substantial at all"(115, emphasis in original). It is being *in sich* only, not simultaneously *für sich*: in Indian philosophy "oneness is not yet conceived of in its true quality, not as concrete as such, as spirit...it is merely the category of the relations of substances"(129). It therefore lacks the restless, ceaseless motion and dynamism as well as the self-consciousness and agency of *Geist*. For Hegel, "the objectivity of *brahman* disappears in the becoming-*brahman* or unification with it that is the aim of contemplative meditation [*Vertiefung*], namely the unification with Brahman, to become Brahman, deification or rather Brahmicification"(133). Hegel goes so far as to identify "the affirmative point or destination of the spirit which marks [the] self-contemplation...self-isolation of consciousness" of yoga *with* true, genuine "*thinking*," but asserts that Indians "did not proceed from the enormous abstraction of this extreme [i.e., *brahman* as objective unitary substance] to the reconciliation with the particular, to the concrete"(107-109).³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ And, notably, "But the orientals *have* not reached the stage of insight to be satisfied with such an

Hegel is confidently convinced that in India this reconciliation was never achieved. Like the ancient Greeks with respect to their mythology, the Indians take their unity with *brahman* literally—so there is immediate identification of the subjective with the objective, instead of the necessary and proper mediated unity. Indian philosophy of *brahman* does not proceed to the dialectical mediation of subjectivity and objectivity, but remains stuck at the level of the opposition between the subjective and the objective. *Brahman* is “abstract unity without any determinateness, and this very “deficiency...constituted the nature of the Indian Brahman” (111-113). This is not to say the Indians were not self-consciously aware as human beings, or that they did not experience themselves as subjective individuals; it is only to say that as Hegel saw it the mediated relation of substance-as-subject was never explicitly posited in their thought (or manifested in their objective, actual social life, institutions, and system). It remained implicitly presupposed, and for Hegel this is a major distinction, which makes all the difference: “whether something has merely occupied the sensuous or fanciful consciousness or whether the same thing is *known by reflective consciousness as thought or concept*”(111, emphasis added).³¹⁰ Hegel twice admits that even the European word “God” is “abstract and insufficient,” but reasons that “the European conception will normally include that with the word supreme Being or even God we have the idea of something concrete, of spirit, and that what is thought is richer than what is said”(115,

abstraction, pure Being, pure substance, even when they have defined it as thinking”(131).

³¹⁰ Again, was caste a cause or an effect of this alleged shortcoming of Indian philosophy, its failure to reach the full truth of self-conscious Spirit? It is difficult to tell; Hegel says that the “meaning and value of Indian religiosity and the doctrine of duty related to it can...only be understood from the caste law,—this institution that has made and still makes morality and real cultivated civilization for ever impossible among the Indians.” From this it appears that caste is the reason why Indian thought could and did never achieve the notion; but it is not clear how Hegel would answer the burning question, *Why India?* In other words, was there something about Indian society (not to say “character”) that caused or allowed the caste system to develop and ossify there? If so, what was it?

119). *Brahman* on the other hand is, unfortunately, just “not the *concrete*, not [Spirit]” (115).

Hegel is certainly on to something; his account and critique of *brahman*, and his contrast of it with the idea of self-othering Spirit that is comprehended (comes to know itself) as equally substance and subject, is remarkable and not to be brushed off lightly—keeping in mind, of course, that it never was the case that *all* Indian people or thinkers were, for lack of a better term, “*brahmanists*.” The *Bhagavadgītā* does have some odd and ostensibly conflicting ideas about *brahman*:

The Lord is the supreme poet, the first cause,
the sovereign ruler, subtler than the tiniest
particle, the support of all, inconceivable,
bright as the sun, beyond darkness.³¹¹

You are the supreme, changeless Reality, the
one thing to be known...
You are without beginning, middle, or
end; you touch everything with your infinite
power.³¹²

You are the eternal spirit, who existed before
Brahma the Creator and who will never cease
to be. Lord of the gods, you are the abode
of the universe. Changeless, you are what is
and what is not, and beyond the duality of
existence and nonexistence.

You are the first among the gods, the timeless
spirit, the resting place of all beings. You are
the knower and the thing which is known.
You are the final home; with your infinite
form you pervade the cosmos.³¹³

Your power is
immeasurable. You pervade everything;
you are everything.³¹⁴

³¹¹ 44 (VIII:9-10).

³¹² 60 (XI:18-19).

³¹³ 63 (XI:37-38).

I pervade the entire universe in my unmanifested form. All creatures find their existence in me, but I am not limited by them. Behold my divine mystery! These creatures do not really dwell in me, and though I bring them forth and support them, I am not confined within them.

Under my watchful eye the laws of nature
Take their course. Thus is the world set in
Motion; thus the animate and the inanimate are created.

I am the father and mother of this universe,
and its grandfather too; I am its entire support.
I am the sum of all knowledge, the purifier,
the syllable *Om*; I am the sacred scriptures,
the Rik, Yajur, and Sama Vedas.

I am the goal of life, the Lord and support of
all, the inner witness, the abode of all. I am
the only refuge, the one true friend; I am
the beginning, the staying, and the end of
creation; I am the womb and the eternal seed.

I am heat; I give and withhold the rain. I am
Immortality and I am death; I am what is and
what is not.³¹⁵

On the other hand, there are also characterizations of *brahman* and *mokṣa* in the *Bhagavadgītā* that suggest dynamism, agency, and self-consciousness. The text states, for example,

They are forever free who renounce all selfish
desires and break away from the ego-cage of
“I,” “me,” and “mine” to be united with the
Lord. This is the supreme state. Attain to this,
and pass from death to immortality.³¹⁶

And,

The supreme Reality stands revealed *in the
consciousness of those who have conquered*

³¹⁴ Ibid., (XI:40).

³¹⁵ 47-48 (IX:4-5, 10, 17-19).

³¹⁶ 16 (II:71-72).

*themselves.*³¹⁷

Hegel himself relates an (unattributed) encounter or interrogation between an Indian yogi and “an Englishman who made every effort to thoroughly study Indian religiosity,” who even “suggest[s] to the Indian what to reply”(131). To the surprise and eventual bafflement of the English inquirer, the Indian unequivocally states that he does not pray or make offerings to *brahman*, worship *brahman* simply as Spirit [*ihn im Geist*], praise or even reflect on the qualities and perfections of *brahman*; when the Indian is finally asked what meditation *is*, then, Hegel writes,

His answer will be: ‘When in some divine service I sit there with crossed legs, elevated folded hands, eyes closed, mind, thought, tongue and lips being at rest, then I speak to myself with my inner voice: *I am Brahman*. Due to *Māyā* we have not the awareness of being Brahman. It is forbidden to adore the supreme Being, to praise Him with prayers and oblations, for this would be a worship directed to ourselves; we may venerate and adore emanations of His. (133).

Hegel’s derogatory attitude toward such a series of responses aside, it could perhaps be argued that this anonymous Indian’s meditative insight, “I am Brahman,” does not remove the objective existence of *brahman*, nor does it obliterate the existence of the “I” who is *brahman*, but on the contrary *preserves both in their full truth or reality*. Still, from a Hegelian perspective, even if the Indian idea of the absolute were not completely devoid of dynamism and self-consciousness (and the verses above may still offer insufficient proof that it is not), it is nonetheless not enough simply to have the content, but imperative to achieve an adequate form in expression of it, which can only be the one that emerges from the phenomenological odyssey itself. That is, the proper articulation of the absolute content must be the systematic presentation of the self-driven immanent dialectical movement of shapes or stages of spirit *qua* laboring consciousness striving

³¹⁷ Easwaran, 34 (VI:7), emphasis added.

toward self-knowledge. As the *Phenomenology* puts the point, “Just because the form is as essential to the essence as the essence is to itself, the divine essence is not to be conceived and expressed merely as essence, i.e. as immediate substance or pure self-contemplation of the divine, but likewise as *form*, and in the whole wealth of the developed form. Only then is it conceived and expressed as an actuality.”³¹⁸ Claiming that the *brahman* of the *Bhagavadgītā* is a preferable alternative to self-conscious Spirit is, to borrow one of Hegel’s own similes, like suggesting that chicory is a good substitute for coffee.³¹⁹

Hegel is probably right on one count: the form or manner through which the attainment of self-knowledge of absolute Spirit is described in his philosophy of phenomenological idealism is more sophisticated and systematized than what can be found in the *Bhagavadgītā*—even in it and the *Upaniṣads* combined (though including the *Brahmasūtras* and *Brahmasūtrabhaṣya* makes for a different story). A Vedāntin or a practitioner of yoga, on the other hand, might retort that all the conceiving and expressing in the world may come to naught if one does not also engage in the practices designed to effect liberation or realization. Further, *pace* Hegel’s insistence that it is a “misunderstanding” to construe yoga as *eine Wissenschaft, ein entwickeltes System sei*, one could assert that it has quite well-developed contents whose proof is their replicable efficacy; his view only reveals his lack of experience. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; the proof of the practice is in the “weeding,” so to speak.³²⁰ As far as respective

³¹⁸ PS §19, p11.

³¹⁹ PS §68, p42.

³²⁰ That is, in the palpable consequences of continual attention to and removal of cognitive “afflictions” both manifest and latent or potential: “...As the gross dirt of clothes is at first shaken off, and then the fine dirt is washed off, by effort and appliance, so the gross [i.e., operative] essential modifications [of cognition] need but small antagonistic efforts, whereas the potential ones need very powerful antagonists.” Vyāsa, *Yoga-bhāṣya*, quoted in Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 463.

ideas of the absolute and ways of knowing it are concerned, Ayon Maharaj has offered one way a proponent of nondualist Advaita Vedānta philosophy could respond to Hegel’s allegations that *brahman* is simple substance, pure (which is to say vacuous) Being devoid of content, and that rather than achieving true expression of the form of *brahman* as divine essence the Indian “stares... ‘for years on end only at the tip of his nose’ and ‘says inwardly *Om, Om, Om*, or else nothing at all’” as if this could possibly be sufficient or the same thing. The Advaitin, Maharaj suggests, might “point out that Brahman, of course, appears to be a mere void or blank to Hegel because Hegel commits the mistake of attempting to grasp *suprarational* Brahman by *means* of reason (what Hegel calls *Vernunft*),” which is by definition not up to the task. What happens is that “Hegel falsifies Brahman by trying to conceive it through reason, and then—ironically—turns around and criticizes his own hopeless caricature of Brahman. In short, Hegel mistakes his rationalized falsification of Brahman for *suprarational* Brahman itself,” when, crucially, “he is not even in a position to grasp the reality of Brahman because *he is not equipped with the sādhanacatuṣṭaya*, the *preliminary* disciplines of mental purification and concentration necessary for the *suprarational* realization of Brahman.”³²¹ The Hegelian counterpoint, of course, is that if *brahman* outstrips or overflows reason, it is difficult to comprehend how it *can* be grasped or known at all; if, on the other hand, what is meant is that *brahman* is not grasped or known propositionally but rather experientially, by unifying with or becoming *brahman*, then it is difficult to see how this does not lead right back to the problems of 1) direct intuition of the absolute and 2) dissolving subjectivity in substance. As Hegel puts it, “The objective definition of Brahman, this category of pure Being with which the Indian concept of *everything*

³²¹ Maharaj, “Śrī Harṣa contra Hegel,” 108 n.45.

extraordinary *merges* as the annihilation of all finite beings, marks the sublimity of the Indian religion which, however, for that reason is not yet the beautiful or even less the actual truth [*das wahrhaft Wahre*]”(121-123).

5. Negation

Given also the common-enough conception of *brahman* as positive plenitude, it is necessary as well to touch briefly upon Hegelian negation. Hegel’s criticism of Indian philosophy as philosophy of substance centrally involves the allegation that Indian thought does not know, or places insufficient emphasis on, an aspect of thinking that is indispensable to Hegel and that the *Phenomenology* calls “the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.” In the *Bhagavadgītā* *brahman* as ultimate reality is typically cast in a positive manner, it is true—though, memorably, Krishna allows Arjuna to have a direct “cosmic vision” of his (Krishna’s) “immortal Self,” in all its glory, i.e., not only gentle and benevolent divinity but also as the infinitude within which or into which all created things and beings perish.³²² Naturally, this terrifies Arjuna, the finite mortal, who over the course of this event of mystical insight utters, “I look at you and/ my heart trembles; I have lost all courage/ and all peace of mind,” “[H]ave mercy on me!,” and, “I rejoice in seeing you as you have never been seen before, yet I am filled with fear by this/ vision of you as the abode of the universe.”³²³ Arjuna, overcome and overwhelmed by the revelatory experience, asks Krishna to revert to manifesting “as the shining God/ of all Gods...not with a/ thousand arms but with four,

³²² Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 58. That Krishna in effect helps Arjuna to realize *brahman*, however briefly, is clear from Arjuna’s declaration, “You are the eternal spirit, who existed before/ Brahma the creator and who will never cease/ to be. Lord of the gods, you are the abode/ of the universe. Changeless, you are what is/ and what is not, and beyond the duality of/ existence and nonexistence”(63).

³²³ *Ibid.*, 61, 64.

carrying the/ mace and discus and wearing a crown.”³²⁴ Whether or not this is an example of “the suffering of the negative” properly speaking, Hegel does go so far as to expressly allow that there is negativity in Indian thought, that it reaches to the point of negation. He says that there is “a specific characteristic of Indian religiosity, namely the *purely negative* attitude of spirit” (57, emphasis in original).³²⁵ As far as thought itself, he writes, the “fundamental Indian conception [*Grundbestimmung*]...is the point of the negativity of thought, the pure subjectivity of the spirit”(85). That is, it cannot be denied that there is conscious or thinking spirit in India because there is a conception of the absolute; this, self-evidently, is thought. In conceiving an absolute which swallows up the very subject that thinks it, however, this thinking does not recognize and value its own independent existence precisely as the (subjective) way in which the objective, the material, becomes known to itself; in thinking only of the objective, Indian thought remains purely subjective.

According to Hegel Indian thought does know something of the labor of the negative, then; however, with respect to its notion of the absolute it does not accomplish the “negation of the negation,” which, crucially in Hegelian dialectic, is not merely a return to the initial affirmative term, claim, or fact, but is the *Aufhebung* that proceeds beyond both it and its “mere” negation, canceling and completing them while also preserving them, wrapping them into the completed moment, which is the *Begriff*, the concept or true idea. Indian philosophy remains stuck at the level of the initial negation and does not go on to achieve the (re)union of subject and object in the concrete, of the individual and universal in the particular. Its concept of the absolute is not the true

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

³²⁵ The translation is modified; Herring has “spirituality” for *Geist*.

concept, where self-conscious Spirit understands itself as such; rather, Indian thought fails to recognize that its idea of pure, positive, unitary Being flies in the face of the truth of determinate negation (that any affirmation requires or entails negation). Hence *brahman*, which is the objective external absolute, in its abstract universality negates the individual (mind, consciousness, or soul), which is the subjective inner reality and is no less a certainty for being individual and finite: “individual beings and all finite qualities must be taken as not being independent of but rather as those which are only dissolved, *negated* [*negierte*] in pure Being”(127). The only outcome of not accomplishing the dialectical resolution of the individual/subjective and the universal/objective into the concrete particular, which continues to preserve them as “moments” of itself, is—and this is characteristic of Indian philosophy—that “its spirit [*ihr Geist*]...is only the unsteady reeling” between the two, “and finally the misery to realize *mokṣa* only as the annihilation of the individual”(109) (*die Unglückseligkeit, die Seligkeit nur als Vernichtung der Persönlichkeit...zu wissen*).³²⁶ The fact that “to this negativity or infinitude there is directly related the productive activity” explains why in India “there are innumerable forms, names, personifications by which from that profound meditation, from the self-centered isolation of Brahman there arises different interpretations of creation and creator”—why, that is, Indian philosophy “roams about with many forms of the great One, the universal soul etc. that can hardly be really distinguished from Brahman”(139).

Having covered key interconnected areas in which Hegel’s analysis of Indian philosophy (almost exclusively as articulated in the *Bhagavadgītā*) laid bare significant

³²⁶ *Characteristic* of Indian philosophy, not “the peculiar thing” about it, as Herring renders *das Eigentümliche*; Hulin has here “*Ce qui les caractérise*,” – “what characterizes it” – which is closer to the German and less misleadingly provocative than Herring’s English.

concerns about Indian philosophical ideas, it is now necessary to ask: what, regardless of how far from exhaustive his resources on India may have been, should Hegel have realized about Indian philosophy that he seems not to have realized?

