

THE BORDERS OF AN UNCERTAIN OBJECT. NATURE, DESIRE AND MAGIC IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION¹

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Abstract. *One of the essential aspects of Hegel's philosophy of spirit is the construction of religion as an inherent and necessary dimension of human freedom. The aim of this paper is to grasp the epistemic operation underlying this new scientific intelligibility capable to address the actual reality of the religious subjectivity. In that sense, it will analyze how Hegel's thought dwell in the specificity of religion by refusing its subordination to the empirical interactions of nature as well as to the moral horizons of practical reason. By situating the anthropological structure of consciousness at the core of the discourse on the believing subject, Hegel opens the possibility for a new perspective on the diversity of concrete historical religions. The fundamental hypothesis of this work is that such an epistemic horizon requires the identification of the dysfunctional borders of the concrete existence of religions. Within the section of the Vorlesungen devoted to the 'determined religion', Hegel conceives this liminal existence of belief through the concept of magic (Zauberei), which is the first expression of a spiritual detachment from nature that nevertheless does not succeed in fixing the objectivity of the divine in a stable conscious representation. The problem that magic consciousness arises goes beyond the particular ethnological or historical reality it might denote. It brings up the question of the borders of the philosophical intelligibility of religious spiritual consciousness.*

Keywords. *Hegel; Philosophy of Religion; History of Religions; Philosophical Anthropology; Magic*

1. Introduction

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In his famous work *The Christian Faith*, F. Schleiermacher makes a statement that, read now, might appear quite surprising: «The term ‘religion’ applied to Christianity is relatively new»². This quotation, dating from 1821, challenges the self-evidence of the object to which we give the name of religion. The certainty that the philosophy of religion claims to have towards the subject of its own discourse is disturbed by the inconstancy of the phenomenon it studies, as it can no longer assert to describe a given facticity. This phrase is, therefore, the theoretical symptom of a profound transformation taking place at the turn of the 19th century. This shift is not, as it is often claimed, the relegation of faith in favor of reason, but the epistemic and political *construction* of religion as a social and human reality. The ‘novelty’ described by Schleiermacher is thus a sign of the inauguration of a scientific understanding of religious subjectivity. The result of this epistemological transformation is the consolidation of the ‘sciences of religion’ – autonomous vis-à-vis theology – over the course of the century, but its bases are to be found in the postulates of Classical German Philosophy.

By proposing a conceptual experimentation leading to a specifically philosophical reflection on religion, post-Kantian idealism and romanticism played an essential part in this transformation. An entire generation of thinkers was devoted to the institution of a disciplinary field, developing its methodological and hermeneutical tools. Although this trend exceeds the single figure of Hegel, the importance that the contributions made by the German philosopher, particularly in his teaching in Berlin in the 20s, is undeniable. Although in the Jena period Hegel had already made religion an intrinsic and necessary domain of the spirit, it is in the *Vorlesungen* where the systematics of this new knowledge are fully developed.

The aim of this article is to analyze the epistemic operation underlying the birth of this new sphere of knowledge that Hegel calls ‘philosophy of religion’ but also, from 1817 onwards, ‘science

² F. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, Berlin, De Gruyter [1960], 1830, p. 47.

of religion' (*Religionswissenschaft*)³. This epistemological inquiry does not concern the relationship of Hegel's philosophy to the validity of the theoretical postulates of belief, nor his take in the debate on the opposition between faith and reason. One of the essential aspects of the Hegelian proposal, I will argue, is the effort to understand the *actuality of belief* as a phenomenon of human freedom.

Hegel's attempt to grasp the reality of religious consciousness involves an analysis of the anthropological rooting of human freedom. Before deciding whether this abrogates divine transcendence or not, it should be noted how this perspective changes the production of the philosophical truth about religion. Within its speculative conceptualization, philosophy now involves the capacities of the subject – feeling, representation, thought –, its cultural and historical frameworks, as well as the desiring and driving structure of its activity. This paper focuses on the problem of the *anthropological genesis of religion* as a decisive issue in the construction of this new domain of philosophical knowledge and the demarcation of its elusive object.

This paper's hypothesis is that the problem of the *genesis* arises in a quite specific manner when it comes to thinking about the historical reality of representations, practices and rituals. In the section on *Determined Religion* of his *Vorlesungen*, Hegel faces the task of marking the *beginning* of belief, so as to circumscribe its actual existence. At this point, Hegel evokes and thematizes the concept of *Zauberei* as the first awakening of the spirit in its relationship to the Absolute. Below, I will argue that this category will be the one that determines *the liminal form of religious subjectivity*. Rather than focusing on the eventual and highly problematic ethnological correlate of such a notion and its sources – an

³ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion und Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes II, Nachschriften zu den Kollegien über Religionsphilosophie der Sommersemester 1827 und 1831 und Sekundäre Überlieferung. Nachschriften zum Kolleg über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes des Sommersemesters 1829*, ed. Walter Jaeschke, 2021, *Gesammelte Werke* (GW, followed by volume/number), Bd. 29/2, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hamburg: Meiner, p. 3.

approach to the subject that has already been explored⁴ – this article aims to analyze the epistemological problem that this idea raises. It will propose a study of the process of delineating religion, and religiousness, as a new object of philosophical reflection.

This article will be divided into two main sections. Firstly, I will address the general transformation that Hegelian philosophy of religion entails by focusing particularly on the manifestation of God's revelation in the experience of human consciousness. The aim is to show the distance from earlier elaborations, notably those of Kantian philosophy, and to present the conceptual tools that enable religion to be addressed in its positive, institutional and social existence. The second part will specifically delve into the discourse on 'determined religion' to identify how Hegel tackles the problem of the origin of belief, and to understand the role of the concept of magical consciousness outlined therein. In doing so, I attempt to prove that Hegel's discourse opens the possibility of a meta-philosophical inquiry into the construction of regimes of intelligibility for spiritual formations.

