

AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF FRIEDRICH HEGEL'S DIALECTIC ON
TRUTH VS. TRUTH AS EXPRESSED IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
Religion
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina

March 2019

Accepted:

[First Reader]

[Second Reader]

ABSTRACT

Why is it so difficult to talk to others about the truth of Christ? We often respond that it is just because of the skepticism of “today”. But is it really a “today” issue? This paper will examine this question by looking at one of the roots of today’s skepticism in an attempt to better help Christians to effectively structure their evangelistic conversations. This will be accomplished by first examining three current obstacles to discussing Christ: postmodernism, the millennial subculture, and popular culture. We will then look back to the 16th century philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, his dialectic method of determining truth, and how it influences epistemology within the current plausibility structure. The Gospel of John will provide an alternative approach to the pursuit of truth during the time of Jesus and today. Hegel’s dialectic will be compared and contrasted to the Gospel of John to see how it has shaped the reigning plausibility structures. Due to Hegel’s current influence on how we think, this paper will examine what we can learn from the Gospel of John that will help to promote the truth of Jesus and develop strategies for resisting the skepticism of today.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to consider the extent to which Friedrich Hegel’s dialectical approach to the ascertainment of truth—in contrast to the presentation of absolute truth claims in the Gospel of John—has impacted Western culture so thoroughly that it informs the content and direction of conversational evangelism at the local neighborhood level.

When followers of Christ enter conversational evangelism to present or proclaim the Gospel to non-believers, they often face objections and counter-arguments. Many of these objections and counter-arguments appear to emerge from the predominant values and generally held beliefs of the current popular culture. What may be less obvious is the occasional tendency for evangelical discourse to drift toward a type of dialectic that may be unsuitable for the articulation and presentation of the absolute truth claims of the Gospel. This paper examines the continental post-Kantian idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and his “dialectic” for ascertaining truth as set forth in his *Phenomenology and Spirit*. The Hegelian approach is contrasted with the way in which absolute truth claims are expressed in the Gospel of John. Several case studies involving conversations between a believing Christian (i.e., the author) and unbelieving neighbors in a residential neighborhood serve to demonstrate this tension between dialectical and propositional truth-seeking. By demonstrating the influence that

Hegel's dialectic appears to have had on the way truth-claims are often addressed in today's culture, this paper can serve as a resource for Christians who wish to be more alert to -- and more able to recognize and avoid -- those conversational dynamics that serve to distract from, and deter, a proper consideration of Gospel truth.

To this end, this paper will examine current obstacles to conversational evangelism, Hegel himself, his background, and specifically his dialectic and what it means to the attainment of truth, the Gospel of John and its truth claims and finally the impact that this has had on sharing the Gospel with those around us.

There has been much written on Hegel pertaining to his published work. For the most part, analytic philosophy of the West has little to say about the impact of his work on contemporary philosophy. There is no real literary history which addresses the specific topic of this paper. From a Christian perspective authors have written on Hegel and his theology. William Desmond in his book *Hegel's God* proposes that Hegel departs from orthodoxy in that his God is a 'counterfeit' God from the perspective that his speculative dialectic promotes a God of self-determinant immanence at the cost of God's transcendence¹. Other authors such as Peter Hodgson in his book *Hegel and Christian Theology* are more sympathetic to Hegel and prefer to argue that he is orthodox in that he offers the possibility of knowing God over against the modern

¹ William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

doctrine that nothing can be known of God². Karl Barth has also weighed in on Hegel in his *Theology of the 19th Century*³ though not in a direct application to the topic.

The examination of current obstacles will be accomplished by looking at current culture and the philosophical/generational influences that have shaped contemporary thought and life. This will specifically focus on the effect that postmodernism, the millennial subculture, and popular culture have had on epistemology and how people seek and process truth. The literature related to the current culture is somewhat limited. Works such as *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* provide a varied assessment of postmodernism and its influence on our Christian culture⁴. Due to the quickly changing landscape of popular culture, literary works are primarily limited to current academic essays and journal articles.

Hegel and his background will then be examined in terms of his historical setting and the influences which shaped his thought, and finally his development of the dialectic he proposes for how humans determine what is true. The third leg of this study will involve a review of the Gospel of John and the truth claims made by Jesus, His authority to do so, and if and why His words can be trusted. Of the literary sources available for this paper, those written on the Gospel of John are the most replete.