One thing he should have discerned, perhaps, is that the *Gītā* is not intended, not even readable really, as a single or unified philosophical system delineated for its own sake, independent of applicability to the reader's concern with and pursuit of practical, existential insight. It "does not present a system of philosophy," and the "lofty and even abstruse philosophy" it does contain "is not there to satisfy intellectual curiosity; it is meant to explain to a spiritual aspirant why he is asked to undergo certain disciplines...the Gita makes most sense when it is practiced."³²⁷ The knowledge of reality and the self-knowledge that Krishna seeks to assist Arjuna in attaining is not meant to be abstract and intellectual alone, but is meant to effect a profound self-transformation, a shift in one's very experience of oneself and—in—reality. It might be countered that Hegel did understand this but believed that given the one-sidedness, the "abstract unity" of *brahman* as simple immediate substance, the only end of such forcible immobility, withdrawal, and emptying of the body and mind from worldly contact would necessarily be a kind of impassivity and reversion to "conscious unconsciousness." Yet against this, following Halbfass, it could be argued that Hegel could have considered (though he did not consider) "the possibility that meditation, instead of being abstraction, escape and a denial of all 'mediation,'" aims not at unconsciousness, deadening of the mind, or some

³²⁷ Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, xxxv-xxxvi. In other words, "Philosophy carries us to the gates of the promised land, but cannot let us in; for that, insight or realisation is necessary" (Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 355).

kind of exhaustion of or flight from reality but rather a renewed “openness for the world.”³²⁸

Along the same lines, Hegel might have entertained the possibility that meditative contemplation may be a response to discursive, objectifying, excessively rationalistic thought, completing it in a way even Hegel’s *Vernunft* cannot (or at least in a way different from it yet still compelling). Moreover, he failed to comprehend that the course of history might lead around or back “to a new readiness and need for meditation, to a new actuality of what he regarded as historically superseded.”³²⁹ That is, a resurgence of interest in meditation could be “newly actual” insofar as it involves not merely regressive escapism from the demands or results of rational thinking and absolute knowing, but self-conscious declarations of the necessity of limiting “excesses of measuring, quantification, objectification, [and] instrumentalization” and of the demonstrable value of contemplative practice to the endeavor to self-impose limits on this thought. Such a “new actuality” might be more than a localized, retrograde movement against the larger thrust or direction of history (and therefore easily dismissed by Hegel), but in fact an undeniable turn in it, a legitimate and valuable dialectical moment leading to a further *Aufhebung*. This might not be true only of meditation but might apply to religions as well; in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* Radhakrishnan argues that despite the pretension of certain Christians that their religion subsumes or surpasses all others (and given the “void” that scientific, secular modernity

³²⁸ Halbfass, “Hegel on Meditation and Yoga,” 78. As an admittedly anachronistic aside, it is hard to imagine yoga being enduringly embraced worldwide by the early twenty-first century if it were really nothing more than forced physical and mental passivity, if it did not have broader or even universal appeal and applicability despite its original Indian cultural context.

³²⁹ Halbfass, “Hegel on Meditation and Yoga,” 79.

creates but cannot itself fill) the world is ripe for an even higher reconciliation of the world's religions:

Each religion has sat at the feet of teachers that never bowed to its authority, and this process is taking place to-day on a scale unprecedented in the history of humanity and will have most profound effects upon religion. In their wide environment, religions are assisting each other to find their own souls and to grow to their full stature. Owing to a cross-fertilization of ideas and insights, behind which lie centuries of racial and cultural tradition and earnest endeavour, a great unification is taking place in the deeper fabric of men's thoughts. Unconsciously perhaps, respect for other points of view, appreciation for the treasures of other cultures, confidence in one another's unselfish motives are growing. We are slowly realizing that believers with different opinions and convictions are necessary to each other to work out the larger synthesis which alone can give the spiritual basis to a world brought together into intimate oneness by man's mechanical ingenuity.³³⁰

Of major importance, too, is the extent to which Hegelian philosophy was anticipated— possibly even already accomplished—by Indian philosophy; or at any rate the extent to which Hegel might have seen convergences between Indian philosophizing and his own, and what meaning or value he accorded aspects of Indian thought that ran parallel to principles and concepts of speculative-dialectical phenomenology —a subject of scholarly difference of opinion among researchers such as Wilhelm Halbfass, Robert Bernasconi, Bradley Herling, Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, Lucia Staiano-Daniels, Dorothy Figueira, and Herbert Herring. It seems that at least in so far as Hegel recognized the proximity of (some) Indian thinking to his own, not only in its contemplative or speculative (yet still fully active) aspect but also in its prioritization of the absolute in philosophy, its emphasis on actual knowledge of the absolute, its explanation of the purpose of the universe as Spirit's cosmic odyssey toward self-awareness, its aspect of quasi-secular theodicy, etc., he was willing to admit that “it

³³⁰ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 348.

would well deserve the name of philosophy”(29).³³¹—yet for all this he would never walk back the proclamation, “Philosophy proper commences in the West.”³³²

Last but not least, Hegel also ought to have understood that his own ideas or conclusions about philosophy in India had to be provisional, limited as they were to what he could access, which was not a great deal. Problematically, he did more or less the opposite of this, concluding and declaring that all there was to know about India that mattered was now known: the veil of exotic fascination having been lifted and the belief in ancient wisdom having been dispelled, it could be seen that the most India could offer was the dawn of philosophical thinking or consciousness, an initial step toward the full (self-)realization of self-conscious Spirit achieved first and finally in eighteenth-century Germanic Europe. There is some truth to the idea that Hegel was an equal-opportunity critic, and even on occasion elevated Indian ideas or accomplishments above trends or moments in European thought³³³; still, the derision and contempt he showed for Indian character has little parallel in his depictions of life in European antiquity.³³⁴ He was overly credulous of fabulous reports and scandalous episodes related (at second- and even third-hand) by missionaries, East India Company officials, and other European travelers, from purported Brahminic forgeries (5) to reported extreme yogic mortifications (65-67) and even mass suicide (69). On this score he provoked von Humboldt’s complaint that

³³¹ See also Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 97.

³³² *LHP I*: 99.

³³³ See, for example, “On the Episode of the Mahabharata known by the Name Bhagavad Gita by Wilhelm von Humboldt,” 101, 107, and 123; but see also 59, 65, and 141 for comparable moments of non-enthusiasm.

³³⁴ See, for example, *The Philosophy of History*, which gives “the generic principle of the Hindoo nature” as “Spirit in a state of Dream,” calls “the diffusion of Indian culture” a “dumb, deedless expansion,” insinuates that Indians are “pusillanimous and effeminate,” maintains that the “morality which is involved in respect for human life, is not found among the Hindoos,” and (last but certainly not least) baldly asserts, “Deceit and cunning are the fundamental characteristics of the Hindoo. Cheating, stealing, robbing, murdering are with him habitual...’I do not know an honest man among them,’ says an English authority. Children have no respect for their parents: sons maltreat their mothers” (Section II, “India,” 139-158).

Hegel “mixes philology with legend, the genuine with what is not genuine.” At the same time, Hegel was highly dubious of the apparent flights of fancy, farfetched claims, and unrestrained imaginings of Indians themselves, all but sneering that “all our concepts of the impossible fail with regard to the Indian power of the imagination in which *to accomplish the impossible [faire l'impossible]* is quite at home”(49).

To reiterate a point briefly mentioned earlier, maybe the biggest failure in this respect is Hegel’s willingness to allow—his overconfident assumption, even—that the *Bhagavadgītā* is representative of, or in fact contains in its full measure and scope, the very essence of “Indian philosophy.” The *Bhagavadgītā* is a syncretic text. This accounts for the fact that its viewpoint is not entirely self-consistent; as profound as the text is, it can also be confounding. For example, in terms of metaphysics certain passages in the text convey a quasi-Spinozist emanationist monism, while at least one gives the impression that *brahman* is not the sole ultimate reality: “”For I [Krishna says] am the sup-/port of Brahman, the eternal, the unchanging,/ the deathless, the everlasting dharma, the/ source of all joy.”³³⁵ Elsewhere there are articulations of other ontological positions, including classic Sāṃkhya dualism of separately uncreated/evolved matter (*prakṛti*) and self or soul (*puruṣa*)³³⁶ and talk of “the field” etc. in XIII, especially 5-6, 19-23, 33-34. Also, formulations of caste vary (see, e.g., XVIII: 40-48) and are in tension with statements that downplay caste. Hegel could certainly be forgiven for finding it difficult to discern the “true” standpoint of the text, and for being perplexed (perhaps even revolted at times) by the stylistic combination of poetic constructions and philosophical

³³⁵ Easwaran, 77 (XIV: 26). See also 31 (V:16), “The light of this knowledge [of the Self]/ shines like the sun, revealing the supreme/ Brahman;” and 36 (VI:27), “...with their consciousness unified, they become/ one with Brahman.”

³³⁶ See II:24-30.

ideas, which latter involved an extensive vocabulary of terms not strictly identifiable with Greek or otherwise “Western” philosophical concepts.³³⁷ After all, the work is a philosophical poem, and it may not have evolved organically with the *Mahābhārata* but rather was likely interpolated into the larger epic at a later point, then undoubtedly edited or further modified now and then by various hands (again, syncretically). Yet it does not seem that Hegel was aware of this; rather, he knew only that the *Bhagavadgītā* was an “episode” in the epic. He certainly did not know that the *Gītā* was one (but only one) of Vedanta’s three *prasthānas*, along with the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras*. Nor did he suppose that it might have a less-than-fundamental importance even to schools of thought that accepted the authority of the Vedas—he did claim that “what is revealed in the Bhagavad-Gita in general and of the core of [the] Indian world-view is entirely grounded in the teachings of the Vedas”(103)³³⁸—let alone to the so-called “heterodox” systems that did not accept Vedic authority: Cārvāka, Jainism, and Buddhism. (Hegel did not understand these schools or *darśanas* in this way.³³⁹) Somewhat less forgivable, then, is any equation on Hegel’s part of the *Bhagavadgītā* with such a “core” of Indian

³³⁷ As Barbara Stoler Miller accounts for the text’s philosophical-poetic combination and its large number of terms and concepts from various systems, “Krishna develops his ideas in improvisational ways, not in linear arguments that lead to immediate resolution. The dialogue moves through a series of questions and answers that elucidate key words, concepts, and seeming contradictions to establish the crucial relationships among duty (*dharma*), discipline (*yoga*), action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*). The concepts are drawn from many sources” (*The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War*, trans. by Barbara Stoler Miller [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 8). To these terms one might add many more: *ātman*, *brahman*, *mokṣa*, *saṁnyāsa* and *tyāga*, *prakṛti*, *puruṣa*, *guṇa*, *śrāddha*, etc.

³³⁸ But on this note he assumed unerring fidelity to Vedic scripture, and was not aware of the difference between *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, or of *arthavāda* (non-essential statements) in the *Upaniṣads*, distinctions that “enable one to treat the Vedic testimony in a very liberal spirit” (Radhakrishnan and Moore, *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 350-351).

³³⁹ As another example, moreover, he did not know of divergences among Mīmāṃsā thinkers with respect to the state of liberation and the reality of God. See Radhakrishnan and Moore, *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 486.

philosophy; less still, the sense that throughout all of India's history³⁴⁰ there had been thought nothing better or different than the ideas contained in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Least forgivable of all—though mitigated by the fact that Hegel knew little to nothing of the existence of Indian philosophical treatises, the commentarial tradition, cultures and centers of debate and learning, etc.—is his assertion that the infelicities, contradictions, and objectionable aspects of the text owe not simply to *its* happening to be a philosophical poem, but to the basic and unavoidable truth that *a text that uneasily and confusingly expresses philosophy through poetry is the most that “the Indian mind” is capable of producing in its incompletely philosophical condition.*

It is perhaps inappropriate to accuse Hegel also of having failed to understand or predict that he would be “succeeded by a tradition of neglecting India, especially within the historiography of philosophy”³⁴¹, even if he did aid and abet—not to say almost singlehandedly initiate—the process of “the reinvention of philosophy as Greek.”³⁴² It is important to understand his criticisms of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and Indian philosophy, in all their “exaggeration, aggressivity, and unilaterality”³⁴³, as constituting “a stimulating

³⁴⁰ One of Hegel's most thinly rationalized and contemptible claims is that Indians simply have no history. He makes it often: “India has not only ancient books relating to religion, and splendid poetical productions, but also ancient codes; the existence of which latter kind of literature has been mentioned as a condition necessary to the origination of History—and yet History itself is not found” (*Philosophy of History*, 61-62); “A culture which does not yet have a history has made no real cultural progress, [and this applies to the pretended history] of India over three and a half thousand years” (*LWPH*, 13); “It is obvious to anyone who has even a rudimentary knowledge of the treasures of Indian literature that this country, so rich in spiritual achievements of a truly profound quality, nevertheless has no history (*LPWH* 136); “Nothing can be more confused, nothing more imperfect than the chronology of the Indians; no people which has attained to culture in astronomy, mathematics, &c., is as incapable for history; in it they have neither stability nor coherence” (*LPH I*: 126). For Radhakrishnan and Moore, the fact that comparatively less is known about philosophers than about philosophies in India, and even the fact that some “of the most famous names to which history attributes certain philosophical doctrines or systems are now admitted to be legendary” may owe not to the “unhistorical” but to the “perhaps so deeply-philosophical...nature of the ancient Indians” (*Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, xvii).

³⁴¹ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 135.

³⁴² See Bernasconi, “Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism” and “Krimskrams.”

³⁴³ Tola and Dragonetti, “What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel,” 33.

provocation.”³⁴⁴ The more Hegel came to know about India, and about ways of thinking that had been richly developed centuries before his own time, the more aware he became of the extent to which Indian philosophy challenged, even unsettled his own philosophical schema. He was suitably impressed, perhaps even “haunted”³⁴⁵, but ultimately remained a “son of his time,” reasserting the claim of his philosophy of absolute idealism to the title “science of knowledge” in the face of any potential disturbance (or competition) from Indian thought. However unforeseen, neglect of India by the European philosophical mainstream was nevertheless a real consequence of Hegel’s way of dealing with India. As Halbfass summarizes the situation,

Hegel does provide us with an example of a very serious and comprehensive discussion of Indian thought. Yet his historical segregation of philosophy from religion, his devaluation of any form of yearning for a lost unity, and his conviction that Europe, by unfolding the “actual,” “real” philosophy committed to the spirit of free science, had essentially surpassed the Orient, instead contributed to *a restrictive use of the concept of philosophy and to a self-limitation in the historiography of philosophy*. As a part of this process, the academic historians of philosophy, in their roles as caretakers of a specialized scholarly discipline, gave up the more comprehensive horizon of a phenomenology of the spirit and the world-historical perspective espoused in Hegel’s history of philosophy in order to pursue a history of philosophy in its “true,” “actual” sense. The willingness to concede India an “actual” philosophy as well, an attitude which Hegel occasionally gave utterance to during his later years, generally received little notice, and *an essentially restrictive view of the history of philosophy emerged which was to eventually dominate nineteenth and early twentieth century thinking and which explicitly excluded the Orient, and thus India, from the historical record of philosophy.*³⁴⁶

Tola and Dragonetti are fierier: “What is really deplorable is the great heap of errors that Hegel spread out based on his intellectual authority, and the great harm he did with his

³⁴⁴ Halbfass, “Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus,” 107.

³⁴⁵ This term is Singh Rathore and Mohapatra’s.

³⁴⁶ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 146, emphasis added.

conclusions to Indian philosophy and to those who adhered to his ideas.”³⁴⁷ Chapter 4 now turns to further examinations of Hegel’s ambiguous concession to Indian philosophy, his sources, his philosophical principles, the role of European ethnocentrism and race theory, and this “great harm.”

³⁴⁷ “What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel,” 29.

Chapter Four

Hegel's Account of Indian Philosophy and the Question of Eurocentrism

The previous two chapters have examined key places in Hegel's writings and lectures where his knowledge and belief about India are brought to bear. An attempt has been made to discuss Hegel's account of India more or less independently, to avoid giving the impression that it can or must be reduced, subordinated, or continuously referred to European debates and controversies. That would be incorrect; however, it is still true that Hegel's attention to India was part of a complex process of dialogue, positioning, and polemic between Hegel and his contemporaries. In both its praising and its criticizing aspects, Hegel's account of India was markedly parallel to his position concerning the philosophy of Spinoza. Frequently enough, he made this quite explicit, whether by bringing up Spinozist substance in discussions of Indian philosophy, or by interpolating remarks on "Eastern," "Oriental," or Indian philosophy when writing or speaking about Spinozism, pantheism, philosophies of the absolute, or related topics.