2. *The epistemic shift of the new science of religion*

2.1 The anthropological mediation of God

As I anticipated, among the fundamental transformations that shaped the new idealist elaboration on religion, there is the attempt to place the *anthropological grounding of belief* at the core of the concept of religion. In other words, for a whole generation of thinkers, to capture the truth of religion as a phenomenon of freedom it was imperative to address the structure of human *attitude* towards God. Henceforth, the possibility of knowing religion depended on identifying the driving and desiring conditions of the spiritual relationship to the Absolute. Hegel is a paradigmatic example of this orientation, insofar as he

⁴ Cf. J. Stewart, *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 43-47.

consolidates religion as a constitutive and necessary dimension of self-consciousness. As Hegel asserts in his *Vorlesungen* in Berlin – and anticipates in Jena⁵ – the subjective deployment of the believing consciousness is the absolute spirit itself, reflecting and determining itself: «God's Being requires the relation to consciousness»⁶. The subject's relationship with the Absolute is now inscribed at the heart of the divine's self-manifestation and, conversely, the divine exists only through its revelation in the subject's interiority. God's intimate Being and the knowledge of God are no longer two autonomous, self-sufficient entities. They configure a relationality that defines – and rules – the field of religious existence.

This transformation implies a merging of the different discourses that the Enlightenment had, by every means, sought to distinguish. Hegel's thought abolishes the straightforward opposition – characteristic of the debates of the *Aufklärer* against the 'anti-Enlightenment' – between, on the one hand, theological discourse – concerning the Being of the divinity and the prescriptions of revelation – and, on the other, a consideration of the natural history of religious practices. Instead, Hegel constructs his philosophical project based on a dialectical relationship between God's revelation and the actual existence – anthropological, historical and social – of belief. The self-movement involved in the *revelation* (*Offenbarung*) of the Absolute is both inscribed within the intra-divine economy and at the heart of the believer's subjectivity.

This configures a double relationship that makes it possible to construct the specificity of the religious experience: the believing consciousness – with its vicissitudes, crises and contradictions – is now part of the essence of the Absolute itself. The latter, likewise, only becomes *actual* through its instantiation in a concrete religious subjectivity. The epistemic key to this transformation, which ensures this mediation within the concept of religion, is the notion of representation (*Vorstellung*), which determines «the specific

⁵ «God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone and is only in that knowledge, and *is* only that knowledge itself» GW 9, p. 407.

⁶ GW 29/1, p. 195.

mode in which truth exists in religion»⁷. Thus, as presented in the *Vorlesungen* of 1824, representation is the element that configures the mediation between God and consciousness, a mediation that provides a specific and irreducible content for the philosophy of religion:

But God is this: not merely to be in himself, but to be just as essentially for himself. God is spirit, not finite spirit but absolute spirit. That God is spirit consists in this: that he is not only the essence that maintains itself in thought but also the essence that appears, the essence that endows itself with revelation and objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*). Although we consider the idea of God in this way in the philosophy of religion, we at the same time also have before us the mode of God's representation. God stand before us and before itself (*er stellt sich uns vor und sich selbst*). This is the aspect of the existence (*Dasein*) of the Absolute⁸.

The object referred to as 'religion' is thus constructed through the introduction of a becoming, a constitutive non-identity within the concept of God, which functions as the condition of its intelligibility. As the *Phenomenology of Spirit* announced in its preface, the truth of God does not exist in its pure immediacy⁹. Even the proofs of God's existence – which reached their apogee in Scholastic thought – fail to capture the self-movement of the Absolute. Instead, according to Hegel, we must address the living truth of the Absolute, which is not fixed in its Being – nor in an external proof that affirms it – but is presented through the knowledge that enunciates it, through the movement by which it makes itself *known* to consciousness.

⁷ GW 17, p. 77.

⁸ GW 29/1, p. 119.

⁹ «The need to represent the Absolute as subject made use of the propositions: God is the eternal, or the moral world-order, or love, and so on. In such propositions the true is only posited directly as subject, not presented as the movement of reflecting itself into itself» (GW 9, p. 20).

Hegel inscribes the notion of religion within the dialectical structure of consciousness. As a consequence, he has been accused of dissolving any idea of transcendence, and of rendering God's exteriority a mere ideal presence in human's thought¹⁰. Yet, the uniqueness of the Hegelian approach consists in the delimitation of a *specific* sphere, which is neither limited to a purely naturalistic anthropological description, nor to a purely theological disquisition. I must insist in the fact that Hegel constructs a new object constituted by a genetic relationality that cannot be reduced to the determinations it brings into relation. As some important works on the subject stated¹¹, there is no anthropological reduction, then, simply because the poles of the relationship – human consciousness and God – do not remain the same after being inscribed in the relationship that religion engages. The relationship to God will not mobilize an essence of man that is always identical, but a *determinability* of human desire and activity that gives shape to the particular manifestations of the concept of religion. So, for the first time, a form of philosophical knowledge appears that succeeds not simply in defining religion, but also in understanding religions – in all their representational, ritual and

¹⁰ The references here would be countless. We will limit ourselves to saying that this reading is present, critically, within orthodox theology as well as apologetically within Marxist reception. For emblematic examples of the former cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic. Theological Logical Theory*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press [2005], 1987, pp. 41- 44 ; K. Barth, *Protestant Thought. From Rousseau to Ritschel*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959, pp. 301- 305. Of the latter, see the famous Lectures of A. Kojève, cf. A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 312.

¹¹ In this respect, may I highlight Gerard Lebrun's seminal work on the Hegelian philosophy of religion: «The God we now speak of is no longer the distant essence designated by the 'God' of earlier, nor is it even a new version of it. The I or Man whose name we now write is no more than homonymous with the finite being that Representation understands by these words. It's not the transcendent God who, unalterably identical to himself, would also become himself by recognizing himself in his Other; nor is it the same Other who recognizes himself as a moment in the Knowledge-of-God. These *becomings* have led to the collapse of the subjects who appear to be their bearers». G. Lebrun, *La patience du concept: essai sur le discours hégélien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 130.

institutional diversity – on the basis of a rationality that is immanent to these differences.

2.2 From boundaries to borders

In order to better understand this movement, it is useful to compare it with Kant's procedure for framing religion within the *boundaries* (*Grenzen*) of reason. In his famous work of 1793, Kant wanted to identify the rational core of the religious, not through the theoretical capture of the Divine Being, but in the postulates of practical reason¹². This was a philosophical discourse *on* religion, which conceived its truth in terms of its own convergence with the subject's horizon of autonomy. This leads Kant to establish a sharp dichotomy between a religion of reason – determined by the boundaries of practical reason – and those religions that hinder the relationship between human action and the essential ends of reason.