Available literary sources for the Gospel of John range from the original church Fathers

² Peter Crafts Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

⁴ Myron Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2005).

(*Against Heresies*-Irenaus, *Ecclesiastical History* – Eusibius), to historical Roman writers (Pliny the Younger), to contemporary writers such as Dr. Michael J. Kruger⁵ and George Eldon Ladd⁶.

Finally, a comparison will be made between Hegel's approach to truth and that of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The purpose of this comparison will be to determine why or how this has impacted how we talk to others about the good news of the Gospel and how we may overcome obstacles to helping them see and understand its truth claims.

⁵ Michael J. Kruger, ed., *Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

⁶ George Eldon Ladd, Donald Alfred Hagner, ed., *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

CHAPTER TWO

CURRENT OBSTACLES TO CONVERSATIONAL EVANGELISM

To assist in the understanding of Hegel's influence on conversational evangelism and the pursuit of truth it is beneficial to examine the state of our current culture and those aspects of our culture which have a direct impact on the exposition of the Gospel. To accomplish this, an examination will be made into three areas of our culture which have a major impact on how individuals process propositions and frame their epistemological approach to life. These three areas are: postmodernism, the millennial subculture, and the area of popular culture.

Postmodernism

Tracing the roots of postmodernism is as elusive as its definition. However, to understand its influence on today's culture, an important first step is understanding how it has influenced our epistemological approach to truth. Postmodernism is rarely understood and yet has had a major impact on our culture. It is often thought that descriptions of postmodernism produce confusion, which may seem to be the whole point of postmodernism.¹ However to provide "enlightenment" on its origin and influence, its history and roots will be examined here.

¹ Penner, Introduction to *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 13.

There has been much conjecture as to the birth of postmodernism, by whom and when. The start of postmodernism is often connected with the “end” of modernism. Modernism is here used to describe the continuation of the Enlightenment, wherein reason, knowledge, and eventually technology, could be called upon to answer all of the questions of man’s existence and resolve the social, economic, and political problems that current and future cultures faced. Based on this terse definition of modernism, there have been several points in time which have been flagged as the end of modernism and the beginning of the postmodern turn. One such identified point is August 6, 1945 and the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. A second data point referenced is July 15, 1972 at 3:32 pm in St. Louis, Missouri and the demolition of the Pruitt Igoe housing project. Both events broke the modern utopian mindset as each was considered a failure of modernism, and the ideal values of that period were now under scrutiny. They contributed to the questioning of absolute truth and the meanings of theory and belief.

With these two events contributing to the end of modernism and a shift to the postmodern mood, the term “postmodernism” first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979 with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard argued that the intellectual foundations of Western thought as built by Kant, Hegel, and Marx were teetering. Western societies since the Enlightenment had, he argued, been informed by “grand narratives” that were no longer convincing stories of human progress. He, like others, was disappointed by the failure of one of those grand narratives, Marxism, to deliver paradise. However, even in this apparent failure, Lyotard stated that his portrayal of the state of knowledge “makes no

claims to being original or even true” and that his hypothesis “should not be accorded predictive value in relation to reality, but strategic value in relation to the questions raised”.²

It is difficult to define the tenets of postmodernism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices that employ concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.³ Postmodernism challenged everything. It deconstructed, critiqued and shredded apart. The intellect was for cutting rather than creating, as Foucault put it. For Lyotard, postmodernism was a condition marked by a set of attitudes, chief of which was a deep-seated suspicion about universal explanations and in particular those of modern science.⁴ He saw the Enlightenment project as not just unsuccessful, but as a totalizing project inherently illegitimate.⁵ To that extent it can be helpful to identify postmodernism as an ongoing paradigm shift in Western culture.⁶

² Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2015 edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/>. (accessed October 21, 2018).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Penner, 19.

⁵ Merold Westphal, “Onto-Theology, Metanarrative, Perspectivism, and the Gospel,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*. ed. Myron B. Penner. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 149.

⁶ John R. Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theology: Theology and the Non-Foundationalist Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*. ed. Myron B. Penner. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 107.