At this point, there are a number of related questions to consider. First, visited briefly above but perhaps still outstanding is the question of Hegel's position on the existence of philosophy in India: did he effectively acknowledge that there had been philosophy in India, or did he profess definitively that philosophy began in Greece? If the latter, was this chiefly because the existing literature on India—translations, critical apparatus, explications—was insufficient to allow for any other conclusion, or did it have more to do with Hegel's reading and interpretation of available materials, which might be

further traceable to his specific conceptions about philosophy, history, and peoples as stages of *Weltgeist*? Next, given what he had to say about India among other places in the world, was Hegel a Eurocentric thinker? Was he a racist? Further, was (or is) Hegelian philosophy intrinsically Eurocentric? Is it irredeemably racist? The latter two questions, of course, are importantly different from the two before them, but clearly not at all unconnected to them. Finally, if there has been a broadly, decidedly Eurocentric trend in Western academic philosophy over the last century and a half, to what extent might Hegel and Hegelian philosophy have enabled or contributed to it? In what ways can Indian philosophy resist, counteract, and transform this state of affairs? The aim of the present chapter is to address the remaining questions enumerated above; as an exploratory essay it constitutes an initial and tentative entry into the heated controversy over Eurocentrism and racism, which has heightened in the past few decades and is still ongoing, particularly in the light of a number of recent “returns to Hegel.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ On Hegel’s logic and ontology, see e.g., Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012); James Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel’s Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Stanley Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Rocio Zambrana, *Hegel’s Theory of Intelligibility* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015). On Hegel’s political theory, practical philosophy, and philosophy of action, see e.g., Robert Pippin and Otfried Höffe, eds., *Hegel on Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Andrew Buchwalter, *Dialectics, Politics, and the Contemporary Value of Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Christian H. Krijnen, ed., *Recognition—German idealism as an ongoing challenge* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Mark Alznauer, *Hegel’s Theory of Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Christopher Yeomans, *The Expansion of Autonomy: Hegel’s Pluralistic Philosophy of Action* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Sara MacDonald and Barry Craig, *Recovering Hegel from the Critique of Leo Strauss: the virtues of modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014). On Hegel’s philosophy of religion, see e.g., Andrew Shanks, *Hegel versus “Inter-Faith Dialogue”: A General Theory of True Xenophilia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Martin J. De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2009). On Hegel’s aesthetics, see e.g., Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Andrew W. Hass, *Hegel and the Art of Negation: Negativiy, Creativity, and Contemporary Thought* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); and Julia Peters, *Hegel on Beauty* (New York: Routledge, 2015). On Hegel’s theory of history, see Eric Michael Dale,

I. Hegel on the existence of Indian philosophy

Regarding the first question, of whether or not Hegel “ultimately” allowed that there had been or was philosophy in India, it is unanswerable in that form; that is, it would be imprudent to offer any cut-and-dry answer confidently, since Hegel’s remarks across different texts and lectures are not entirely consistent. To an extent this might simply reflect changes in his thinking over time, but there is also a distinct sense in which he resisted making repeated unequivocal statements one way or the other. One could even be forgiven for thinking that his statements are deliberately obfuscating or evasive.³⁴⁹ Several scholars have asserted that Hegel’s overall view is ambiguous, which might reflect a persistent ambivalence or consternation on his part: a sense, perhaps, that India *should not* have philosophy in the proper sense (given its placement in Hegel’s account of history), but it nevertheless seems to. It could perhaps be contended—though it does not seem that anyone has advanced this idea in the context of discussions of Hegel and non-western philosophy—that Hegel’s apparently incongruent or irreconcilable comments about philosophy in India are merely designed to discourage any kind of easy conclusions about India. This would undoubtedly have a certain dialectical appeal, in keeping with Hegel’s emphasis on the “labor of the negative”: only superficial perspectives are effortless, and effortless ones are invariably shallow.

The preponderance of material, however, favors the idea that Hegel by and large denies India philosophy—a conclusion that is not cautious, exactly, but not exactly final, either. This is the scholarly consensus, to be sure. Virtually the only scholar to attempt to

Hegel, the End of History, and the Future (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also Michael Baur, *G.W.F. Hegel: Key Concepts* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

³⁴⁹ Vyagappa, for instance, writes that Hegel’s writings on India are “enough to puzzle a reader, and doubt arises whether Hegel was sometimes out of his mind.” *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 2.

deviate meaningfully from it recently is Lucia Staiano-Daniels. Yet even she has to qualify what she designates Hegel’s “unexpected elevation” of India in the 1827 review essay by observing that “Hegel comes unexpectedly close to Indian thought, but only on his own terms.”³⁵⁰ That is to say, she argues that he presents and elaborates certain terms and concepts from the *Bhagavadgītā* in a manner nearly identical to that in which he explains certain ones in his own system, though in effect he “cut[s] Indian thought” to fit the mold of his philosophy. Indeed, the most Staiano-Daniels can say about Hegel’s study in the mid- to late 1820s is that “it may have changed his mind slightly about India.”³⁵¹ Her claim that Hegel’s position is “unexpectedly, even shockingly well-disposed toward Indian concepts” thus rings hyperbolic, particularly since it is followed immediately by the admission that “not only is this praise of Indian thought embedded within a mass of negative judgments, it presents Indian themes as reflections of Hegel’s own ideas. Although Hegel unsettles his chronology in favor of India and attempts to open himself up to foreign ideas, nevertheless his approval diminishes them: Indian ideas are valuable to Hegel, when at all, only as a confirmation of what he already thinks.”³⁵² As dissent from what Staiano-Daniels sees as an overblown, unfair common belief that Hegel’s estimation of India is intensely negative and Hegel himself “little more than a chauvinist,” this is well-intentioned but minimal.³⁵³

Questions such as “Is Hegel’s philosophy Eurocentric?” thus became and remain serious, as well as highly disputed, because Hegel did not absolutely, incontrovertibly

³⁵⁰ Lucia Staiano-Daniels, “Illuminated Darkness: Hegel’s Brief and Unexpected Elevation of Indian Thought in *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the Name Bhagavad-Gītā* by Wilhelm von Humboldt,” *The Owl of Minerva* 43:1-2 (2011-2012), 75-99: 77.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 75.

affirm the existence of philosophy in India and other world civilizations, and because he did on the other hand tender a number of self-assured opinions regarding Indians' backwardness, superstition, immorality, inferior intelligence, lack of history, and unfreedom. It might be thought that Hegel was hampered by his limited sources, and that he was ineluctably yet innocently misguided into adopting an unbecoming view of a sort that he would have rejected if he had only had better information. Thus one way of trying to decide whether Hegel was Eurocentric would be to examine what he had access to, and whether he used what was available to him sensitively, straightforwardly, and fairly, or on the contrary his appropriation and analysis constitute a misuse of available materials. A few researchers have examined, in varying depth and detail, the sources on Indian thought that existed prior to Hegel's time or were published during his lifetime.³⁵⁴ Viyagappa's chapter "Hegel's Sources of Information on India" is comprehensive and inimitable in this regard.³⁵⁵ Although there is no complete record of the works Hegel had in his "rich collection" and the handwritten excerpts he copied out from his own and borrowed books, from references in Hegel's writings and lecture manuscripts Viyagappa

³⁵⁴ See, for instance, Wilhelm Halbfass, "Hegel on Meditation and Yoga," *Zen Buddhism Today: Annual Report of the Kyoto Zen Symposium 3* (1985), 72-84; and "Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus," *German Scholars on India: contributions to Indian studies*, ed. by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany: New Delhi (1973), 107-122; Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, "What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 83* (2002), 1-36 ; and *On the Myth of the Opposition between Indian Thought and Western Philosophy* (Hildesheim; New York: Olms, 2004); Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gītā: Hermeneutics and discipline in the German reception of Indian thought, 1778-1831* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's rebirth in modern Germany* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009); Michel Hulin, *Hegel et l'Orient: suivi d'un texte de Hegel sur le Bhagavad-Gītā* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1979 [repr. 2013]); and Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker* (Stuttgart: K.F. Koelher Verlag, 1960).

³⁵⁵ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 11-60. Pages 266-274 provide a detailed list of sources known to Hegel "directly and indirectly" up to 1830.

develops an extensive list. Among the “old”³⁵⁶ sources with which Hegel was familiar, the main one was Johann Jacob Brucker’s history of philosophy published 1742-1744 (Brucker’s sources for sections on “Barbaric Philosophy” and “Exotic Philosophy” were Abraham Roger and Jesuit and Danish missionary reports). “New” sources prior to 1784 included Alexander Dow’s *The History of Hindostan*, an English translation of a history of the Moghul empire in Persian. Dow followed its author, Mahmmud Casim Ferishta (Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi Firishta), in omitting consideration of pre-Islamic India. As Viyagappa explains, Dow cautioned against the assumption that the Hindus had no history prior to Moghul conquest, yet his “overall picture” of Indian history conveyed just this view, along with the notion of Indian political disorganization and submissiveness; according to Dow, “Despite their learning and genius, the Hindus were a people destined to be subjugated by others, and they submitted themselves without complaint to any rule which was imposed upon them.”³⁵⁷

“New” sources after 1784, which constituted by far the majority of the testimony, scholarship, and commentary on India that Hegel examined and utilized, ranged from French works such as Duperron’s *Oupnek’hat*, Abbé Dubois’s *Moeurs, Institutions et Cérémonies des Peuples de l’Inde*³⁵⁸, and Alexandre Langlois’s series of four articles in *Journal Asiatique* on August Wilhelm Schlegel’s translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, to a wide array of material in English and German. In the former language there were the

³⁵⁶ Viyagappa uses comments Hegel made in the 1820s to show that Hegel distinguished between “old” and “new” sources for information about India. For Hegel the “new” sources, dating from approximately 1784 with William Jones’ establishment of the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta, were to be seen as considerably advanced on works published prior to that time, for Europeans had since gained access to the “authentic sources” and accordingly their reports and analyses had become much more reliable and accurate (13). Hegel did, however, regard a small number of pre-1784 works as belonging to the “new” group.

³⁵⁷ Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel’s Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 20.

³⁵⁸ Viyagappa notes the resemblance between Hegel’s statement in the *Philosophy of History*, “Trick and cunning is the fundamental character of the Indian; in his habits are cheating stealing, robbing and killing,” and a passage in Dubois (*ibid.*, 30).

translations, expositions, and essays of the first English Sanskritists: Jones, Wilkins, and especially Colebrooke, as well as lesser lights such as Francis Wilford and the missionary William Carey. There were also travelers' accounts, e.g., that of Samuel Turner, whose "fabulous narrations" (perhaps embellished) of his experiences in Tibet Hegel accepted unquestioningly and took to be proof of "how ridiculous are the ascetical exercises of an adept and how they stupefy a person."³⁵⁹ Texts in German included the books, translations, and lectures of Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Rosen, Karl Ritter, Hegel's colleague in Berlin Franz Bopp (through whom "Hegel came to learn and appreciate the research made in comparative linguistic studies" and from whom he continued to learn of the latest developments in Indological research³⁶⁰), and Georg Friedrich Creuzer, whose *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* Hegel esteemed highly and used heavily. Creuzer, while praising India in some respects and controversially locating the origins of Greek myths, gods, and religion in non-Greek sources (yet nonetheless affirming Greek religion as "the point of culmination in the history of non-Christian religions"), saw in Indian religion primarily childlike naivety, an attitude of devotion and reflection, and a certain element of speculation and philosophy: "But the inner core of [these three features] was a spirit of self-annihilation."³⁶¹

It is clear that Hegel knew of Indian philosophy only through European interpreters and from works such as *Śakuntala* and the *Bhagavadgītā* in Latin, German,

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

French, and English translations.³⁶² It is also true, as not only Viyagappa but also Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, Wilhelm Halbfass, and Michel Hulin have pointed out, that Hegel knew little to nothing of certain areas or aspects, both major and minor, of Indian intellectual and philosophical culture.³⁶³ This is partly owing to certain gaps and deficiencies in the understanding of even the most distinguished European intellects (such as Colebrooke), and partly due to Hegel's own attention and emphasis with respect to the materials he surveyed and studied. Nevertheless, as Leidecker, Halbfass, and others have indicated, enough was available and known to Hegel to make it possible for him to develop a more charitable and accepting position concerning Indian philosophy than what resulted overall in his Berlin period. Furthermore, Peter K.J. Park has persuasively shown that several of Hegel's contemporaries among historians of philosophy opted for comparative and accommodating approaches, which were studied and cogently argued, not fanatically, exoticizingly Indophilic.³⁶⁴ Hegel's general or predominant strategy of excluding India from the history of philosophy "proper" was

³⁶² As Figueira notes, "for the most part, these were only specimens and not coherent wholes." *The Exotic*, 206 n.67.

³⁶³ Viyagappa, for instance, writes that the "miscellaneous and rudimentary" sources Hegel had "presented...a mixture of observations, fables and serious studies. Reading through them one gets the impression that India was a jungle of men and faiths, prosperous once upon a time, but whose history is now shrouded in myths and fables...The first picture of India sketched out by these sources was not only incomplete, but also was in so many ways inadequate and likely to lead to great errors of judgment." *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, 59. See also Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 86, 96-99; Halbfass, "Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus," 107, 109, 113, 117-118; Halbfass, "Hegel on Meditation and Yoga," 76-79; Hulin, *Hegel et l'Orient*, 207, 213-215; Tola and Dragonetti, "What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel," 5, 17-21, 29-31; Tola and Dragonetti, *On the Myth of the Opposition between Indian Thought and Western Philosophy*, 45-59.

³⁶⁴ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 97-112. Park focuses especially on the "new idealists" and historians of philosophy Georg Anton Friedrich Ast and Thaddä Anselm Rixner. See also Jon Stewart, "Hegel, Creuzer and the Rise of Orientalism," *The Owl of Minerva 45:1-2* (2013), 13-34. Stewart takes Hegel's approval of his contemporary Georg Friedrich Creuzer's comparative mythology, and his occasional efforts to defend Creuzer's work against criticism, as evidence that "Hegel was not the political and social reactionary that many scholars have taken him to be" (13), but does not attend to either Creuzer's or Hegel's attribution of childlike, naïve, or self-annihilating qualities to "the Indian character" or the spirit of Indian people(s). See p. 6 above.

thus not the only choice available to him on the basis of the texts, interpretations, etc. to which he had access.

The “innocent” plea, therefore, only goes so far. Without a doubt, there are certain things Hegel did not know, some of which he could not have known. He knew a fair amount nonetheless—certainly enough to be less pejorative, condescending, and simplistic than what comes through in writings and lectures. Hegel knew as well as anyone, and in fact made the point explicitly (most famously in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) that each person is a child of their time. Still, as a number of scholars have recognized (Herring and Leidecker among them), Hegel was none too eager to restrict, tone down, or qualify his assertions in light of his resources. In fact, he seemed emboldened by his reading of and his trust in the work not just of Colebrooke, Jones, Wilkins, and other early Indologists but equally of missionaries and travelers, even at second hand. Taking their word, and extrapolating at times on the basis of what was known, claimed, or believed, he purported to uncover and dismiss the “secret” of India without countering with an insistence on Indians’ rationality, contemporaneity, capacity for self-determination, etc.³⁶⁵ On this basis, Europe could emerge very favorably from comparisons to India. Hegel’s way of dealing with India grew from, was indebted to, and in turn reinforced his conviction that the Europe of his day represented the pinnacle of human civilizational achievement to date.

Philosopher J.L. Mehta elaborates a key problem in Hegel’s identifying China, India, Persia, etc. as “moments” in an evolutionary or dialectical order, *aufgehoben*

³⁶⁵ Since India is a land of fantasy (or phantasy), which follows from its philosophy/religion, its people consequently need not or ought not to be listened to, trusted, taken seriously, left or even allowed to govern themselves, etc.

progressively in each subsequent moment³⁶⁶ and finally in Western thinking as philosophy proper (again, Hegelian speculative-dialectical objective idealism being the culmination, if not the only true form, of philosophy). The problem is that such cultures and traditions “cannot be dismissed as a merely consumed residue...the hermeneutic process of self-understanding and self-interpretation through which a religious and philosophical tradition like that of India has developed continuously does not at a certain point in time come to a sudden stop, becoming only a dead and transcended moment in Western thinking.”³⁶⁷ Rather than holding that Indian traditions represented starting points, stepping stones, or superseded forms, why not acknowledge them, conceptually and also politically or practically, as having the capability to self-interrogate, respond, and determine necessary changes for themselves, rather than being required to concede the supremacy of the West and succumb to its power? Mehta, at a loss, has no answer on Hegel’s behalf, but proceeds to quote William Ernest Hocking’s claim that Hegel’s ordering of societies is “*inconsistent with the dialectical principle itself*. For no people and no religion ceases to think. If Chinese religion, for example, is defective, it will be Chinese experience which will discover it, and the cure should come in China, not in India. Why must the movement of fundamental racial thought pass from region to region, as if thought were no longer productive in its old haunts?”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Compare Hegel, *EPR*, §346 and §347: “Since history is the process whereby the spirit assumes the shape of events and of immediate natural actuality, the stages of its development are present as *immediate natural principles*; and since these are natural, they constitute a plurality of separate entities [*eine Vielheit aufeinander*] such that *one of them is allotted to each nation [Volke]* in its *geographical and anthropological existence [Existenz]*. The nation [*Volk*] to which such a moment is allotted as a *natural principle* is given the task of implementing this principle in the course of the self-development of the world spirit’s self-consciousness. This nation is the *dominant* one in world history for this epoch, *and only once in history can it have this epoch-making role.*”

³⁶⁷ J.L. Mehta, *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 191.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 191-192, emphasis in original.