The *limit* is clear and conclusive¹³: on the one hand we find the ideal of a rational religion based on a series of principles – providence, immortality of the soul and a future life – which are the corollary of the critical self-determination of reason¹⁴; and on

¹² «This faith needs only the idea of God which must occur to every morally earnest (and therefore religious) pursuit of the good, without pretending to be able to secure objective reality for it through theoretical cognition». I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Berlin, Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1793, p. 164 (Kant gesammelte Werke [1902ss], Vol. VI).

¹³ We are well aware of Kant's distinction between limit (*Schranke*) and boundary (*Grenze*) in the *Prolegomena*. It is precisely the 'fixed' character that belongs to the boundary, insofar as it separates two previously constituted domains. (Cf. I. Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, Berlin, Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften [1902ss], 1783, p. 352 (Kant gesammelte Werke, IV).) In what follows, we'll use the English words 'limit' and 'boundary' interchangeably to refer to this latter, properly metaphysical, meaning.

¹⁴ Cf. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, p. 157. Postulates that are already announced at the conclusion of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: Cf. Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Berlin, Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften [1902ss], 1787, pp. 531- 538 (Kant gesammelte Werke [1902ss], Vol. II).

the other the whole dogmatic, pastoral and ecclesiastic diversity formed by 'statutory religions'. These «counterfeit services» (*Afterdienst*) impose mandates that diverge from the practical norm of freedom, and overturn (*Umkehren*) the relationship between means and practical ends¹⁵. Actual religions – the revealed, positive belief that exists concretely in history – only find their truth when they *approximate* to the «pure religion of nature»¹⁶.

Epistemologically speaking, this dualism reveals an incapacity to grasp, differentiate and compare positive religions in all their particularity: statutory religions *are all equally discarded* outside the boundaries of reason¹⁷. When they converge with practical rationality, they do so only in an external way, as an accessory pedagogical mean to communicate an already established truth. What Kant lacks is the identification of a specifically religious rationality – neither purely practical nor purely theoretical – that

¹⁵ «This is the true service of the church under the dominion of the good principle; but that service in which revealed faith is to come ahead of religion is a counterfeit service through which the moral order is totally reversed (*ganz umgekehrt*), and what is mere means is unconditionally commanded (as an end)» Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, p. 165.

¹⁶ «[...] every church erected on statutory laws can be the true church only to the extent that it contains within itself a principle of constantly coming closer to the pure faith of religion (which, when operative, is what truly constitutes religion in every faith) [...]» (Ivi, p. 153).

¹⁷ It's in this sense that we can find this type of formula, which homogenizes everything that doesn't submit to the ideal of a rational practical religiosity: «Between a shaman of the Tunguses and the European prelate who rules over both church and state, or (if, instead of the heads and leaders, we only want to look at the faithful and their ways of representation) between the wholly sensuous *Wogulite*, who in the morning lays the paw of a bear skin over his head with the short prayer, 'Strike me not dead!' and the sublimated Puritan and Independent in Connecticut, there certainly is a tremendous distance in the *manner* (*Manier*), but not in the principle of faith; for, as regards the latter, they all equally belong to one and the same class, namely of those who place their service of God in something (faith in certain statutory articles, or the observance of certain arbitrary practices) which cannot by itself constitute a better human being» (Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, p. 176). Precisely, as we shall see, for Hegel, 'manners' are all that matter for understanding religious diversity.

would enable an understanding of the actual instantiation of religious reason in the plurality of creeds and practices.

It is only with the emergence of Post-Kantian Idealism, and with Hegel's approach in particular, that this threshold is definitively crossed: *religious difference is no longer external to the concept of religion*¹⁸. The relational movement between consciousness and the Absolute involved in representation makes it possible to construct a scientific and philosophical knowledge of the plurality of religions. This is the reason why, in the second part of his *Lectures*, Hegel reaches the 'determined' moment of the divine's self-manifestation, i.e., the moment when the concept becomes embedded in the actual realization of its social, cultural, and geographical particularities. Once again, it is the concept of manifestation – the finite becoming of the Absolute – that enables us to discern between finitudes. This is the embryonic epistemological core of any comparative science of religion. It allows to consider the diverse conditions of heterogeneous manifestations as dimensions of *one and the same* object. Difference no longer belongs to contingency; particular religions are grounded in the necessity of the concept itself¹⁹. As a result, there is a reconfiguration of the place of Christian revelation as the closing horizon of this differentiation. Christianity is no longer the religion that comes closest to a moral ideal beyond itself – the most effective 'means' for 'rendering intelligible' the universal principles of reason, as it was in Kant²⁰ – but the instantiation of the movement of revelation itself.

As it is often the case with Hegelian thought, the fundamental device that inscribes difference and singularity at the heart of the concept – and no longer incorporates them in external ways – is

¹⁸ «Religion is not just this abstract determination. If it were merely an abstract determination of this sort, all further content would lie outside it» GW 29/1, pp. 180-181.

¹⁹ «It is not the work of chance, and it is absurd to see contingency here. Therefore the religions, in the way they have followed one another in history, are not determined externally but instead by the concept itself» GW 29/1, p. 136.

²⁰ Cf. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, p. 225.

history. With Hegel, we witness the birth of a procedure that captures religious heterogeneity through the *historicization* of faith and devotion. There is a *historical turn* that determines the possibility of addressing religious actuality, and which will mark attempts to produce histories of religions throughout the 19th century. Through a gradual progression – decidedly *Christianocentric* – the religious formations succeed one another, while they participate, at the same time, in the self-development of God himself. It is the interiority of this relationship that must be retained at all costs: *the history of representation is the history of the presentation of God to consciousness*. The same structure of representation, as a crucial device of conscious experience, displays a historical temporality intrinsic to the reality of religious existence. The historical knowledge of religions is implicated in the immanent deployment of its concept:

These determinate religions are determinate stages of the consciousness and knowledge of spirit. They are necessary conditions for the emergence of the true religion, for the authentic consciousness of spirit. For this reason too, they are extant historically, and I will even draw attention to the historical mode in which they have existed, for we come to know them in these particular forms as historical religions. In the true science, in a science of spirit, in a science whose object is human being, the development of the concept of this concrete object is also its outward history and has existed in actuality²¹.

Therefore, we cannot agree with W. Jaeschke, who identifies a certain inconsistency and states that «historicity cannot be inferred from the principles that Hegel proposes for the realization of the concept of religion»²². On the contrary, the passage above suggests that is the representational nature of religion that engages consciousness in a temporalization of its existence, in a standing-

²¹ GW 29/2, p. 73-74.