Given the evidence in the first three chapters that Hegel's understanding was not utterly crude or dogmatic, however, one might wonder whether Hegel would have ever experienced a truly profound transformation in outlook where India and Indian philosophy were concerned: if he had had better access to other original sources, for example; if domestic philosophical, theological, and other controversies had not been what they were, or if their heat had dissipated in the 1820s rather than intensified; if Hegel had not succumbed to cholera early in his 60's but had lived another twenty years to think, write, and lecture. The facts being as they are, however, such speculation is necessarily idle, and so it must be acknowledged that Hegel used the sources he had in the manner he chose. Responsibility for any avoidable injustice done to Indian thought or culture lies ultimately with him. As Tibebe puts it, "This plea—'don't blame Hegel, for he was a victim of his sources'—sounds like the cliché 'the devil made me do it.'"³⁶⁹ Even Tibebe, however, recognizes that there is something to learn from Hegel's missteps, as does Halbfass, who observes that while Hegel did not try "to draw neutral and balanced conclusions from what he did know," his claims and statements are "still instructive, and at least a stimulating provocation."³⁷⁰ Halbfass accepts that Hegel was a confident, even triumphant son of his Protestant-European day, a "philosophical herald"

³⁶⁹ Tibebe, *Hegel and the Third World*, 184 n.8. Tibebe ascribes this view to (among others) Peter C. Hodgson, editor of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, who states, "Any tendencies that we might detect to trivialize or ridicule [Eastern] religions are traceable not so much to Hegel as to his sources, which he quotes at length, often verbatim." See Hegel, *LPR II*: 272. In "Hegel and the Orientals," Leidecker similarly opines, "Perhaps not Hegel should really be blamed for reading history so patently falsely...He was the victim of the lack of perceptiveness of the parochial authors he read"(158). After further discussion of Hegel's treatment of India, however, Leidecker admits that the "suspicion" that Hegel willfully misconstrued information to suit his purposes is inevitable in light of some of the "harsh pronouncements about Indian thought and philosophy which are quite unverifiable and were not shared even in his day by those very authorities whom he quoted"(164). Bernasconi is unequivocal: "Hegel cannot be portrayed as the victim of his sources" ("Hegel's Racism: A reply to McCarney," 36). See also Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in Stuart Barnett, ed., *Hegel after Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998),

³⁷⁰ Wilhelm Halbfass, "Hegel on Meditation and Yoga," 78; Halbfass, "Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus," 107.

whose very awareness of “his historical standpoint and of the historical conditions of his thought...confirm[ed] him in his self-confidence, the confidence in his own height of reflexion.”³⁷¹ He was philosophically committed to the progressive, immanent dialectical movement of both logic and history, and to the belief in reason in history (which could only ever be seen and articulated retrospectively). For him there could be no legitimate return to what came earlier in history, and any desire to go back—whether on the part of Indians venerating their ancient texts or that of Europeans desperate to trade the excesses of modern free subjectivity for the comforting grasp of the pristine wisdom of the “mystic East”—was misconceived and bound to be frustrated in the attempt.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to address one possible response on the subject of Hegel’s use of sources in his appraisal of Indian thought. It might be captured in the questions, “What if Hegel was largely correct, and there just was not rigorous philosophy in India, as it has been defined in the European tradition? What proof has been offered that there was?” While not arrogant or dismissive in the way a response absolutely asserting the absence of philosophy in India would be, these questions are nonetheless benighted. To ask them is to fall into a trap that ensnared Hegel—perhaps not first, but importantly—and which he (re-)set for subsequent philosophers of European heritage. The questions arguably can only originate from a position of presumption and suspicion: assuming there certainly *is* Greco-European philosophy while *doubting* there is or could have been Indian or Eastern or “non-Western.” This supposition notwithstanding, two rejoinders are apt here. One is that the burden of proof rests on the

³⁷¹ Halbfass, “Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus,” 117.

denier of philosophy to India, not any longer on the claimant.³⁷² Granted, definitions of philosophy itself are at stake in the matter, but simply defining philosophy in such a way as to analytically limit it to thinking that occurred in a particular geographical region accomplishes little, particularly if doing so trades on the mere fact that the word philosophy or *philosophia* is of Greek provenance.³⁷³ A second retort is that, as numerous Indian philosophers and expositors of Indian philosophy have emphasized, the very nature of this question shows the extent to which an asymmetry dominates, privileging European interpretations of India over Indian perspectives on Europe and European thought.³⁷⁴

³⁷² And complete ignorance should be cause for less rather than greater conviction: Tola and Dragonetti recount a not-uncommon instance in which an Italian philosopher at an international conference declared there was no Indian philosophy; when asked what texts or studies provided the basis for such judgment, the philosopher in question announced “with some pride” complete unfamiliarity with any material. See “What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel,” 1.

³⁷³ For one thing, as Jacques Derrida profoundly understood, questions about what counts as philosophical are always philosophical questions: “The question of knowing what can be called ‘philosophy’ has always been *the very question* of philosophy, its heart, its origin, its life-principle...I will always find it hard to understand of a question *about philosophy* that it is simply *non-philosophical*.” “*Honoris Causa*: ‘This is also extremely funny,’” in *Points...Interviews*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber, trans. by Peggy Kamuf et al (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 411-412. For another, labeling “all” philosophy “European” because the word “philosophy” comes from Greek papers over many *intra-European* distinctions and disagreements, ancient as well as more recent, about the definition, features, or “true nature” of philosophy. Tola and Dragonetti have argued that “‘manifestations of irrationality,’” whether rightly or wrongly so called, existed in ancient Greece and in later Europe and were “as numerous as they are in the history of Indian thought;” hence, “Greece and Europe have never been characterized by rationality only and India has never wholly submitted to irrationality. In both regions of the world, we can find the same mixture of dominant irrationality and limited rationality which manifested itself only timidly and was not a predominant or excluding factor at all.” *On the Myth of the Opposition between Indian Thought and Western Philosophy*, 20.

³⁷⁴ See, for example, Daya Krishna, *Indian Philosophy: A Counter-Perspective* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in India: Proper Work of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Bina Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2012); J.N. Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought: An Essay on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992); B.K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); J.L. Mehta, *India and the West, the Problem of Understanding: Selected Essays* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985); Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999); and Ayon Maharaj, “Śrī Harṣa contra Hegel: Monism, Skeptical Method, and the Limits of Reason,” *Philosophy East and West* 64:1 (2014), 82-108. To a degree, it seems this response may apply even to the well-intentioned question, “Is there an Indian counterpart to Hegel?” While Hegel’s exceptionality, uniqueness, and perhaps profundity need not be denied, it can still be suggested that the apparent inapplicability or non-urgency of questions like, “Has there ever been a

This is not the place to undertake a survey of philosophical thought in India throughout history; it can only be mentioned that there are to be found a diversity and variety of forms, modes, schools, concerns, emphases, and productions of thought irreducible to any one “core.”³⁷⁵ As regards Hegel, Halbfass has made clear that the “systematic manifoldness and historical variability of Indian philosophy”³⁷⁶ were not known to him in anything nearing their full range. Cataloging some of the trends, themes, concerns, arguments, and ideas Hegel knew poorly or not at all, and clarifying accordingly some of the unwarranted assertions and incautious generalizations he took the liberty of making on the basis of what he believed, Tola and Dragonetti have argued that “what Indian philosophy owes Hegel” is above all “its *exclusion*”—from the West’s consideration and respect, and from its narratives of the history of philosophy as a human endeavor. Conversely, what Western philosophy owes Hegel is “the *having been deprived of possibilities*”(36). Elsewhere Tola and Dragonetti have gone so far as to venture that Hegel *is* the origin of “the myth of the opposition between Indian and Western philosophy.” This myth, they claim, can be seen for what it is from careful study of ancient Indian thought and comparison of Indian ideas with Western ones, ultimately substantiating three theses: first, up to the 17th century (when intercultural encounter rapidly intensified) “*there was frequent reflection on the same philosophical subjects,*

European Śaṅkara? Gaṅgeśa? Aurobindo?” might testify more to the perspective that prompts the questions than to the matter itself.

³⁷⁵ Indeed, surveys and other presentations of Indian philosophy typically cannot be done without inevitable massive omissions, but particularly notable are Surendranath Dasgupta’s three-volume *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass); Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009 [repr: 2 vols.]); M. Ram Murty, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013); Candradhara Śarmā, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (London: Rider, 1960); Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*; King, *Indian Philosophy*; Deepak Sarma, *Classical Indian Philosophy: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1990).

³⁷⁶ Halbfass, “Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus,” 117.

and it was carried out in the same way”(19). Second, forms or versions of irrationality can be found in the history of Greek and European ideas, “*as numerous as they are in the history of Indian thought*”(20, emphasis in original). Third, ““*such a thing as Indian philosophy*’ did exist in India”(ibid., emphasis in original).³⁷⁷ This might be seen as implying that “Indian” and “Western” philosophy are not strictly opposed, yet are nonetheless separate or distinct domains—and indeed, Tola and Dragonetti effectively acknowledge this, at least for the centuries up to the modern period of heavy cross-cultural encounter and exchange. Hence they are still concerned primarily with showing *that* there was such a thing as Indian philosophy, i.e., such a thing as philosophical thought in ancient or classical India similar in all decisive respects to the philosophical thought of the West: similar or comparable subjects, questions and problems, methods of reflection, answers and solutions. Still, it may be inferred that the “myth of opposition” can be resolved into a truth, not of the identity or even unity of “Indian” and “Western” philosophy necessarily, but of their equality in originality, diversity, and vivacity. The result then is not an incorporation or absorption of Indian philosophy into the “greater” narrative of the history of (Western) philosophy, but a thoroughly reconceived story of human experience with respect to philosophical problems: puzzlement, deliberation, articulation, illumination, solution, refutation, abandonment, etc.

II. Eurocentrism and Hegel

³⁷⁷ Tola and Dragonetti have a fourth and perhaps more debatable thesis: there are “chronological limits” to the comparison of Indian and Western philosophy, i.e. approximately the 16th century, after which “Western culture in all its expressions began to adopt a wholly novel form which was different from all previously known forms and succeeded in imposing itself worldwide to differing degrees...To compare Indian thought before the 16th or 17th centuries with Western thought following that date would be to compare two things which belong to two completely incommensurable epochs as a result of the intrusion of the factors indicated”(22-23).

At any rate, it is perhaps permissible to set aside the question, “Why did Hegel not think differently, more accommodatingly, of India as a philosophical culture?” and proceed to consider the views about philosophy, history, and philosophy’s history, which Hegel had and which inflected his approach to India. Are these views marked by Eurocentric or racial prejudice? If so, are they structured by and inextricable from it, or is it merely appended to them? At the outset of this chapter two distinct sets of questions were raised, one concerning Hegel the person and the other concerning the philosophy or thought of Hegel. The questions of whether Hegel the historical individual was a Eurocentric person, and whether he was a racist, are problematic and intractable. They are problematic because they are not entirely irrelevant, but they create confusion. Is a person who has racist or Euro-supremacist convictions nevertheless capable of producing a philosophical theory or system that is unaffected by them? Conversely, if a set of ideas or a philosophical system can be shown to have racist underpinnings, or to be strongly ethnocentric³⁷⁸, does this entail the same of the person who generated it? If an extensively articulated philosophy such as Hegel’s is *not* identifiably racist or Eurocentric, is that sufficient for stating that he was not either? In the case of someone whose name was—arguably despite his attempts to show otherwise and his occasional insistence against any deep originality—considered to be so closely tied to a philosophical program, whether it be termed objective idealism, absolute idealism, speculative-dialectical philosophy, the phenomenological doctrine of the notion (*Begriff*), or something similar, such considerations may seem particularly germane. Yet, given the difficulty of separating “the man” from “the philosophy,” as well as the imperative to avoid implicit *ad hominem*

³⁷⁸ The use of the general term here does *not* imply that the two are interchangeable. Eurocentrism is but a single species of the genus ethnocentrism, one of many possible and actual versions of it—but one that has in recent times been pervasive and incredibly damaging.

argumentation, the contention here is that it will simply prove more fruitful to focus on Hegel's philosophical ideas (also their roots and their repercussions) rather than on his personality or unreflective impressions. What therefore can be said of Hegelian philosophy concerning the questions of Eurocentrism and racism? Specifically, is it Hegel's core conceptions of philosophy, history, and peoples that are responsible for his judgements about India and Indian philosophy? Generally, then, is there justification for claiming that Hegel's philosophy is Eurocentric or racist intrinsically, through and through, or is there a way in which it can be argued that his ideas have validity despite or independently of any demonstrated ethnocentrism or racism?

Defining Eurocentrism in a straightforward and rather literal way as the idea or view that Europe is at, or just is, the center of things, makes it sound unavoidable as well as innocuous, so much so that it would be unfair to associate it with anything inherently negative. Some would say a European, or someone of European descent, or someone born, conditioned, socialized, and educated in a society organized around European values and traditions, is naturally going to exhibit Eurocentrism, and this should be no more problematic or blameworthy than an African being Afrocentric, or an Asian Asia-centric, or even each of person self-centric, in terms of finding or having oneself at the center of one's world. What makes Eurocentrism different, what has made and makes it more pernicious and oppressive according to many who have sought to articulate and critique this concept in its connections with concrete world realities, is that it goes far beyond simply European-ness in both theory and practice. Eurocentrism, like the self-centered person who fails to comprehend that being at the center of one's universe does not equate with one's being the center of *the* universe or *all* universes, assumes that

certain traditions, practices, ideas, discoveries, mores or morals, etc. are suitable for everyone, and arrogates to itself the right or the duty to refashion in its own image those who do not yet resemble it. As one contemporary thinker puts it,

The idea behind Eurocentricity in its most vile form, whatever its theoretical manifestation, is that Europe is the standard and nothing exists in the same category anywhere. It is the valorization of Europe above all other cultures and societies that makes it such a racist system. On the other hand, there should be nothing incorrect about European people wanting to have motifs, ideas, and narratives, concepts that are derived from their history. That is to be expected, but what is not to be expected is the idea that Europe somehow has a right to hold a hegemonic banner over all other people.”³⁷⁹

In the history of European imperialism, colonialism, and capitalist globalization, Eurocentrism in practice has meant one part ideological efforts (proselytization, educational and political reforms, and other kinds of persuasion) and one part material efforts (forcible compliance, economic aggression, violence, war, imprisonment, punishment, extermination).

In their book *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam define Eurocentrism in the following way: “the procrustean forcing of cultural heritage neatly into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world’s center of gravity, as ontological ‘reality’ to the rest of the world’s shadow. Eurocentric thinking attributes to the ‘West’ an almost providential sense of historical destiny.”³⁸⁰ Additionally, Eurocentrism is “a form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures *contemporary* practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism.” Shohat and Stern highlight five

³⁷⁹ Molefi Kete Asante, *Facing South to Africa: Toward an Afrocentric Critical Orientation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 6-7.

³⁸⁰ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994 [2013 repr.]), 1-2.

key elements of Eurocentrism: 1) belief in a linear historical trajectory leading from “pure, democratic” ancient Greece through imperial Rome to the various capitals of Europe and the U.S.; 2) attribution to (only) Western society of inherent progress toward democratic institutions; 3) a double sleight of hand that elides non-European democratic traditions, while obscuring manipulations embedded in Western formal democracy and also masking Western efforts to subvert or sabotage democracies and democratic movements elsewhere; 4) minimization of Western aggression and oppression, regarding these as accidental or contingent rather and failing to consider seriously colonialism, slave trading, and imperialism as “fundamental catalysts of the West’s disproportionate power;” 5) appropriation of the cultural and material production of non-Europeans, while both denying their achievements and withholding due (or any) recognition or appreciation.³⁸¹

If this makes it clear that Eurocentrism has been and still is real and effectual, where did it come from? In one of the first book-length accounts of Eurocentrism, Samir Amin linked the ideology of pre-capitalist “tributary cultures,” in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world, to capitalism and its contradictions. Amin argued that a twofold transformation, “the crystallization of capitalist society in Europe and the European conquest of the world,” began at the time of the Renaissance and has shaped the modern world as its inhabitants know it.³⁸² Europeans’ dawning consciousness that their civilization *could* achieve the conquest of the entire world led them to try, generating in

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2. Tibebu provides an additional gloss: “Eurocentrism is the intellectual rationalization of Western modernity. It is the self-consciousness of capital accumulation in the land of its origin, western Europe. Eurocentrism is spurious universalism. Its cardinal sin is to read the global hegemony of the West over the rest as the triumph of universalism over particularism. It reads Western global victory as the victory of humanity itself. It equates the West with ‘man’ as such.” *Hegel and the Third World*, xx.

³⁸² Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 151.

the process a conviction of their own superiority that led them to think they *should*. European conquest, rather than quickly creating a homogenized and Europeanized planet, produced a polarization, a gap between “developed” centers and peripheries forever incapable of “catching up.” Eurocentric ideology came to function to legitimize both the system itself and the ever-increasing inequality attending it, in the latter case doing so particularly via racism, culminating in a present reality that philosopher Charles W. Mills has called an order of *de facto* global white supremacy.³⁸³ For Amin the contemporary world is at a total impasse: it responds to the challenge posed by Eurocentric capitalist expansion according to a “colonizer’s model of the world” (in J.M. Blaut’s well-known phrasing), with “a desperate evasion, in a twofold culturalist involution, Eurocentric and provincial in the West and ‘inverted Eurocentric’ in the third world.”³⁸⁴

Turning to the relationship between Eurocentrism and philosophy, two discrete phenomena can perhaps be identified: Eurocentric philosophy and philosophical Eurocentrism, which exist in reciprocal interaction or a feedback loop. It might be said that Eurocentric convictions, prejudices, and attitudes have influenced philosophy and philosophers in the period of Euro-western ascendancy, so that philosophy has been conceived, pursued, and taught Eurocentrically; and also that there have been explicit attempts by European philosophers to justify or rationalize Eurocentrism philosophically—to prove the superiority of European society, culture, thought, or knowledge. The conception of philosophy as originally and essentially a European

³⁸³ “Today...though formal decolonization has taken place and in Africa and Asia black, brown, and yellow natives are in office, ruling independent nations, the global economy is essentially dominated by the formal colonial powers, their offshoots (Euro-United States, Euro-Canada), and their international financial institutions, lending agencies, and corporations...Thus one could say that the world is essentially dominated by white capital.” Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 36.

³⁸⁴ Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 156.

activity, and thus one that has an exclusively or predominantly European pedigree, results in the privileging of European philosophers, ideas, and texts, which further reinforces the Eurocentric paradigm, and so on.

The debate about Eurocentrism in philosophy has continually gravitated toward Hegel's philosophy in particular, indeed so much so that his name alone almost encapsulates the problem.³⁸⁵ Some point to the work and legacy of Hegel as a representative expression of philosophical Eurocentrism and a formative contribution to Eurocentrism as a force in both philosophy and world affairs. In this vein the historian Teshale Tibebu has recently written, "Hegel's corpus is Western modernity's canon. It is the canon of the supremacy of the Greco-Germanic *Geist*. His paradigm articulates, justifies, systematizes, and rationalizes the project of Eurocentric modernity. Hegel's canon and Napoleon's cannon worked together in the making of Western modernity. The encounter with Hegel thus entails coming to terms with the trials and tribulations of modernity, including negative modernity."³⁸⁶ Before Tibebu, there was Enrique Dussel: "Philosophically, no one expresses this thesis of [Eurocentric] modernity better than Hegel: 'The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) of Freedom—that Freedom which has its own absolute form itself as its purport.' For Hegel, the Spirit of Europe (the German spirit) is the absolute Truth that determines or realizes itself through

³⁸⁵ Kant is also a central figure for some thinkers. See, for example, Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Eurocentrism in Philosophy: The Case of Immanuel Kant," *Philosophical Forum* 27:4 (1996), 333-356, and "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy," in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, 141-161.

³⁸⁶ Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World*, 330.

itself without owing anything to anyone.”³⁸⁷ And before Dussel, Marcien Towa: “Western imperialism finds one of its most elaborate ideological expressions in the Hegelian philosophy of history, according to which the modern civilization of Europe constitutes the universal synthesis of all the values produced by humanity in the course of its long history. The Occident is thus proclaimed the Absolute of the World in front of which all other peoples are without rights. [...] Under the cover of this absolutisation of itself, the Occident is enabled to indulge, with a good conscience, in the destruction of other civilizations across the world.”³⁸⁸ It is, however, Tibebu who states the idea most concisely and poignantly: “*All Eurocentrism is...essentially a series of footnotes to Hegel.*”³⁸⁹

A number of philosophers, however, have offered defenses of the philosophy and the theory of history that Hegel articulated. To take just one, in a recent article, “Is Hegel’s Philosophy of History Eurocentric?” philosopher Andrew Buchwalter accepts that Hegel’s thought may have been Eurocentric in certain respects. He does not even deny that there is a “centrally Western or even Eurocentric focus to Hegel’s conception of history.”³⁹⁰ He does, however, attempt to contest the assumption that Hegel’s logic of world history is Eurocentric inherently or at its very core. Buchwalter asserts that a non-Eurocentric core or set of ideas can be found in Hegel’s philosophy, particularly his philosophy of history, that is globally valid or truly universal, worth preserving and building from. His case rests on six theses; among them are a) that Hegel’s philosophical

³⁸⁷ “Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity,” in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

³⁸⁸ “Propositions sur l’identité culturelle,” *Présence Africaine* 109, 84. Quoted in Serequeberhan, *Contested Memory*, 63.

³⁸⁹ Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World*, xxi.

³⁹⁰ Andrew Buchwalter, “Is Hegel’s Philosophy of History Eurocentric?” *The Owl of Minerva*

account of history prioritizes Western culture and politics, but in a way that “challenges one-sided views of European modernity, while also fostering an openness to other cultures;” b) Hegel articulates a singular logic of development in history, but one that requires plurality in accounts of history; and c) Hegel’s account of history has a moral and practical dimension, an understanding of which opens the door both to “alternate accounts of historical development” and to “a form of civic engagement committed to interculturalism and to a notion of globality more inclusive than that associated with Eurocentric positions.”³⁹¹

Heinz Kimmerle, on the other hand, argues that not only does Hegel provide the “clearest and strictest foundation of philosophical Eurocentrism,”³⁹² but he does so because his own concept of philosophy is itself deeply and indelibly Eurocentric. In other words, Eurocentrism structured Hegel’s very understanding of philosophy; as a consequence, he developed a conception of philosophy that both was Eurocentric and also legitimized Eurocentric philosophy. True or proper philosophy for Hegel, Kimmerle contends, “deals only with thinking itself and nothing else, and therefore with pure thought.” It is the representation, in a systematic and interconnected way, of thinking in its various forms from a lesser to a greater degree of abstraction. The kind of thinking that reflects on thought, that directs itself to itself and represents what it finds there, deserves the name “philosophy” according to Hegel. This “pure thinking” is then used as Hegel’s benchmark for judging “where in European history and in other cultures particular ways of thought, which have this specific form, can be found and can be

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² Heinz Kimmerle, “Hegel’s Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy,” *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies 1:1* (Verlag Karl Alber, 2014), 99-117: 100. This is similar to Tibebu, for whom Hegel’s work is “the most sophisticated rendition of the Eurocentric paradigm.” *Hegel and the Third World*, xvi, 330.

recognized as ‘proper’ philosophy.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, once arriving at this conception Hegel finds true philosophy only in Europe, and subordinates other cultures and regions accordingly. Hegel problematically assumes “pure thinking,” and his philosophy, to be absolutely valid and a standard by which to judge all other thinking—this despite his own historicist sensibilities. They are, Kimmerle counters, undertaken in a very specific linguistic and temporal setting, as well as reliant on concepts and debates common to that setting. “Pure thinking” isn’t that at all; Hegel’s claims about where there is or is not “real” philosophy are therefore spurious and philosophical Eurocentrism, which truly took off after Hegel, is “highly contestable.” It must be overcome: both specifically, that is to say in recognizing its centrality to Hegel’s thought, and generally, since it is still pervasive and influential today. “In so far as Hegel’s concept of philosophy can be regarded as typical of the European-Western philosophy as a whole,” Kimmerle concludes, “the horizon of that philosophy has to be transcended.”

Commentators including Tibebu, Bernasconi, and Park have, like Kimmerle, found Hegel’s ideas on philosophy and history to be indissociable from Eurocentric prejudice.³⁹³ More than this, however, these three have linked Hegel’s thought directly to racism. For Tibebu, while it is perhaps a stretch to say “race constitutes the structural foundation of the *Phenomenology*,” Hegel’s philosophy of world history is “the historicization of this theory of the various phases of spirit’s journey to know itself, from immediate sense certainty to the Absolute Idea.” The working out of the phenomenology of spirit on the plane of world history entails an identification of races with moments of

³⁹³ Beiser also writes that Hegel “lapsed into the very fallacy that historicism intended to expose: ethnocentrism, the belief that one’s own age is the apotheosis of world history,” which manifests in “both blatant and subtle forms,” including “his preference for Greek and German thought” and “his refusal to call the thought of India and China philosophy.” Hegel, *LHP I*: xxix-xxx.

spirit. Thus a “racialized philosophical anthropology...informs Hegel’s philosophy of world history.”³⁹⁴ Bernasconi also argues that the Eurocentrism palpable in Hegel’s philosophy of history, particularly his decision about which peoples “properly” ought to be regarded as world-historical ones, has its basis in race theory.³⁹⁵ Park, focusing on Hegel’s history of philosophy, finds, “From ancient to modern times, from Thales to Schelling, from Miletus to Berlin, the agents of philosophy are Whites. Hegel’s history of philosophy bears a dialectical unity; it also bears a racial unity.”³⁹⁶ Park’s scrutinizing historical survey shows that Hegel’s understanding of race, and his appeal to race “science” in order ultimately to write Africa and Asia out of the history of philosophy “proper,” were a legacy of Christoph Meiners, an anthropologist whose fame was not as lasting as that of Herder, Kant, Hegel, or even Blumenbach. Still, and thus, “Hegel’s exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy was the culmination of a movement within academic philosophy that had been gaining momentum for two decades before he gave his first lecture on the history of philosophy in 1805.”³⁹⁷

Consequently, some further questions arise: was Hegel, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by a prevailing or growing opinion of his day that held (central/Western) European humanity to be the apex of world-historical civilizational development and achievement, and that moreover denigrated and explicitly subjugated other human groups, cultures, and races below itself? In this way Hegel’s theory of history and its consequences for the hierarchical ranking of non-European cultures as early moments of Spirit’s progress in and through the world, as well as its consequences

³⁹⁴ Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World*, xii.

³⁹⁵ Bernasconi, “With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel’s Eurocentrism.”

³⁹⁶ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 129-130.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

for the “belongingness” of Asian, African, indigenous American, even northern European (Celtic, Norse, etc.) and southern and eastern European (e.g., Slavic) traditions to the history of philosophy, are seen as more or less following from his being exposed to, instructed in, and hence a propagator of nascent white-supremacist theory. Or, on the other hand, was Hegel actually born and educated early enough, and far enough removed from the discourse of imperialist colonial expansion (increasingly justified by appeals to race), not to have been indoctrinated into a belief in the innate cultural and racial supremacy of white European civilization? This would allow an interpretation of his theory of history and his account of the history of philosophy as comparatively race-neutral, but at the same time it would put more of the responsibility for Hegel’s derogatory, belittling, and otherwise poorly considered remarks—not to mention his overabundance of rather one-sided trust in missionary and other travelers’ reports that related farfetched and defamatory accounts of the scandalous and duplicitous behavior of Indian “locals”—squarely on his shoulders. It might also make Hegel, via his conscious personal choices, more directly accountable for the entrenchment of white racism—or at the very least the conviction of white European cultural superiority—in the discipline of philosophy, since the ultimate effect of his efforts was to stress (even if not to cement forever) the achievements of contemporary Anglo-Franco-Germanic Christian Europe, the primary and “rightful” heir of the Greek legacy.

The truth of the matter is undoubtedly somewhere in between these two extremes. Sandra Bonetto and Joseph McCarney have responded to Bernasconi’s work specifically, challenging the notions that Hegel’s philosophy of history either appeals to *or* lends support to racialist accounts of human populations that would fix the “essential” capacity

or incapacity of particular races to advance (“in spirit”) and rationalize systematic enslavement or oppression of some by others.³⁹⁸ Bernasconi has clarified his greater concern with “our racism, not theirs...with the institutional racism of a discipline that has developed subtle strategies to play down the racism of Kant, Locke, and Hegel, among others, with the inevitable consequence that, for example, in the United States, philosophy departments are disproportionately white.”³⁹⁹ Bernasconi reiterates, however, that “Hegel uses race as a category to exclude all but Caucasians from being historical subjects in the full sense,” and cautions, “The fact that Locke, Kant, and Hegel also played a role in formulating emancipatory ideas constitutes the problem...It does not make it disappear. This is because the annunciation of fine principles – the philosopher’s stock in trade – is no guarantee that one is not at the same time undermining or negating those principles.”⁴⁰⁰ (A Hegelian might reply that Hegel nowhere intends to deny the basic humanity or *capability* of peoples around the world in terms of participating in the full self-conscious life of Spirit via concrete social and ethical institutions in which subjects feel at home and with respect to which they fulfill their obligations voluntarily and in a self-aware manner—in a word, *Sittlichkeit*—but that in surveying the world’s cultures past and present he sees the actual accomplishment of this only in “Teutonic” Europe, and there only *in nuce*.)⁴⁰¹ So, given the intractability of these problems, attempting to get to the bottom of this chicken-and-egg question (“Were existing white racism and supremacism in philosophy and society to blame for Eurocentric and racist

³⁹⁸ Sandra Bonetto, “Race and Racism in Hegel—An Analysis,” *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* vol. 10 (2006), n.p.; Joseph McCarney, “Hegel’s Racism? A response to Bernasconi,” *Radical Philosophy* 119 (2003), 32-35.

³⁹⁹ Bernasconi, “Hegel’s Racism: A reply to McCarney,” *Radical Philosophy* 119 (2003), 35.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁴⁰¹ See Andrew Buchwalter, ed. *Hegel and Global Justice* (Springer, 2012).

moments or aspects of Hegel's philosophy, or were these moments or aspects of Hegel's philosophy to blame for subsequent white racism and supremacism in philosophy and society?") would ultimately miss the point. That is the conviction animating the present study: the chicken-and-egg questions concerning Eurocentrism and racism in Hegel are not wholly misguided or meaningless, but ultimately more important than conclusive answers to them are the following three tasks. The first is the task of understanding when, where, and how certain of Hegel's pronouncements were factually wrong, markedly prejudiced, and ultimately damaging to European and Euro-American philosophers' openness to the richness and depth of philosophical insights of world cultures, richness and depth quite comparable to their own. The second is ensuring that the anti-racist, non-Eurocentric, "radical" critique of Hegel not be ignored, avoided, minimized, shrugged off, or otherwise poorly handled by contemporary scholars, particularly those working primarily in English and pursuing yet another "return to Hegel." The third task is recognizing and respecting the early, ongoing, and increasing global meetings of minds in philosophical exchange and the potential contained therein for restoring once-achieved profundities and for generating new ones cooperatively and pluralistically that are commensurate with human civilization at the present time.

III. Hegel, India, and (the history of) philosophy

Two points ought to be reiterated en route to a conclusion. The first is that Hegel was committed to non-neutrality, to articulating the accomplished movement of spirit in the self-consciousness of the concept: simply put, to philosophizing *as* a "son of his time." Whether this is to be understood as hubris, pride, modesty, an embrace of the

requirements of reason or forgetfulness, deficiency, even hypocrisy with respect to them, it is quite difficult to say.⁴⁰² The second is that what is at stake here, finally, is not a conviction or acquittal of Hegel or Hegel's philosophy on the grounds of Eurocentrism and racism⁴⁰³, but instead something simultaneously more modest and more radical: the goal of liberating contemporary "Western" philosophical activity from cultural prejudices and limitations that have afflicted it for many years, leading it to become self-involved, self-referential, cut off from important currents, trends, perspectives, and conversations or at the very least bringing a presumption (an implicit conviction if not an explicit insistence) of the centrality of "its own" figures, texts, debates, and preoccupations to engagements with the wider world. Obviously, this aim is more radical than that of simply adjudicating the debate over Hegelian Eurocentrism. It is more modest, however, in two senses. The first is that it concedes that the Hegel debate might well go on indefinitely, never being conclusively settled by any new archival or manuscript evidence. The second is that the present work is conceived as nothing more than a contribution to the ongoing process of liberation mentioned above, which might also be termed the necessary deconstructing and decolonizing of philosophy in a postcolonial age, in the interest of its reconstruction by, in, and for an intercultural, multi- or polycentric world.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Halbfass has provided a well-balanced perspective on this: Hegel "is the philosophical herald of...European self-confidence and sense of destiny. "Hegel on Meditation and Yoga," 72. See also 78-80, as well as Halbfass, "Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus," 107, 109-110, 117-118, 120-121.

⁴⁰³ As Stern and Shohat have emphasized, holding European philosophy, or Hegel synecdochically, responsible for all the wrongs and injustices of modern and recent history would be a kind of over-privileging all its own: "the inverted European narcissism that posits Europe as the source of all social evils in the world" results in a victimology of sorts, reducing all recent non-European religious, philosophical, cultural, or intellectual activity to a pathological response to Western imposition (*Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 3).