²² W. Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1986, p. 290.

before-itself (*stellen vor*) that necessarily inscribes religion in a structural historicity. The very concept of revelation is linked to a temporality that the knowledge of religions must identify. In this sense, I follow C. Malabou's characterization that inscribes historical temporality within the concept of religion, as a result of the *re-presentative* performance of revelation:

To insist on the fact that the representational process is not only a moment in individual spirit but also and in the first place a movement in God, allows us to conceive the divine alienation not as evidence of something uncompleted, but as the manifestation of a temporalization²³.

However – and this is the very core of this paper's argument – this objectification can only reach its epistemic efficacy by assuming a *structural uncertainty*. This means that the concept of religion does not possess a stable *limit* that allows to identify, *a priori*, what religious rationality is. We must inexorably traverse the diverse reality of the phenomenon, and follow it to the complete culmination of its truth, in order to be able to define the contours of the object 'religion'. Instead of considering religion within the frames of practical reason, Hegel has to identify a *frontier*, a *border zone*, where very singular spiritual experiences take place. These experiences express a religious relationship between the subject and the Absolute take place, but in a completely *dysfunctional* way.

On the margins of the Hegelian discourse on anthropological existence of belief – at the internal border of the sphere of religion – certain practices appear that desist from what characterizes the proper norm of the rationality of this sphere, namely the *representative form* of consciousness. Here we arrive to a very singular aspect of Hegelian epistemology. It is not enough to simply identify a new object and describe its dialectic. Everything happens as if the epistemic foundation of a new field of knowledge requires the grasping of a *radical alterity* at the very heart of the definition of such new object of science. There are liminal

²³ C. Malabou, *L'avenir de Hegel*, Paris, Vrin, 1996, p. 158.

religious existences that find themselves in a structurally ambiguous status *vis-à-vis* the definition of the religious domain. However, at the same time, such phenomena mark the edge of the stage on which its actual deployment takes place. In what follows, we shall show how the Hegelian concept of magic functions, at the heart of determined religion, as that radical alterity which blurs the contours of this new object of knowledge that is religion.

3. *The magical genesis of religious consciousness*

3.1 An elusive origin

In the Lectures of 1824, Hegel introduces the ‘determined’ moment of religion by asking himself about the ‘first religion’: «The question is, where should we look for the primitive locus of the presupposed spiritual element, i.e., what is the form of its existence?»²⁴. The question is, therefore, where does religion begin in its actual reality as a structuring dimension of individual and collective lives? And most importantly, where is the scientist authorized to draw the line that circumscribes the anthropological reality of religion? Hegelian discourse is thus urged to put forward a first figure that allows the subsequent determinability of the religious formations of historical peoples. In the course of the different versions of the *Vorlesungen*²⁵, Hegel advances the notion of the *religion of nature* (*Naturreligion*) to designate the first milestone on the path of the believing consciousness. The aim is to define an initial category that will enable the knowledge of religion to define its field of application.

The term ‘religion of nature’ is nevertheless already semantically charged, and Hegel is well aware of it. The philosopher’s analysis takes part in a widespread historical discussion regarding the *origin* of religions (*Ursprung der Religion*), or the *original* religion (*ursprüngliche Religion*), a debate that prevails in

²⁴ GW 29/1, p. 235.

²⁵ With the exception of the first version of the lectures (1821), where the topic of the religion of nature is not explicitly addressed.

the construction of scientific disciplines that are beginning to address religious phenomena. Hegel therefore firstly hurry to distinguish this concept from what the German *Aufklärung* had called *natural religion* (*natürliche Religion*), i.e. the idea of a set of metaphysical principles that could be deduced from the rational structure of thought, accessible to every individual spirit according to the 'light' of its intelligence, and beyond any historical and positive institution of religions. According to Hegel, such a notion is part of the formalist pretension of the understanding that makes a one-sided separation between the objective divine concept and the consciousness of the latter in particular religions²⁶. On the one hand, it is clear that this concerns Hegel's critique of the Enlightenment's notion of *natural reason*, «an erroneous expression»²⁷. But Hegel identifies a similar mistake on the other side of the intellectual landscape, namely in the Romantic investigations into original religion. Whereas for rationalist thinkers the idea of natural light fell on the side of understanding and the metaphysical principles of deism, for the Romantics the 'nature' is on the side of the first and original revelation (*erste und ursprüngliche Offenbarung*)²⁸. On several occasions, Hegel criticizes this romantic idea of origin, which postulates the existence of a first spiritual people, a pure and immaculate beginning, which would have no other development than in the form of decadence and corruption²⁹. What both the *Aufklärer* and their romantic opponents ultimately share is the need to capture the origin of religion in a 'nature' that is always identical to itself, whether given in the presence of the intellect or lost in the mists of time.

²⁶ «Natural religion (*natürliche Religion*), as the term has been employed in more recent times, has also referred to mere metaphysical religion, where 'metaphysics' has had the sense of understandable thought. That is the modern religion of the understanding, or what is called 'deism', a result of the Enlightenment, the knowledge of God as an abstraction» GW 29/2, p. 75.

²⁷ GW 29/2, p. 74. II

²⁸ Cf. GW 29/2, p. 78.

²⁹ Cf. for example GW 29/2, p. 244, as well as the *Vorlesungen on the Philosophy of World History*, Cf. GW 18, p. 142.

In contrast to these two tendencies – and paradoxically as it may seem – the concept of ‘religions of nature’ enables Hegel to disengage religion from the realm of nature. On this detachment relies the inaugural step of anthropological knowledge of belief, by defining the latter based on a *positive* movement of freedom, and consequently situating it as a spiritual phenomenon. As a result, Hegel challenges the fundamental assumption of the ‘natural history of religions’ that had been consolidated in the 17th and 18th centuries. Within these approaches, *fear* was taken as the origin of belief. From Hobbes³⁰ to Hume³¹ fear appeared as the fundamental passion, or emotion, that explained the birth of religious veneration from its earliest cultural and historical forms. For Hegel, however, to consider fear (*Furcht*) as the anthropological basis of religious consciousness amounts to transferring the genesis of religion outside its own sphere, and to relegate it to human’s natural – instinctive and mechanical – relationship with his finitude. Any possibility of a *human science* of religion is grounded in the refusal of such a subordination to the natural life of the individual. This relative autonomy makes it possible to delineate a specificity to the religious field, irreducible to causal explanations of sensible interactions. The *actual* genesis of religion – that is the *Dasein* of the beginning of belief – cannot be found in a reaction to purely external factors. On the contrary, the *genesis* must be understood in terms of the spirit’s own free activity:

Human beings may be afraid of the sun, of thunder and lightning, and so on, but the fear of these natural powers is not the religious aspect [*of the human relation to them*]. For the

³⁰ «And this fear of things invisible, is the natural seed of that, which every one called religion; and in them that worship or fear that power otherwise than they do, superstition» (T. Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civil*, London, Bohn, 1839, p. 93).

³¹ «The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind [...]» (D. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, Charlottesville, IntelLex, 1995, p. 352).

abode of religion is essentially in the realm of freedom, and nowhere else [...] ³².

This divergence is key to the epistemological definition of religious existence as an object of knowledge: *the liminal phase* of religion cannot be formed by a mere external, mechanical and animal nature, which would remain at work in human action. On the contrary, it has its abode in the sphere of freedom, and it is within this domain that we must find its beginning. But why then, despite this, does Hegel refers to this first moment as ‘religions of nature’? It is not because the phenomenon *belongs* to the world of Nature, but because of the *form* of its manifestation. In other words, ‘nature’ here does not designate a given reality distinct from the spirit, but the first hesitating rise of the spirit in its *naturalness* ³³. The difference is not a nuance. Understanding the anthropological roots of religions cannot be reduced to identifying a remanent element of the sensitive interaction already known by the natural sciences, but to recognize an active movement of freedom embodied in the natural modality of its immediacy. This is the reason why the source of the birth of faith and worship it is not *fear* – the passive sign of the finitude of consciousness –, but human *desire*, that is, the positive appropriation of finitude.

This shift radically transforms the way of producing knowledge about religions, determining the scientific production over the following century ³⁴. From this moment on, its subject of study are the particular forms of representations and practices, i.e. finite, historical forms, as generated by the drive of the spirit and

³² GW 29/1, p. 233.

³³ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 235.

³⁴ In this shift of the focus from fear to desire, we can identify the anticipation of the founding gesture of sociology of religion. For example, in Durkheim’s seminal work, the possibility of constructing religion as a ‘social fact’ involves precisely this shift. «The first religious notions have often been attributed to a feeling of weakness and dependence [...] We have just shown that the first religions have a completely different origin. [...] The impressions awakened in us by the physical world cannot, by definition, contain anything that goes beyond that world. All you can do with the sensible is sensible». E. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, PUF, 2013, pp. 320-321.

not as the result of an external influence. By linking anthropological difference to desire, Hegel is able to conceive the singularity of manifestations in their specificity, and to chart their own functioning and logic. In the same sense, it is the function assigned to desire that enables Hegel to address the ambiguity of the beginning of religion. Within the 'religions of nature' there is a first phenomenon that manifests the drive and desire of the spirit, but in its most immediate form. This primary appearance of desire engages an entirely new perspective on the question of the origin while enabling the possibility to leave the naturalistic explanation of fear behind: «Neither is the fear of natural powers or violence that constitutes the beginning of nature religion. This beginning occurs rather in the opposite of all that can appear as fear»³⁵. That meaning, in magic (*Zauberei*).

3.2 The dysfunctional desire

Magic as the first form of the believing consciousness is necessarily equivocal. Even the term 'religion' suits it only partially³⁶, and yet Hegel includes it as what inaugurates this dimension of the spirit. Magic is characterized by its structurally ambiguous status rather than by a substantive and conclusive definition. On the one hand, magic presupposes an initial spiritual movement beyond natural determinations, which elevates freedom to a position of power (*Macht*)³⁷ and mastery (*Beherrschung*)³⁸ over the sensible world. Yet, on the other hand, magical consciousness displays a dysfunctional manifestation of desire, which has its axis in the individual will, in «the singular and contingent consciousness»³⁹. It is indeed a spiritual movement, where «man knows himself to be superior to nature», but where «the spiritual is not yet present as spirit» (*dieß Geistige ist noch nicht als Geist*)⁴⁰.

³⁵ GW 29/1, p. 233.

³⁶ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 236; GW 29/2, p. 84; GW 29/2, p. 85.

³⁷ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 235; GW 29/2, p. 85.

³⁸ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 237.

³⁹ GW 29/1, p. 235 and GW 29/2, p. 85.

⁴⁰ GW 29/2, p. 85.

It is therefore a very special relationship between spirit and nature at work in this first religious self-consciousness. In the initial anthropological determinations of the concept of religion, one might expect the religion of nature to be a veneration of natural objects. However, this is not the case. According to Hegel, the worship of Nature as such does not define any specific religious principle⁴¹. Hegel calls for abandoning the idea of «a religion in which external, physical objects are taken to be God and are revered as God»⁴². Consequently, and contrary to the interpretation of some commentators⁴³, nature religions in general – and magic in particular – are not religious practices that make Nature their object *in the same manner* as revealed religions conceive their God. Here, the natural is not the referent of veneration, but the mode

⁴¹ If anything, this type of veneration may constitute a specific sub-type within Religions of Nature, under which a process of transferring spiritual power to the natural object ‘seems’ to be taking place: «What comes next is a relationship to objects that seem to be capable rather of being viewed as independent, so that power here appears to human beings as something other, something that is no longer under their control, a power that is not free power, empirical self-consciousness. Examples of such independent, natural things are the sun, moon, sky, sea-great elemental objects that are powers which appear to confront humanity purely as independent and autonomous» (GW 29/1, p. 244). One might be tempted to see this as a first – albeit insufficient – rational objectification of religious consciousness. Yet it is not the content of the object that determines magic, but rather the type of relationship to the object: «[...] but the attitude that the consciousness which is still at the standpoint of natural unity, for which the unchanging is of no interest, takes to such natural objects is governed solely by its contingent wishes, needs, and interests, or [it is related] to them only to the extent that their mode of operation appears as singular, as contingent» (GW 29/1, pp. 244-245).

⁴² GW 29/2, p. 82. Hegel expands on this idea in the 1831 Lectures: «By natural religion as the most basic form of religion what is commonly understood is a religion in which natural objects-sun, moon, mountains, rivers, etc.-are worshiped. But this is false. – Even at the earliest stage of self-consciousness, human beings experience the spiritual (i.e., themselves) as something higher vis-a-vis nature; for religion has a place only in the realm of spirit» (GW 29/2, p. 245).