⁴⁰⁴ Tibebu has advocated "polycentric egalitarian humanism," for example (*Hegel and the Third World*, xix), while Richard King suggests "something akin to 'postwesternism'...that is, an approach which takes

Returning to the difference between *European* and *Eurocentric*, as defined in the previous section, the latter involves the belief that Europe is superior and has a greater claim to civility or (“civilized exchange”), rationality, and possession of truth than do other societies or traditions. Certain defenders of Hegel, and possibly others who may be indifferent to Hegel or Hegel’s thought yet concerned generally about how to treat past thinkers, might contend that it is irresponsible and wrongheaded to judge Hegel’s ideas from the standpoint of the present, or to go beyond the cultural and historical context in which he lived, thought, wrote, and taught and then fault him for not knowing better. To an extent, they are right. Paraphrasing Paulo Freire, it is important to avoid criticizing an author, in this case Hegel, for tools that history had not given that author.⁴⁰⁵ But this is not the end of the story. One should not shrink from pointing out *either* where Hegel fell short by the standards of his own day, *or* the ways in which his philosophical positions and claims concerning India are (out)dated and no longer acceptable. On a seriously insufficient textual basis, Hegel made (semi-)conscious decisions about India and Indian philosophy the cumulative effect of which was to subordinate, denigrate, and trivialize the rich philosophical heritage and profound intellectual diversity of India, and to make it acceptable for European and other Western philosophers to dismiss or ignore India when

into account the changing formation of international politics, globalization and inter-cultural dialogue, and which is overtly motivated towards facilitating a postcolonial ‘inter-culturalism’ with the goal of an end to the political, economic, and philosophical hegemony of the western world” (*Indian Philosophy*, 233). Ram Adhar Mall and others have articulated a conception of “intercultural philosophy.” See Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Mall, “Intercultural Philosophy: A Clarification,” *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies 1* (2014), 67-84; and Kimmerle, “Hegel’s Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy,” 115-117. Hassan Bashir has called, in the domain of political theory, for a comparative approach that steers “between Euro-centrism and Euro-denial.” See Bashir, *Europe and the Eastern Other: Comparative Perspectives on Politics, Religion, and Culture before the Enlightenment* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 15-38.

⁴⁰⁵ Donaldo Macedo, *Literacies of Power: What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 113.

thinking about philosophy's history and about philosophical problems.⁴⁰⁶ The unimportance of India became a commonplace prejudice in the European and American philosophical mainstream, even as Hegel's thought fell out of fashion in the same circles with the rise of the analytic tradition.⁴⁰⁷ The reasons for the persistence of Hegel in sub-currents of philosophy and social and cultural critique in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and for the resurgence of Hegelian ideas and positions, as well as critical analyses of Hegel, into the twenty-first are too complex and varied to be adequately theorized or even explored here. There has, however, arguably not been sufficient sensitivity to or recognition of the cross-cultural issues at stake in Hegel's philosophy or the consequences of his interpretive and polemical moves with respect to Indian philosophy.

On one hand there is the issue of the Eurocentrism of Hegel; on the other, the Eurocentrism of much of post-Hegelian European and Euro-American philosophy.

⁴⁰⁶ Tola and Dragonetti write, pointedly, that "it is regrettable that an idea [i.e., that there was no philosophy in India] arisen in such conditions [i.e., "confused notions, generalizations, fascinations, ethnocentric prejudices, scanty knowledge"] has gained ground in a community of persons...dedicated to the study of Philosophy, whose mission is a solidly founded and objective thinking. Another more negative consequence of a psychological and moral nature is the attitude of pride and arrogance that that idea contributed to create in Westerners dedicated to philosophize, as they feel that they are the *unique* possessors of something valuable: Philosophy. Another negative consequence is that such an idea hindered many philosophers in the Western tradition to get interested in the study of Indian thought, undervalued just by the fact of being outside Philosophy; and thus paradoxically they were acting against the admirable Greek tradition of which they considered themselves the heirs, and in a general manner against the Western tradition...Thus the Western world lost the opportunity to establish a fruitful dialogue of unsuspected consequences with Ancient India in the realm of Philosophy not only with the aim of finding similarities and parallelisms, but also with the aim – that we consider much more important – of showing the divergences and differences which would reveal the multiple possible ways of thinking which human spirit can adopt. This philosophical dialogue, if realized, could allow Western philosophers and historians of Philosophy to have access to the knowledge of conceptions and attitudes that scholars of excellent intellectual preparation, and possessing all the instruments that are necessary for a scientific investigation of the field of Indology and Buddhism, judge of great value, worthy of being studied, and capable to attract a profound and enriching interest." "What Indian Philosophy Owes Hegel," 35.

⁴⁰⁷ Arguably, this prejudicial attitude was nurtured where European and American interests had or sought ideological hegemony. Jon Stewart has remarked that the area of Hegel studies has traveled a "difficult and controversial road" in Anglo-American philosophy, which "has only added to the intrinsic difficulty of Hegel's own texts in our effort to achieve a sober assessment of his thought." "Hegel and the Myth of Reason," in Jon Stewart, ed., *Hegel Myths and Legends* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 318.

Further, then, it is important to recognize how both the move to “recuperate” elements of Hegel’s philosophy in the service of critique of later movements that arose in response or reaction to Hegel (Marxism, existentialism, positivism, analytic philosophy, and deconstruction, just to name a few) and the move to “correct” ostensibly one-sided views of Hegel as a wholly reactionary, chauvinist, proto-colonialist Euro-supremacist tend in subtle ways to belabor the significance of Hegel and the necessity and obligation of understanding his thought. That this is true does not make the “whole-sided” picture of Hegel’s thinking about India any less useful. Some have argued that the “spirit of Hegel,” the methodology, value, or even deliberate point of his dialectic, demands that we go beyond some of his (non-)empirical claims about the Eastern or Oriental world, that we in fact dialecticize his own thought in ways he did not (because he could not) expect, imagine, or even understand. Some who see themselves as engaged in this task also see themselves “reclaiming” the European legacy in the process, asserting fidelity to the tradition of Greco-European philosophy. This raises important questions, such as whether and how one can actively and passionately emphasize the European legacy without privileging it at the expense of other world traditions; whether and how one can consciously, deliberately claim adherence to “Europe” without reproducing the colonialist, imperialist, marginalizing mindset associated with Europe (and “European philosophy”) in the modern era; and, no less importantly, whether and how one can responsibly *be* a “Western” philosopher today. Possibly these questions can be answered in the affirmative, so long as doing so follows significant self-interrogation and reflection on whether “Western” functions as a simple geographical descriptor or as a subtle value judgment or mark of distinction. Yet it also requires considering the implications for

one's own ideas about the existence of philosophy in other parts of the "pre-modern" world. As Bernasconi notes, "Today the upholders of the thesis that the beginning of philosophy is Greek place the burden of proof on those who think otherwise. They tend to defend their position largely by attacking the most ridiculous and easily refuted claims made on behalf of the alternatives."⁴⁰⁸

Where Hegel's philosophy is concerned, the ultimate outcome need not be to relegate it to minor status, much less to condemn aggressively every aspect of his thought. At the very least, however, there ought to be reciprocal appreciation of the efforts, arguments, and achievements of extraordinary figures in India like Nāgārjuna, Śaṅkara, Dīnāga, Śrī Harṣa, Gaṅgeśa, and Abhinavagupta, to name a scant few—not to mention more recent ones such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Radhakrishnan, for example—recognizing them as impressive, capable, and respectable philosophical thinkers, as they deserve.⁴⁰⁹ One might claim there are few if any philosophers in the global history of the human species whose sweeping vision, encyclopedic organization of thought, and degree of difficulty combine to rival those of Hegel.⁴¹⁰ Yet even between

⁴⁰⁸ "Krismskrams," 191.

⁴⁰⁹ On the situation of women philosophers in India: see Vrinda Dalmiya, "The Indian Subcontinent," in Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young, eds., *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 118-127; Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 6-10. More generally, see Mandakranta Bose, ed., *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Clarisse Bader, *Women in Ancient India: Moral and Literary Studies* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964); Sita Anantha Raman, *Women in India: A Social and Cultural History* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009); and Nivedita Menon, ed., *Gender and Politics in India* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo may be one. See, for example, his monumental *The Life Divine* (New York: Greystone Press, 1949); *The Synthesis of Yoga* (New York: The Sri Aurobindo Library, Inc., 1950); *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1950); *The Hour of God* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1960); and *The Future Evolution of Man: the divine life upon earth* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971). A few attempts have been made to study Aurobindo and Hegel together: Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra, "Political Philosophy of Hegel and Sri Aurobindo: A Comparison," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 68:3 (2007), 483-496; Steve Odin, "Sri Aurobindo and Hegel on the Involution-Evolution of Absolute Spirit," *Philosophy East and West* 31:2 (1981), 179-191; and Vijai Kant Dubey, *Absolutism: east and west (a comparative study of Sri Aurobindo and Hegel)* (Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corp., 2002). See also S.K. Maitra, *Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* (Benares:

this view and acknowledgment of the philosophical stature of Indian thinkers there is no deep incompatibility. In any case, the implications for the story of a globally human history of philosophy and for a curriculum of philosophical education are on one hand relatively clear, but on the other still problematic and thus likely to be sites of continued contestation and disagreement. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that Hegel cannot be called an unimportant thinker: even his most-trenchant studied critics, such as Tibebe, Serequeberhan, and Tola and Dragonetti, still have more than a little to say in his favor. Even according to those who find much to criticize, Hegelian thought is not to be passed over lightly, let alone dismissed altogether as entirely bankrupt or irrelevant for contemporary thought. Again, however, more meaningful and productive than a decisive answer to whether Hegel was a Eurocentric philosopher, or even whether elements of Hegel's dialectical logic or theory of history are or are not Eurocentric, is opposing the continuation of Eurocentric philosophy and philosophical Eurocentrism, and subverting Eurocentrism as a force in the world. To put the point this way neither excuses presentations of Hegel's philosophy that duck the problem or remain oblivious to it, nor does it strike the final death knell for Hegel's books and ideas, consigning them to the dustbin of (Euro-supremacist) history.

This said, a crucial possibility in the context of the current "Hegel renaissance" is that of drawing on elements, strategies, and conceptions from Indian philosophical viewpoints, schools, and traditions in the service of a critical engagement with Hegelian ideas and Hegel's legacy. Such resourcefulness may take a variety of forms. An important one is that of showing how Advaita Vedānta resists Hegel's broad

Benares Hindu University, 1945) and *Meeting of East and West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1956).

characterization of Indian philosophy as a philosophy of substance where nascent individuality is not valued and preserved for its own sake but is consigned to utter submersion and effacement in boundless Being—where, as Hegel puts it in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, “The highest point attainable by the individual, the everlasting bliss, is made an immersion into substance, a vanishing away of consciousness, and thus of all distinction between substance and individuality—hence an annihilation.”⁴¹¹ It is true that Hegel did little more than refer to Vedānta, and then only on very rare occasions, and that he never mentioned Advaita at all and may not have known of its existence. Although the point is not to introduce a variable largely absent in the Hegelian corpus just for the sake of refutation, considerable attention to Advaita is nevertheless appropriate. For it is at once a philosophy to which Hegel’s general critique of Indian philosophy might seem to apply in every respect, and one whose historical prominence and continuing vitality show its considerable sophistication and render it—perhaps not solely, but certainly uniquely—capable of posing a challenge to the assessment Hegel delivers.

In Advaita or “nondualist” Vedānta there are several key concepts, including but certainly not limited to *ātman* and *Brahman*. *Ātman* is generally translated into English as “self,” but is also described as “the ultimate as discovered introspectively”⁴¹² and “the innermost self.”⁴¹³ In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* a treatment of the self includes the statement, “Finer than the finest, larger than the largest,/ is the self that here lies hidden/ in the heart

⁴¹¹ Hegel, *LHP*: I, 98.

⁴¹² Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 38.

⁴¹³ Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi, eds., *The Essential Vedānta: A New Source Book in Advaita Vedānta* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 20.

of a living being.”⁴¹⁴ Whereas “soul” might seem suitably analogous, especially from a Western perspective, it is ill-fitting. Philosophers have called attention to such a “questionable and misleading translation” and recommend using only “self” or “Self” to avoid confusion and possible misinterpretation.⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, the tendency they discourage points to the unmistakable senses of both individuality and essentiality that *ātman* conveys. Elsewhere in the 108 *Upaniṣads*, especially the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*, teachings focus on the nature of *ātman* as the “true Self,” but in a way inextricably bound up with pronouncements about the equally central term *Brahman*. The most succinct and elegant English expression for *Brahman* is “the One.” This expression is arguably the least descriptive, but it is befitting especially to those subschools of Vedānta, Advaita among them, which contest the legitimacy of any predicative statements concerning *Brahman* that are intended to be taken literally. *Brahman* may also be designated as the Absolute or the Ultimate, e.g., “the ultimate as discovered objectively.”⁴¹⁶ “God” may seem to be an appropriate way to render *Brahman*, and this case is more complex than that of *ātman* as “soul.” Particularly, there are traditionally two ways of conceiving *Brahman*: *Brahman* as inexpressible, qualityless, the pure Real, etc. (*nirguna Brahman*); and *Brahman* viewed as qualified or having qualities, the apparent existent, “in the universe,” etc., even as “a personal god.” It is certainly not unheard-of for Vedāntins to refer to *Brahman* (if only *saguna Brahman*) as God, from Vedānta’s early exponent Śaṅkara all the way up to modern apologists

⁴¹⁴ Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta*, 30.

⁴¹⁵ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 39.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

such as Rambachan.⁴¹⁷ Yet others recommend using only the impersonal pronouns “It” or “That” to designate Brahman for the same reasons as above, which indicates that “God” ought to stand for *Brahman* only in some contexts and with some nuances, not to say reservations. One contemporary philosopher claims that even “It” is inaccurate, that the name *Brahman* instead gestures toward “that state which *is*...the experience of the timeless plenitude of being.”⁴¹⁸

Many of the *mahāvākya* or “great sayings” of the Upanishads treat *Brahman* and *ātman* in conjunction rather than in isolation. The famous “That art thou” or “You are that”; “*Atman*, indeed, is this all...*Brahman*, indeed, is this all”; and, “Verily, this all is *Brahman*” of the *Chāndogya Upanishad*⁴¹⁹; as well as the statement, “Now this Self, verily, is Brahman” of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*⁴²⁰, denote an intimate relation between the two, the problem of which is a major one in Advaita and Vedānta generally; indeed, differing accounts of this relation effectively define Vedānta’s sub-schools. Advaita’s conclusion, formulated initially by the eighth- to ninth-century philosopher Śaṅkara, is that the two are in reality identical. As Halbfass points out, Hegel could have denounced the “correlation and identification of *ātman* and *brahman*,” the identity solution proposed by Advaita, as evidence of the pure annihilation of free individuality endemic to Indian philosophy; oddly, however, in defiance of our expectations, “the concept of *ātman* is conspicuously absent in his presentation.”⁴²¹ Perhaps this is because Hegel knew very little of Advaita or even Vedānta in general. Still, the notion of *ātman* is

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Anantanand Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), in particular 83-97, “Brahman as God.”

⁴¹⁸ Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969), 9.

⁴¹⁹ Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta*, 165.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴²¹ Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 91.

prominent in other schools of Indian philosophy. Yet Hegel's focus was far and away on *Brahman*, given the number of negative characterizations he came up with for it: "abstract unity without any determination," "substance without subjectivity," "pure being, without any concrete determination in itself," "eternal rest of being-in-itself," "spiritless substance," etc.⁴²² Alternatively, it could be that he saw *ātman* as trivial because its "loftiest goal," as far as he could tell, was to be re-submerged into the undifferentiated pure substance of the One. Yet there is an element of transitivity implicit in the *ātman*'s knowing itself as also *Brahman*—which might have indicated, even to Hegel, that the matter admits of more subtlety than a crass, brutal reduction or annihilation of subjectivity.

To grasp this more clearly, one can briefly examine how such knowing in Advaita involves a dialectic-like or sublational process. If nothing truly predicative can be said of *Brahman*, and if the self is really non-different from *Brahman*—precisely *is Brahman*—then one need only eliminate ignorance for this unity to manifest fully. Śaṅkara thus stresses "great sayings" like *neti, neti* or "Not [this], not [that]" to discourage attempts to describe *Brahman* qualitatively, and the importance of knowledge epitomizes his philosophical teachings. Knowledge results directly and immediately in *mokṣa*, or liberation. However, for him "knowing" cannot possibly mean just abstract, intellectual, or theoretical cognition, "possession of some kind of propositional knowledge."⁴²³ It must be existential and experiential. As Pierre Hadot has observed *apropos* Plotinus, "One cannot know the principle of all things if one has not had the experience of union

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴²³ John Taber, *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Sankara, Fichte, and Heidegger* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 10.

with it.”⁴²⁴ Knowledge in Śaṅkara’s sense, then, consists in dispelling ignorance (*avidyā*, literally “non-knowing”), in the removal of obstacles or hindrances to true knowing. This in turn implies “the relativity, if not falsity, of all empirical experience.”⁴²⁵ There are, of course, various stages in the progression to this awareness—or, to put it another way, in the process of engaging in self-criticism of more limited modes of conceptualizing that function as impediments to ultimate realization. Eliot Deutsch notes that the Advaita term for this, *bādha*, literally means “contradiction,” and is often rendered as “cancellation” or “sublation;” for clarity and semantic heft Deutsch calls it “subration,” and defines it as a process of devaluing “some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience.”⁴²⁶ It is irresistible to juxtapose this with Findlay’s description of Hegelian dialectic: “The progress of knowledge will then consist in the constant demotion of what appeared to be the absolute truth about the object to what now appears to be only the way that the object appeared to consciousness, a new appearance of absolute truth taking the former’s place”(xiv). Elsewhere, and even more instructively, Findlay explains that Hegelian dialectic’s

basic characteristic is *higher-order comment* on a thought position previously achieved. What one does in dialectic is first to operate at a given level of thought, to accept its basic assumptions, and to go to the limit in its terms, and then to proceed to stand outside of it, to become conscious of it, to become clear as to what it has really achieved, and how far these achievements do or do not square

⁴²⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 60. Easwaran would add: “In the unitive experience, every trace of separateness disappears; life is a seamless whole. But the body cannot remain in this state for long. After a while, awareness of mind and body returns, and then the conventional world of multiplicity rushes in again with such vigor and vividness that the memory of unity, though stamped with reality, seems as distant as a dream. The unitive state has to be entered over and over until we are established in it. But once established, even in the midst of ordinary life, we see the One underlying the many, the Eternal beneath the ephemeral” (*The Bhagavad Gita*, xxiv). Whether liberation takes place all at once and irreversibly, or fleeting glimpses or stirrings of illumination need to be nurtured, consolidated and reconsolidated until true, complete liberation is achieved, is a subject of much debate in Indian traditions.

⁴²⁵ Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta*, 162.

⁴²⁶ Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 15.

with its actual professions. In dialectic one sees what can be said *about* a certain thought-position that one cannot actually say *in* it...In dialectic one criticizes one's mode of conceiving things, rather than the actual matter of fact that one has conceived."⁴²⁷

One may conclude, at any rate, that Advaita Vedānta's articulation of the strict identity of *ātman* with *Brahman* means that "any difference in essence between man and Reality must be erroneous, for one who knows himself knows Reality, and this self-knowledge is a liberating knowledge."⁴²⁸ This is further proven by the frequency with which Śaṅkara quotes the pronouncement in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, "He, verily, who knows that supreme *Brahman*, becomes very *Brahman*..."⁴²⁹ The idea here, though, is not to attempt a remainderless match-up of Hegelian dialectic with "subration" in Vedānta; there are crucial, even irreconcilable differences. It is only to suggest that in the latter the "becoming-Brahman" of the knowing *ātman* need not be taken as advancing the utter obliteration of any kind of individual self-consciousness. It is indeed doubtful that this is the way even some of the early adherents of Advaita Vedānta understood it. More-recent accounts show still less of a tendency to conceive the "bliss" (*ananda*) accompanying liberation on the Vedānta view as a simplistic dissolution of personal consciousness. Incidentally, then, it should come as no surprise that Vedāntins of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Swami Vivekānanda, Sri Aurobindo, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan embraced Hegelian philosophy as a welcome development in the West.

To be sure, there are some concerns: for one, Vedānta's persistence in Indian society for millennia and its sheer dominance during certain periods prompts the question of the extent of its conductivity to—even its complicity in—dubious social institutions

⁴²⁷ J. N. Findlay, "The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel," in Alasdair MacIntyre, ed., *Hegel* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 4-5.

⁴²⁸ Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 47.

⁴²⁹ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 55.

and practices, from its special reverence for “old cows and monkeys” (Hegel’s phrasing) to the notorious rigidly-stratified caste system and the various repressions and subjugations bound up with the latter, which Hegel spends a chunk of pages detailing in *The Philosophy of History*. While Hegel might quite confidently claim that all these are logical consequences of either India’s station in the history of Spirit or Indians’ character (or something of the sort), in the light of the analyses of the preceding two chapters skepticism toward such a claim is more than warranted. Moreover, even if Hegel’s sources were the best available at the time, and there were no reason to doubt the quality and integrity of their presentations, it would still be worthwhile to ask whether the way Brahmanic philosophy had been handed down and institutionalized was based on the *only* way of understanding it; for example, Swami Vivekānanda in particular was known for taking the philosophy of Vedānta to entail a radically democratic, egalitarian conception of social life.

Here arises a second major concern: Hegel’s dissection of caste hierarchies, ritual practices, and other pernicious aspects of social life in India is predicated on an interpretation of Indian culture in general, which is to say a conflation of Hindu religion and Indian philosophy.⁴³⁰ Since the fundamentals of Hinduism predate the emergence of Vedānta, it cannot merely be presupposed that philosophical developments would be unanimously supportive of existing religious practices, social arrangements, etc. Hegel

⁴³⁰ Though Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* predates the lectures on philosophy and history, its mention of the “Hindu fanaticism of contemplation” (§5) exemplifies the blurring together of Indian philosophy and Hindu religion which in any case can be seen throughout the lectures. See Robert Bernasconi’s provocative and important essay, “Religious Philosophy: Hegel’s Occasional Perplexity in the Face of the Distinction between Philosophy and Religion,” *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 45-46 (2002), 1-15.

offers no real evidence to support such a judgment.⁴³¹ One could, again, direct the same problem back at Europe in terms of Hegel's glorification of Protestantism: because Christianity, and in particular the institutionalized wealth, the hierarchized system of papal authority, etc., long preceded the Protestant Reformation (which, indeed, arose directly *out of* that religion, even if in defiance of certain of its precepts and practices), the philosophy of Spirit he affirms as the ultimate achievement really remains implicated in the social, political, economic, spiritual, and other ills which that Church continues to transmit.

Further, as already seen, the catchall "Indian philosophy" itself encompasses a variety of systems or schools, of which Vedānta represents one and Advaita a further branch. The "religiosity" of these multiple traditions differs greatly across them, in terms of their degree of (pan)theistic tenor and amount of what one might regard as theological activity. Even within Vedānta, numerous positions might be and have been carved out with respect to theorization of divinity, conception of the ātman-Brahman relationship, etc., and again the Advaita Vedānta appealed to here is a single one of these. The upshot is that it is by no means legitimate, and is indeed an absolute affront to the breadth,

⁴³¹ Even in the *Bhagavadgītā*, the text that on Hegel's reading so uniformly enforces the caste system, the direct connection between (not only) caste membership and liberation is problematized. Krishna tells Arjuna, "All those who take refuge in me, whatever their birth, race, sex, or caste, will attain the supreme goal; this realization can be attained even by those whom society scorns" (Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 51 [IX: 32-33]). Similarly, in at least one place in the text, ritual observance or the mere performance of prescribed duties, toward which Hegel is deeply scornful, calling them "thousands and thousands of absurd regulations of a crude superstition" and "an endless number of observations of the emptiest and absurdist rules" (55, 87-89), is clearly said to be inferior to sincere pursuit of illumination: "Even one who inquires after the practice of meditation rises above those who simply perform rituals" (ibid., 38 [VI: 44]). Prithipaul comments, "A sober acquaintance with the history of Indian society does not warrant the negative view which Hegel so vigorously articulates. Actually his argument strikes one as surprisingly erroneous, for there is abundant evidence to substantiate the view that the caste duties were actually – at least in their intention – designed to establish a structure of social harmony and obligation where the actualization of *dharma* would be unimpeded. The moral concern is precisely to make it, both socially and individually, necessary and possible for Man to be free ultimately with the negation of dogma, of tradition and of the very springs from which well up the requirements of the action." "An Appraisal of Hegel's Critique of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and Hindu spirituality," 169.

profundity, and rigor of India’s philosophical traditions, to lump them together as a whole (aside from the occasional necessity of convenience), equate them with the popular or “institutional” Hindu religion, and only *then* find them wanting.

On the basis, then, of even such a simplified sketch of Advaita Vedānta as the foregoing, the Hegelian confidence that Indian philosophy as a whole strips human existence of personality and freedom is thoroughly shaken. Advaita Vedānta also, on balance and without requiring anachronistic creative reappropriation, may be interpreted as a philosophy of Spirit in which (to put it in Hegelian terms) subjectivity finds itself consciously at home in substance rather than having to be reduced to it. Advaita can hardly be said to be unquestionably and irremediably a philosophy of substantiality where “the Spirit wanders into the dream-world, and the highest state is Annihilation.”⁴³²

Returning to ways of drawing upon Indian philosophical resources to correct, contest, or transform Hegel’s critique of Indian thought, a different, yet possibly still fruitful avenue, might be a deeper look at the affinities and divergences between Sāṃkhya—the classical Indian system Hegel came nearest to accepting as real or true philosophy despite his slight and indirect knowledge of it—and Hegel’s philosophy, particularly his phenomenology of spirit and philosophy of nature. Despite the fact that Sāṃkhya is widely considered to be a thoroughgoing dualist philosophy, its distinction between *prakṛti* (nature/matter) and *puruṣa* (spirit) is one not entirely absent in Hegel, and its elaboration of the teleological movement of matter for the sake of the (self-)knowledge of spirit (which always-already exists but only comes to true self-awareness as the culmination of the process of evolution of material nature) is of serious significance.

⁴³² Hegel, *PH*, 148.

Another promising option would be to pose logical theories and practices from the Indian context over against Hegel's logic. Despite the focus of much recent Hegel scholarship on social and political, practical, religious, and aesthetic aspects of his thought, none of these is easily uncoupled from his articulation of logic in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia Logic* (or, for that matter, from his metaphysics, since Hegel's logic was an onto-logic).⁴³³ Ermanno Bencivenga has adroitly demonstrated that "Hegel's most fundamental contribution is his logic," which "has never enjoyed greater success, both among intellectuals and in the general population."⁴³⁴ And despite the common-enough tendency to imagine Indian philosophies as too concerned with soteriology or practices of meditation to have developed complex logical architectures, the truth is that from early-classical times there existed a wide variety of systems of (onto)logical forms and categories; of nuanced perspectives on the nature, use, and work

⁴³³ See, e.g., *Science of Logic*: "But what is commonly understood by logic is considered without any reference whatever to its metaphysical significance. This science in its present state has, it must be admitted, no content of a kind which the ordinary consciousness would regard as a reality and as a genuine subject matter. But it is not for this reason a *formal* science lacking significant truth. Moreover, the region of truth is not to be sought in that matter which is missing in logic, a deficiency to which the unsatisfactoriness of the science is usually attributed. The truth is rather that the insubstantial nature of logical forms originates solely in the way in which they are considered and dealt with. When they are taken as fixed determinations and consequently in their separation from each other and as held together in an organic unity, then they are dead forms and the spirit which is their living, concrete unity does not dwell in them. As thus taken, they lack a substantial content—a matter which would be substantial in itself. The content which is missing in the logical forms is nothing else than a solid foundation and a concretion of these abstract determinations; and such a substantial being for them is usually sought outside them. But *logical reason itself is the substantial or real being which holds together within itself every abstract determination and is their substantial, absolutely concrete unity*. One need not therefore look far for what is commonly called a matter; if logic is supposed to lack a substantial content, then the fault does not lie with its subject matter but solely with the way in which this subject matter is grasped" (47-48, emphasis added).

⁴³⁴ Ermanno Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-4. Bencivenga, it should be noted, ultimately contests Hegel's logic and wishes to champion Kantian "deontic" logic, and thus his effort in explicating Hegel's logic is one expended for the purpose of knowing the enemy (5).

of reason; and also of theorization of the methods, procedures, and limitations of rational and logical argumentation.⁴³⁵

Further still, greater awareness of the responses of Indian philosophers to Hegel's actual works and arguments would also be of immense benefit. While there has long been an understanding on the part of Indian philosophers themselves of the importance of Hegel's philosophy in European thought, as well as an admirable openness to entertain Hegelian ideas⁴³⁶, knowledge of the history of Indian philosophers' engagements with Hegelian philosophy (and with one another's interpretations and assessments of it) has been lacking in the European and Euro-American mainstream, difficult to come by even for the few who may have been willing to inquire. One recently published collection takes a welcome step in this direction, with essays such as, "Brajendra Nath Seal: A Disenchanted Hegelian," and "The Notion of Absolute: Hegel and Hiralal Haldar."⁴³⁷

Such efforts to "teach Hegelian philosophy to speak Sanskrit" (or Indian English), one might say, are aided by the work that philosophers such as Daya Krishna and Jonardon Ganeri have done in recent years to question received views of "Indian

⁴³⁵ See, e.g., Jonardon Ganeri, *Indian Logic: A Reader* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001); Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana, *A History of Indian Logic: ancient, medieval, and modern schools* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971); B.L. Atreya and Anandagiri, *The Elements of Indian Logic* (Moradabad: Darshana Printers, 1962); Annambhatta and Chandrodaya Bhattacharya, *The Elements of Indian Logic and Epistemology: A Portion of Tarka-Saṁgraha and Dīpikā* (Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1963); Bimala Krishna Matilal, Jonardon Ganeri (ed.), and Heeraman Tiwari (ed.), *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); and S.K. Maitra, "Outlines of an Emergent Theory of Values, in Radhakrishnan and Muirhead, eds., *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Northampton: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 379-405, especially pg. 380-385. Maitra recounts, "On my asking [Dr. Brajendra Nath Seal] what made him discard Hegel, he said it was the weakness of the Hegelian logic. Weakness of the Hegelian logic!...When I asked him if he knew of any better logical scheme than Hegel's, he replied, 'Certainly. Take, for instance, the Caturvyūhavāda of the Vaiṣṇavas. The tetradic scheme of this logic is infinitely superior to the triadic scheme of Hegel'" (282-283).

⁴³⁶ Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo were (along with Brajendra Nath Seal and Hiralal Haldar) two of the first modern Indian philosophers to discuss Hegel, the former in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1940) and the latter in *The Life Divine* (1949). See also the articles by Haldar, Maitra, P.T. Raju, and A.R. Wadia in Radhakrishnan and Muirhead, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*.

⁴³⁷ See Sharad Deshpande, ed., *Philosophy in Colonial India* (New York: Springer, 2015).

thought.”⁴³⁸ For Krishna in particular, three influential yet untenable ideas about Indian philosophy have served to undermine claims about its relevance, despite purporting to show its distinctiveness and value. These are that philosophical thought in India is fundamentally characterized by 1) spirituality, 2) acceptance of scriptural authority, and 3) a strict division into schools. Krishna’s self-described “counter-perspective,” however, is not meant to debunk the notion that philosophical activity took place in India from a very early time, but rather is aimed at dispelling stultifying myths so that it can be better seen “that the Indian philosophical tradition is ‘philosophical’ in the same sense as the western philosophical tradition is supposed to be.” As Krishna writes,

The dead, mummified picture of Indian philosophy will come alive only when it is seen to be a living stream of thinkers who have grappled with difficult problems that are, philosophically, as alive today as they were in the ancient past. Indian philosophy will become contemporarily relevant only when it is conceived as philosophy proper. Otherwise, it will remain merely a subject of antiquarian interest and research, which is what all the writers on Indian philosophy have made it out to be. It is time that this false picture is removed, and that the living concerns of ancient thought are brought to life once more.⁴³⁹

Richard King has drawn further attention to the recent situation of “Indian philosophy” with respect to “philosophy in general” in the form of two problems. The first has to do with the use of the adjective “Indian” itself: “labels such as ‘Indian philosophy’ actually contribute to the marginalization process by defining a diverse group of philosophical traditions in terms of a contemporary geo-political category.” The other, similar to the

⁴³⁸ Ganeri has suggested that the received view—of Indian philosophy as heavily if not purely “spiritual,” “inward-looking,” mystical, and a- or anti-logical—came about due to Indian philosophers themselves, notably Radhakrishnan, yet was “to a more considerable extent than is usually recognized, a product of the colonized Indian intellectual struggle for an indigenous, non-European, identity” (“Introduction: Indian Logic and the Colonization of Reason,” *Indian Logic*, 2). See also J.N. Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought: An Essay on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mohanty, “On Matilal’s Understanding of Indian Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West* 42: 3 (1992), 397-406; and Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Logical Illumination of Indian Mysticism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁴³⁹ Daya Krishna, *Indian Philosophy: A Counter-Perspective*, 15.