⁴³ Cf. H. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, in Labuschange, Bart et Slootweg, Timo, dir., *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2012, p. 3.

of relationship between singular consciousness and the Absolute. It is a manifestation of belief that, while positively engendered by freedom in its affirmation over nature, remains affected by the naturalness of its contingent location: «The spiritual is not yet present in its universality»⁴⁴. In other words, there is a superiority of spirit over nature, but a superiority that remains paradoxically natural. What is referred to as ‘natural’ here is neither the content nor the reference of magic, but the modality of its operation, which results in an unbridled, *uninhibited* movement. The borders of religion are not the remnants of nature, but the «crudest»⁴⁵, «barbaric»⁴⁶ and «savage»⁴⁷ manifestations of the spiritual principle of desiring subjectivity.

In every passage where Hegel presents the idea of magical consciousness, he identifies a series of non-European religions, to be found in particular among African peoples⁴⁸, but also among Amerindians⁴⁹, Inuits⁵⁰ and certain Asian nations⁵¹. In this analysis, these practices and cosmovisions are seen as inferior, a perspective that is articulated to the narrative of European colonial-imperial expansion and, more specifically, to the ethnographic discourse of missionaries in their evangelizing practice. But our interest goes beyond the certainly biased view that Hegel projects and reproduces. What we’re trying to analyze is the epistemic function of the notion of *Zauberei* in the construction of religious knowledge within 19th-century Western rationality. The notion of magic not only serves to denote – and to degrade – certain specific

⁴⁴ GW 29/2, p. 85.

⁴⁵ GW 29/1, p. 236.

⁴⁶ GW 29/1, p. 238.

⁴⁷ GW 29/1, p. 235.

⁴⁸ Cf. GW 29/1, pp. 237-240, 249-253 et GW 29/2, pp. 87-88, 245-246.

⁴⁹ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 239.

⁵⁰ Cf. GW 29/1, p. 236 et GW 29/2, pp. 87, 245.

⁵¹ More specifically, Hegel examines the *Zauberei* of the Tungus peoples, cf. GW 29/1, p. 238 and GW 29/2, pp. 87-88, 245. In the 1824 and 1827 Lectures, Hegel also considers the traditional religion of the Chinese empire as the last form of magic practice, but also as an anticipation of the transition to religions such as Buddhism. In the lectures of 1831, this religious formation shifts to the second moment, and joins the religions of spiritual quietude. Cf. GW 29/2, p. 249.

religious formations, it also operates as a frontier, as a liminal notion that makes the anthropological roots of religion intelligible.

The Hegelian epistemological project is not based then on the constructing of a rational *boundary*, but of an anthropological *border* of religion. A border which, while announcing the beginning of the religious sphere, is necessarily both external and internal to it. It is the opening of the existential and determined path of consciousness of the Absolute, and yet, at the same time, it contradicts what knowledge identifies as the immanent rationality of religion. Magic is then a *dysfunctional threshold* in the field of religious existence, where the principle of spiritual superiority is affirmed, – «no matter how bad it may seem, magic is something superior to natural dependence and fear»⁵² – but manifests itself in an unstable, compulsive, pathological way.

Where does the *dysfunction* of the magic spirit lie? The answer is related to the mode of objectification of religious consciousness. It lies in the way subjectivity posits the object of its reverence as a reality separated from its contingent will. In magic, the position of the supremacy of freedom is capricious and arbitrary, and subject to the dictates of unmediated desire. As we already know from the *Phenomenology*, a dysfunctional desire is one that does not manage to stabilize its object and that therefore cannot follow the dialectical development of its negativity⁵³. By a similar compulsive movement, magic fails to produce the separation that ensures divinity's true objectivity, constancy and fixity as the reference pole of a socially shared belief.

I define magic as a *dysfunctional* belief drawing on Hegel's own definition of the pathologies of the driving condition of consciousness. When presenting the sentimental and desiring emergence of the soul in the *Encyclopedia* – and in the associated Lectures – he analyzes a series of psycho-somatic disturbances (*Verrücktheit*) that manifest the disordered drifts of desire in its relationship to the object. Such disturbances are not simply contingent interruptions to the self-transparent reflexive activity.

⁵² GW 29/1, p.239.

⁵³ Cf. GW 9, p.107.

They are the very genesis of consciousness that manifests an always latent disturbance in the desiring emergence of the conscious individual. It is no coincidence that, in this context, Hegel considers the range of attitudes in which the soul fails to fix the object beyond itself as part of a «magical relationship» (*magischen Verhältniß*)⁵⁴. The dysfunction – which, in the most drastic cases, leads to mental illness – does not arise from an external or natural obstacle to the spirit's freedom, but on the contrary from the failure of the desiring subject to be able to posit reality as a pole that *resists* the immediate tendency of the drive. It is precisely this lack of resistance (*widerstandslose*)⁵⁵ that characterizes the pathology of desire and what constitutes, in the field of religion, magic as a belief that prevents the emancipation of divine absolute.

The paradigmatic example of this failing religious objectification is fetishism, which Hegel characterizes as a derivation of magical consciousness and that meets the same fate as the consumerist consciousness of *Phenomenology*: Fetishism manifests the enshrining of an arbitrarily chosen object, which can ultimately be substituted by another, according to the immediate will of the subjectivity that reveres it⁵⁶. The deified entity is not yet separate and emancipated from the believer's singular consciousness. It is not an objective god in-and-for-itself, as a self-subsistent reality of the absolute spirit⁵⁷. Fetishism thus

⁵⁴ GW 20, p. 404. While it is true that Hegel mostly uses the term of *Magie* in the context of the *Encyclopedia*, the specific term of *Zauberei* reappears in the *Vorlesungen* as linked to the same immediate relationship of the soul with the object, cf. GW 25/2, pp. 1010-1011.

⁵⁵ Cf. GW 20, p. 403.

⁵⁶ «It is an objectification (*objectivierung*), an unknown power that they (*the Africans magicians*) have made themselves. And if something does not work out or some unhappiness befalls them, then they throw this fetish away and get themselves another». GW 29/2, p. 90. For similar descriptions, cf. 29/1, pp. 247-248; 29/2, p. 246; GW 27/2, pp. 519-520; GW 27/3, p. 840; GW 27/4, p. 1224; GW 25/2, p. 958.

⁵⁷ In this respect, the analogy drawn by R. Williamson between magic and the sensitive certainty of phenomenology, due to the inconstancy of language's

presupposes a type of desiring attachment to the venerated object in which the latter remains subordinate to the desire that exalts it. What characterizes the inner rationality of religion is precisely the sublimation of this desire in a divinity that stands for itself, or – to use the terms of Hegel’s speculative logic – the absorption of the immediate origin of belief in a self-subsistent objectivity.

3.3 *The double beginning of religion*

This calls for a supplementary ‘progression’ that Hegelian anthropology of religion is compelled to engage. It is only through the «inhibition» (*Hemmung*)⁵⁸ of this first arbitrary drive of consciousness that the religious subject manages to move beyond the sphere of magic and the arbitrary power of the spirit. The spirit thus leaves behind the «sphere of individual desire»⁵⁹ and the compulsive relationship to the object, and succeeds in fixing the divinity in a subsistent objectivity. Within the history of determined religions, and still under the category of ‘religions of nature’, this is only achieved with Eastern religions such as Taoism, Buddhism or Lamaism, and Hinduism. It is only at this point that, for the first time, consciousness achieves the intuition of a principle or a substantial entity, present in a stable manner in the face of the tribulations of believing subjectivity. Although insufficient and abstract – as well as destined to be sublated – these religions entail a qualitative distance from magic, for despite their unilaterality, they are already in possession of the *objectal form* of rational belief. From now on, representations can change their content and move towards the achievement of religious consciousness in Christian revelation. But what is acquired here is crucial. It is the elementary structure of the representative relationship, which presupposes a gap between the subject and the

reference, is highly relevant. Cf. R. Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1984, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁸ «Similarly, even the will in them is not yet theoretical; there is not yet this *rupture* in them, nor any *inhibition* (*Hemmung*) toward themselves» (GW 29/2, p. 84).

⁵⁹ GW 29/1, pp. 244-245.

divine entity. The inhibition of immediate desire allows the believer to let go of the divine in its own substantiality, and only then «does free reverence begin» (*Hier beginnt freie Verehrung*)⁶⁰.

This hiatus between an early religious form and the history of devotions and veneration raises the epistemological problem addressed in this paper. The anthropological frontier of religious phenomena has a depth and opacity of its own. Magic is the first movement of belief, but it is only with the fixation and quietude of the «being-within-self» (*Insichsein*)⁶¹ that we have the «first true divine determination» (*erst wahrhaft göttliche Bestimmung*)⁶². By positing a kind of *double birth* of belief, the Hegelian discourse on anthropological reality assumes the problematic nature of the limits of religious existence. The concept of magic does not simply denote a certain reality catalogued in an empirical ethnology. On the contrary, the notion has a fundamental epistemic function: to situate the dysfunctional border that defines religious existence in its anthropological modifications. In this, we follow P. Purtschert's insightful analysis, according to which magic is a «liminal figure» (*Grenzfigur*), or a desiring genesis that is not stabilized in its objective product: «it is a version of the beginning of reflection, which nevertheless remains beginning»⁶³.

When confronted with the concept of magic, some commentators have sought to dissolve the ambiguity by forcing the phenomenon to fit one side or the other of a clear-cut limit. As we have seen, readings such as that of H. Kimmerle seek to assimilate magic to the objectal form of the religious representation of God⁶⁴. In this view, magic is simply another variation of the reference of belief, and therefore an intelligible practice in the same terms as any historical faith. In the opposite position, R. Leuze completely excludes magic from the concept of religion itself, on the grounds of its non-conformity with the norm of

⁶⁰ GW 29/1, p. 260.

⁶¹ GW 29/1, p. 258.

⁶² GW 29/1, p. 258.

⁶³ P. Purtschert, *Grenzfiguren. Kultur, Geschlecht und Subjekt bei Hegel und Nietzsche*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus Verlag, 2006, p. 71.

⁶⁴ Cf. H. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, p. 3.

representational objectification⁶⁵. Yet, despite their opposition, both readings consider Hegel to have a clear limit that allows us to delineate religion as a field of knowledge. From our perspective, the liminal dimension of magic is not occasional nor the result of an inaccuracy. It indicates a *threshold of dysfunction* of the believing consciousness that the philosophical knowledge has to evoke in order to define, by contrast, the immanent rationality of religious existence.

The *uncertainty* – which Kimmerle concedes⁶⁶ – in the notion of magic doesn't just belong to this particular reality, it is, on the contrary, an uncertainty that runs through the demarcation of the field of historical and anthropological existence of religions. In other words, the Hegelian concept of religion is not in direct possession of the rational form of its object and its limits. On the contrary, Hegelian discourse presents us with a *border zone* that opens up the knowledge of religions to an otherness that is not a just a difference among others within the rational progression of religions, but a radical, dysfunctional and pathological alterity that calls into question the very objectal form that ensures the intelligibility of religious difference.

From an epistemological point of view, this makes the Hegelian discourse a very special case in the birth of the sciences of religion at the beginning of the 19th century. The object of 'religion' is defined by a frontier that exposes the intelligibility of the phenomenon to the problematic character of its efficacy. In other words, magic appears as the symptom of a philosophical consciousness confronted with the porosity of the object it aims to understand. It is not simply a distinct reality that, because of its difference from Christian revelation, is 'incomprehensible' to the European scientific mentality. The science of religion touches on a radical alterity that confronts it with the crisis of its own rationality.

Therefore, the Christian-centrism or Eurocentrism at work in the history of religions is not just a question of Christianity's

⁶⁵ Cf. R. Leuze, *Die außerchristlichen Religionen bei Hegel*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975, pp. 9-11.

⁶⁶ Cf. H. Kimmerle, *Religions of Nature*, p. 6.

position as the achievement of divine self-revelation, and the inferiority attributed to non-Christian and non-European beliefs. There is a more fundamental act of epistemic mastery, which consists in constructing a *stage of religious difference*. Hegelian thought thus establishes an objectal form of representation and worship, which, within the religious realm, indicates the *general syntax* that enables knowledge to capture the anthropological existence of belief. The concept of magic necessarily designates the troubling background of the religious subject's desiring rootedness. It highlights the fact that the progressive dialectics of desire is not immediately operative. On the margins of the religious sphere, there is a pathological existence of the spirit that troubles the *mise-en-scène* of differences.