“antiquarianism” Krishna is protesting against in the quotation above, is the relegation of texts, topics, figures, and ideas of Indian or Indic origin to specialists in the (sub-)field whose interests and efforts are considered at best tangential to the currents and problems of “contemporary philosophy,” and at worst a curiosity or side show for which occasional, halting, and/or half-hearted consideration in the curricula or course offerings of philosophy departments is support enough. King terms the problem “specialization-itis”: Indian philosophy is taken to be either “an obscure sub-discipline” or a “minor chapter in the history of philosophy” and, if Indian texts, figures, or ideas are taught at all, they are still marginalized “by the degree of emphasis placed upon the cultural and geographical specificity, that is, the peculiar ‘Indianness’ of Indian philosophy.”⁴⁴⁰ Indian philosophy or philosophies are imagined to have little that can add, speak, or relate to the “real” work of philosophical thinking throughout history undertaken by the “major” (Western) figures in communion, dialogue, or disagreement with one another.

Sustained study of Hegel reliably produces a deep ambivalence. On one hand, one comes away with great respect for the breadth and depth of his thinking, aspects of which are and will likely remain deeply compelling to many thinkers. One also admires the critical yet synthesizing power of his dialectical intellect.⁴⁴¹ On the other hand, one frequently feels exasperation with the complexity and obscurity of his writing and terminology, coupled with more serious indignation at his confident cultural—not to mention gender—prejudice and chauvinism. As many contemporary thinkers have recognized, though, no matter how self-assured, authoritative, and final Hegel can come

⁴⁴⁰ King, *Indian Philosophy*, 239.

⁴⁴¹ This is undoubtedly what led Foucault to remark that Hegel “stands there staring at us, waiting for us either to follow or to overthrow him.” *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 235, quoted in Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World*, xvi.

across in his prose, a hallmark of his thought was its amenability—even its perceptible demand—to being further transformed by future inhabitants of times and contexts new, different from his own, and unique to themselves. As J.N. Findlay once put it, this “greatest of European thinkers” was “engaged in a self-critical enterprise which even he only half understood.”⁴⁴² So, when it comes to what Hegel said, meant, and believed about non-European cultures and the possibility of their having developed anything that “counts” as true philosophy, bringing his claims and pronouncements into the perhaps harsh light of present-day understanding is perfectly justified. There is no contradiction in saying that this can, and should, be done while continuing to engage Hegelian texts, rather than spurning them. After all, Hegel articulated some compelling challenges to the metaphysics, ethics, and meditative (or “liberatory”) epistemology he discerned in the *Bhagavadgītā* and, despite finding them ultimately unconvincing, was less categorically hostile to Indian philosophy than many of his successors. Furthermore, as Halbfass remarks, Hegel’s conviction that history and thinking cannot return to bygone days or forms is an important warning when it comes to Indian yoga and meditative practices:

What happens if they are used as solutions for problems and as means for ends for which they were not meant and which may assign to them new and different meanings and functions? Eastern methods of meditation are invoked against objectification, instrumentalization, consumerization. But can we be sure that they do not become part of this process, perhaps even reinforcing it? Can we be sure that meditation is not simply used as a replaceable and disposable device to cope with certain problems which arise *within* the modern technological orientation? That it does not just function side by side and interchangeably with drugs or tranquilizers and is somehow relegated to their status?⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 11.

⁴⁴³ Halbfass, “Hegel on Meditation and Yoga,” 81. Regarding the consumerist commodification of meditation, yoga, and spirituality generally, see also Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005).

In Sybol Cook Anderson's words, "We don't have to be stopped by Hegel when we can use Hegel to correct Hegel."⁴⁴⁴ At the same time, and nevertheless, it is not only Hegel who should be used to correct Hegel, nor is it only Marx, nor any number of Europeans since them, nor indeed worldwide residents of a nearly-fully Europeanized earth that has not yet been successfully un- or de- Europeanized in turn. The voices and ideas of pre-Hegelian Indian philosophers are also entirely relevant, particularly insofar as Hegel did not know of their existence and so did not attempt to address, critique, or dialecticize them.⁴⁴⁵

Park writes that when the history of philosophy "ceases to do what it does in the service of philosophy, philosophers will cease to teach it."⁴⁴⁶ Although this may be taken to imply a profoundly anti-historical approach to teaching philosophy, it is more charitably read as an expression of the hope and the conviction that as philosophy itself undergoes long-due disciplinary transformations, so will the approaches of many of those who presently profess it using certain thinkers, texts, anthologies, narratives, references, examples, etc., while neglecting, excluding, avoiding, or devaluing others. Difficulties and challenges necessarily arise when creating an introductory curriculum in philosophy, and one may well concede that Hegel was on to something when he said that if the history of philosophy is presented (let alone understood) as just a series of opinions, it has little utility.⁴⁴⁷ Yet there exist alternatives that are preferable to either paying lip service

⁴⁴⁴ Quoted in Carlin Romano, *American the Philosophical* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 437.

⁴⁴⁵ See, for example, Maharaj, "Śrī Harṣa contra Hegel." Equally, it certainly goes without saying, the voices, claims, ideas, engagements, and critiques of modern and contemporary Indian philosophers matter, and decidedly not only insofar as they have "come over" to European or Western conceptions of philosophy, its history, and its problems.

⁴⁴⁶ Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 151.

⁴⁴⁷ As Bencivenga points out, Hegel sharply criticizes the view "forbidding us to import into history an *objective purpose*...a requirement often and especially made on the *history of philosophy*: where it is insisted there should be no prepossession in favor of an idea or opinion, just as a judge should have no

to world philosophy while failing to embrace it (and worse, actually contradicting it through what is emphasized), or doubling down on an exclusionary narrative in the name of “embracing our European heritage,” continuing to assert that “we all know” that philosophy began in Greece and that anyone who claims otherwise is being obtuse or, worse, shallowly and patronizingly ‘multiculturalist.’”⁴⁴⁸ There is a third way: with openness, effort, and patience, equal and respectful attention can be paid to various ideas, perspectives, traditions, and philosophies that have emerged throughout human history all over the world, both in their cultural particularity *and* in their claims or ambitions to full universality—while remaining fully cognizant that Hegel’s approach to non-European thought was “a provocation of ‘comparative philosophy’ itself,” which “could be beneficial. It could contribute to preventing ‘Comparative Philosophy’ from lapsing into naivety or non-commitment – into an indifferent comparison and co-ordination of concepts and doctrines, into the ‘enumeration of multifarious opinions’ and their reduction to most abstract conformities, into a liberalism of ‘opining’ the openness of which would ultimately be nothing but emptiness or self-deceit.”⁴⁴⁹ All this is possible,

special sympathy for one of the contending parties.” For Hegel, “A history without such aim and such criticism would be only an imbecile mental divagation, not as good as a fairy tale, for even children expect a *motif* in their stories, a purpose at least dimly surmiseable with which events and actions are put in relation.” Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, part III: Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), §549. Partially quoted in Bencivenga, *Hegel’s Dialectical Logic*, 44.

⁴⁴⁸ A list of thinkers who—whether unwittingly or self-consciously, surreptitiously or overtly and unapologetically—still insist that “Western philosophy” and “philosophy” are synonyms would assuredly be quite lengthy. Suffice it to take two examples from prominent contemporary thinkers, each revisiting Hegelian philosophy in a unique way: “In the history of philosophy (or Western philosophy, which amounts to the same thing), this *eppur si muove* arrived at its most consistent formulation in German Idealism, especially in Hegel’s thought.” Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 5. “But this means that a consideration of being-in-its-intelligibility is the only sort of metaphysics that is possible (to be is to be intelligible, something like the motto of Greek philosophy and so the beginning of philosophy.)” Robert Pippin, “Back to Hegel?” *Mediations 26.1-2* (2012-2013), 7-28: 13. In each of these cases, putting the assertion in parentheses has the intended effect of rendering it inconspicuous, settled, and inarguable, but the insinuation that “philosophy=European ideas” is a mere afterthought is deeply pernicious.

⁴⁴⁹ Halbfass, “Hegel on the Philosophy of the Hindus,” 121. Regarding the tension between the cultural particularity and the possible claims to universality of non-European styles or bodies of thought, Arvind

indeed obligatory, whether or not one wishes to claim there has been slow, definite progress in philosophy.⁴⁵⁰ Of course, undesired omissions will always need to be made when determining what to include or exclude from a limited presentation—of the history of philosophy, for example. Yet the persistent convention of separating “African” or “Indian” or “Chinese” philosophies into non-standard areas, to be handled by specialists, is still frequently enough a way of displacing the necessity of such choices and perpetuating a false, limited, and counter-productive European-universalist characterization of philosophical inquiry.⁴⁵¹ That is unacceptable, and the hold of this presupposition must be shaken loose for good—though the memory of it can and should be preserved—in favor of a wider, deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the meaning, history, and development of “philosophy.” By examining and critiquing Hegel’s appraisal of Indian thought, the present study has sought to move toward such a

Mandair has observed that postcolonial critiques of Indology, Orientalism, and the study of religions have served in the main to reconstitute “past imperialisms,” by relegating aspects of Indian culture to positions of specificity (and representatives to the status of “native informants”) in the effort to insulate them from Western reach: “the very form of critical theory invoked for the protection of South Asian traditions from the religious effects of colonialism in fact repeats the design of a past imperialism...if this form of critical theory was supposed to provide a corrective to the West’s continuing will-to-power, it has, through the denegation of religion in favor of historicism, simply reinstated the very Hegelianism that it set out to remove.” Thus Mandair notes that “there is an increasingly vocal demand from diasporic South Asians to be regarded as more than mere producers of empirical data in relation to a theoretically active West or for South Asian phenomena to be turned into resources for contemporary critical thought,” and pointedly asks: “why can the turn toward critical and cultural theory not be done using Indian religious phenomena/materials/thinking?” “The Repetition of Past Imperialisms: Hegel, Historical Difference, and the Theorization of Indic Religions,” *History of Religions* 44:4 (2005), 277-299. The quotations are from pages 280, 281, and 282, respectively. See also Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32:2 (1990), 383-408; expanded in “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Indian Historiography is Good to Think,” in Nicholas B. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 353-388.

⁴⁵⁰ Along these lines Beiser writes, “If we consider some of the achievements of past philosophy, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that there has been more decline than progress.” Hegel, *LHP I*: xxx.

⁴⁵¹ Bernasconi is vehement on this point: “If the history of the discipline and the conception of the discipline that history supports was not racist in its design, the question must still be addressed as to whether it has not become racist in its effects. Whole peoples experience themselves as excluded, in part because of the systematic diminishment of the achievements of their group. Philosophers almost everywhere are implicated. The problem must be addressed not just in research, but also at the institutional level in each and every department.” “Philosophy’s Paradoxical Parochialism,” 224-225.

rich, truly global and universal, intercultural, integrated idea of philosophy and its history. It might conclude on a note of awareness that this idea has already taken hold in many places and continues to take hold in others; and on a note of aspiration that it might soon enough be recognized as a rightful first and structuring principle of introductions to philosophy and to the history of thought. Hegel's own work will always be relevant to a history of philosophy that is integrative, pluralist, and global—not only because it has its place in that history, but also because, as Halbfass memorably writes, “Regardless of what Hegel said about or against Indian thought, his work set an example through its serious and thorough consideration of India within the framework of a philosophically conceived universal history of philosophy.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 135.

Conclusion

If the foregoing has been successful, then it has shown first of all that two tempting ideas about Hegel and Indian philosophy are mistaken: that India was unimportant or marginal to Hegel, and that his dealings with it were uniformly dismissive despite being based on no real information on the topic. He may have had little conception of India beyond the term “Brahma” in his earliest draft writings, but this certainly changed in the 1810s and especially the 1820s. And the more he came to be acquainted with Indian figures, texts, and ideas in translations and expositions by European scholars, the more concerned he became to account for Indian thought in his system. He did not do this by unequivocally accepting Indian philosophy as completed philosophy, it is true, and he was not averse to making highly critical statements about Indian culture, politics, religion, or character. Nevertheless, he took the time to study and write extensively about Indian ideas in a philosophical way, and furthermore it bears repeating that he accepted *no* philosophy other than speculative-dialectical objective idealism, or phenomenology, as completed philosophy. He also had no shortage of pointed, even caustic remarks to direct at political oppression, religious orthodoxy, and other disdainful behaviors closer to home.

Although this is not the first time an argument of this sort has been made, this study has sought to be uniquely comprehensive. Critiques of Hegel’s Eurocentrism have typically dwelled on his lectures without delving into his published works or the *Bhagavadgītā* review essays in any detail, while defenses have by and large limited themselves to his philosophical concepts and arguments without reference to “non-

Western” topics. No study to date has on one hand made the point that Hegel’s very attention to the specifics of Indian thought complicates the picture of his Eurocentrism and can be used in interpreting his philosophy at the same time, while on the other hand also advancing a pointed and detailed critique of Hegel’s evaluation of Indian philosophical concepts and doctrines as he understood or construed them. This study has achieved its aim if it has presented a multifaceted account of Hegel’s engagement with Indian thought, from the concerns about Spinoza and Romanticism that were formative for him to the full sweep and surprising extent and detail of his attempts to comprehend the core of Indian philosophy and the persistent difficulty of separating or distinguishing his reading of India from traces of ethnocentrism or other prejudice.

All this may, perhaps, still leave questions of the relevance of Hegel’s attention and efforts unanswered. Why should a scholar of Hegel, or a philosopher who accepts any of a number of distinctively Hegelian ideas or otherwise acknowledges Hegelian heritage, take the trouble to learn about Indian philosophy? Why should someone working on or in Indian philosophy care about Hegel? One obvious answer to the first question is: because Hegel himself did. To add nuance to this, one can say that familiarity with Indian philosophy might benefit one’s understanding of Hegel’s thought, since Indian ideas became more integral to it (even if in opposition) than commonly surmised; but equally that studying Indian philosophy may unsettle readings of Hegel, precisely to the extent to which there turns out to be more to Indian philosophy than there is in his interpretation of it. Several responses to the second question suggest themselves: first, Hegel, both in terms of his own statements and in terms of his influence on philosophers who succeeded him, had more to do with the suppression or exclusion of Indian traditions

from the history and practice of philosophy in Europe and elsewhere than may be thought, and there is still much to do to reverse this trend. Second, there are indications that Indian philosophers roughly contemporary with Hegel were more willing to engage with the philosophical content of his works than has become the fashion more recently (not only or even especially among those in India). Third, Hegel's attempt to comprehend Indian philosophy essentially and fully and fix it in its allegedly proper position with respect to European thinking can still be instructive in its ingenuity and its sophistication for its time, its hubris and missteps, and its internal tensions; it can also be subjected to new or further critiques. Fourth and finally, Hegel's thinking was wide-ranging, comprehensive, and arguably both original and lasting in significance; some of his ideas are philosophically defensible and deserving of attention even today, such as the idea that philosophical thought cannot be timeless reflection but is necessarily embedded in (a) history, and the idea that truth and knowledge involve dialectical movement or progression (so that apparent falsehoods can be resolved in consciousness into higher truths, and vice versa).

Avenues of future research and scholarship are intimated in the above responses to the question of why Hegel matters to Indian philosophy. For example, there could be additional scholarship on Indian reactions to Hegel, as well as on the variations in the reception of Hegel and Marx in India and the persistence and legacy of each of them there. Another possibility would be expanding and developing Indian-philosophical critiques of Hegel, either in general or specifically of his assessment of Indian thought. The former might proceed from close reading and reconstruction of Hegel's major philosophical texts to analysis of his views and arguments, either from the perspective (or

in the light of) one or another *darśana* (e.g., Advaita, among others suggested in Chapter 4) or perhaps more syncretically. The latter might seize on other aspects of Hegel's attention to India, such as caste, karma and reincarnation, religious practice, even meditation and yoga praxis, and subject these to further scrutiny. Alternatively, one might pursue research into the diversity and complexity of theories of the absolute from varied geographical or cultural origins, which could result in a refined understanding of Hegel as a philosopher of the absolute that may challenge some current readings. Finally, as suggested in the introduction and Chapter 4, a space—perhaps even a need—exists for immanent critiques of Hegel that begin from the (his) notion and ambition of philosophical universality, yet seek to incorporate Indian philosophy *within* the universal history of philosophy (rather than strive with difficulty to account for it while still demarcating it from the history of philosophy “proper,” as Hegel for the most part did)

Conceivably, any of these programs of philosophical research if pursued conscientiously can avoid the “liberalism of opining” that both Hegel and Halbfass reproached in their own ways for its abdication of the commitment to pursuit of truth and knowledge (which naturally must involve reflection on what constitutes truth, or knowledge). If Hegel's missteps in dealing with Indian philosophy can be instructive, since they are nonetheless a challenge to a staid or complacent form of comparative philosophy, then so are both the achievements and the lacunae of Indian philosophies, and not merely by being “unusual” or “remote” from some more-dispassionate or more-recognizable Greco-European tradition, since there is so much more than dizzy mysticism and preoccupation with experience of the ineffable absolute even in classical Indian thought. In a properly global human history of philosophy these diverse and developed

systems, approaches, and positions are no less deserving of consideration than the ideas of the Greeks or of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European philosophers.

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