3. *Final remarks*

This article explored the complexities of the anthropological embodiment of religion. The idealist approach to religion proceeds by pointing out that the human reality of belief cannot be reduced either to the transcendental functions of practical reason nor to the impact of the sensible interaction of the natural world. However, it is not just a matter of defining a new object. By re-defining religion, philosophical rationality also transform itself. 'Religion' as subject of idealist discourse in the 19th century shaped at the same time the functioning of the new scientific intelligence of Western modernity. The rise of a whole range of sciences of religion during the course of the century was based on the construction of an anthropological, social and psychological object whose truth was immanent to the diversity of its manifestations. Belief became a key phenomenon for the scientists who founded the new disciplines, in which the truth of the absolute became entangled with the existential concreteness of the human being. Paradoxically, it is through the production of religion as a site of truth that modern knowledge is able to consolidate its grip on the diversity of reality.

Hegelian discourse is thus exemplary of the dawning of this shift in the scientific approach to religious phenomena and of a new relationship between philosophy and religion that some commentators have recently described as «specular»⁶⁷. The theoretical construction of religious reality on the basis of the representative consciousness gives birth to a new philosophical sense of speculation. The latter defines itself as a capacity to know, and thereby to sublate, the social and historical reality of belief. The idealist discourse thus elaborates a *field of intelligibility* that allows deciphering the constitutive non-identity of spirit, and in particular, the extreme heterogeneity and diversity that characterize what modernity catalogs as religion. It is not merely a question of widening the framework of rationality that Kant established, to make it more inclusive and flexible towards cultural difference. The gesture goes much deeper. It involves incorporating the anthropological determinability into the development of the Absolute, i.e., inscribing it into *the unfolding of truth itself*. Thus, the hermeneutics of religious differences, their comparison, the concatenation of spiritual transitions, depends on a *historicity of truth* that lies at the heart of the new Hegelian philosophical rationality.

Yet, the surface of the mirror is not uniform. The concept of magic appears within the anthropology of religion to remind us that this historicity is not *immediately functional*. It is not enough to merely declare that religion belongs *generically* to the history of spiritual formations, in order to ensure the rationality of the logical self-movement that enables us to understand the development. This raises a very important meta-philosophical issue for any theoretical reflection on religion: there is a *supplementary operation* to be carried out consisting in identifying the border, not of an identity, but of a regime of differentiation. Of course, within Hegel's thought this border of the rational temporality of the spirit is not just palpable in the context of religion. We might recall how, in the Berliner Lectures, non-European peoples – Africans,

⁶⁷ Cf. M. Maesschalck, *Penser la religion. De Fichte et Schelling à Agamben.*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2022, pp. 45-69.

indigenous American, and Asians – are in fact considered spiritual formations, beyond biological and animal nature, while they are not yet understood as full participants of world history. In such cases, modern discourse is in the need to point to a radical alterity that is not a *substantive moment* within the dialectical progression of freedom. In this sense, the uncertainty of the concept of magic establishes a kind of fundamental disorder in the capacity of modern rationality to produce the figures of the history of religions. The essential categories that organize the field of religious diversity, such as monotheism and polytheism, are rendered impotent when it comes to defining magic. The reason for that is that, in this first expression of belief, the *primary code of representational objectivity* – which guarantees the particle ‘-theism’ – is disrupted.

The structural uncertainty implied by magical consciousness takes this concept beyond its ‘regional’ application, which consists in being the descriptor of an ethnological particularity. Of course, Hegel points out specific human collectives. Yet, magic displays a manifestation of human drive that is rooted, as a possibility, in the desiring structure of the subject as such. Thus, the dysfunctional drift of belief into a compulsive attitude towards an inconstant object is not definitively assignable to a particular cultural or geographical context. The concept’s own ambiguity dislocates its uses and posits the notion as a pathological threshold that haunts every subject’s desiring relationship with the venerated object. Insofar as magic functions as the border of the history of religions – and not of a singular religion – it cannot be fixed in the distant horizon of a determined religion. It emerges instead, as a risk of disruption, in any representative performance of consciousness. As T. Lewis stated, this ubiquity affects the notion’s epistemic performance: «This form or moment of determinate religion (*magic*) cannot be identified with any one of its instantiations»⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ T.A. Lewis, *Hegel’s Determinate Religion Today: Foreign yet Not So Far Away*, in *Religion und Religionen im deutschen Idealismus: Schleiermacher-Hegel-Schelling*, ed. by F. Hermanni, B. Nonnenmacher and F. Schick, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, pp. 211-231.

The elusive character of *Zauberei* prevents the fixed assignment of the phenomenon to a particular spiritual formation:

For magic is something that has been present among all peoples and in all periods, and religion too is seated in the representations of each people, in the popular view of things, which contains the most inconsistent notions side by side⁶⁹. [...]

This relationship, this mediated magic, is extremely widespread, and it is difficult to define its limits and determine what, properly speaking, lies beyond them⁷⁰.

This turns magic into a *sui generis* alterity. The figure of other religious formations can be traced and located within world history with absolute certainty. The historical intelligibility of Hegelian discourse is perfectly capable of determining, for example, the aesthetic religion of the Greeks, its spiritual structure, its rise and fall, that is, where it begins and ends as a determined moment of consciousness. Magic seems to indicate *a different kind of difference*. One that cannot be completely distinguished in its own figure. This implies that even the historical fulfillment of religion in Christian revelation is not immune to the drifts of the desiring core of the subject that inescapably inhabits it: «Magic continues to insinuate itself deeply into other, higher religions in a secondary way, for instance the practice of witchcraft in Christendom, and of invoking devils»⁷¹. We could also think of other ‘intra-Christian’ phenomena – such as *exaltation* (*Schwärmerei*) or *mysticism* – which manifest not an *external difference*, but a threshold of dysfunction, a pathological drift from the principle of spiritual freedom.

The Hegelian discourse on religion thus introduces a much larger problem, namely that of constructing a scientific and philosophical intelligibility of human reality. The result is that the anthropological inscription of the Absolute in no way offers

⁶⁹ GW 29/1, p. 241.

⁷⁰ GW 29/1, p. 242.

⁷¹ GW 29/2, pp. 86-87.

comfort in the peaceful figure of an 'epistemic humanism', confident of an essence of man that is always constant in the background of differences. On the contrary, the rooting of the religious truth of the Absolute in the folds of desire raises a latent danger of the crisis of scientific rationality, which philosophy must assume if its discourse is to be effective. If religion is the mirror-object that modernity postulates to demarcate its own scientific performance, then its uncertain borders constantly confront us with a trouble lodged in the desiring heart of philosophical rationality.