Modernists had assumed that the mind was a “mirror of nature”, meaning that our perceptions of reality correspond to the way the world is. Postmodernists say modern rationalism and technological proliferation have brought us to the edge of disaster. Here, modern progress ends up in a nightmare of violence, both for the people it marginalizes and for the earth itself. Some say that postmodernism is the logical extension of modernist thought in that it exposes autonomous human reason as a dead end.⁷ Enlightenment foundationalism is the understanding that all beliefs are not of equal significance in the structure of knowledge. Some beliefs are more “basic” or “foundational” and serve to give support to other beliefs. As such, foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some way of grounding the totality of human knowledge on invincible certainty.⁸ At the heart of postmodernism is the rejection of this approach to foundationalist knowledge.⁹

Postmodernism is rarely understood. It is often placed conceptually beyond modernism and is a result of profound disillusionment with modernity and its goals. Others place postmodernism within the modern, as a kind of hypermodernity, in which theological ends of modernity’s assumptions come home to roost. In this sense it is a type of hypermodern or ultra-modern, a modernity which has come of age. A third

⁷ James Leffel and Dennis McCallum, “The Postmodern Challenge,” Christian Research Institute. Article ID: DP321. June 10, 2009, <http://www.equip.org/article/the-postmodern-challenge/>. (accessed December 18, 2017).

⁸ Frank, 109.

⁹ Ibid., 110.

option places postmodernism conceptually before modernity.¹⁰ That is, a “work” can become modern only if it is first postmodern.¹¹

In postmodernism the focal point is no longer knowledge or metaphysics, but language becomes the focal point for rational explanation.¹² As such, a major part of postmodernism is what has been called the “linguistic turn”. According to Kant, it is language that stands between us and the “real” world, and since we cannot know language in itself, we may know only the various discrete languages.¹³ As Wittgenstein puts it, “the connection between ‘language and reality’ is made by definition of words, and these belong to grammar; so that a language remains self-contained and autonomous.”¹⁴ To be postmodern is to be aware of the created nature of our linguistically constructed world.¹⁵ The postmodern maintains that we do not view the world from a purely objective standpoint, but that we structure our world view through concepts and structures we bring to it, such as language.¹⁶ Postmodernism does not claim to describe the way things have to be or define the boundaries of what is rationally

¹⁰ Penner, 18.

¹¹ Ibid., 19.

¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ Scott R. Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*. ed. Myron B. Penner. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 54.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kevin Vanhooser, “Pilgrim’s Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*. ed. Myron B. Penner. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 76.

¹⁶ Franke, 108.

possible for thought. Moreover, it is an attempt to think after absolute certainty is given up.¹⁷ In general, the postmodern creed is largely negative: “I cannot believe in individual autonomy, in universal reason, in determinate meaning, or in absolute truth”.¹⁸ Given its position, the postmodern mood seems to leave no room for rational explanation.¹⁹ What it does teach is something we should have already known: that we are situated, limited, and contingent.²⁰

According to postmodernists, the concepts or “narratives” we use to shape our world are local rather than universal.²¹ A metanarrative (also called grand narrative) is an overarching story or storyline that gives context, meaning, and purpose to all of life. A metanarrative is the “big picture” or all-encompassing theme that unites all smaller themes and individual stories. A metanarrative is similar to a world view. Lyotard describes metanarratives as appeals to criteria of legitimation that are understood as standing outside any particular language game²² and thus guarantee “universal” truth.²³ Lyotard also argues that modern scientific knowledge, when called upon (by itself) to

¹⁷ Penner, 25.

¹⁸ Vanhooser, 75

¹⁹ Penner, 25.

²⁰ Vanhooser, 80.

²¹ Franke, 108.

²² The term “language game” was developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his work *Philosophical Investigations*. It refers to simple examples of language use and the actions into which the language is woven.

²³ Smith, 130.

legitimate itself, cannot help but appeal to narrative; but whenever science attempts to legitimize itself it is no longer scientific but narrative, appealing to an orienting myth which is not susceptible to scientific legitimization.²⁴ In this regard, reason is grounded in myth and metanarratives are a false appeal to universal, scientific criteria as if they were separate from any particular game and transcend all language games.²⁵ Science has rejected this school of thought when it implies that social science research can never generate objective or trustworthy knowledge.²⁶ Based on this, the question arises as to whether postmodernism would reject the metanarrative of the Christian faith. However, since the Christian faith does not claim to be legitimate by an appeal to universal reason, but an appeal to faith, one could say that postmodernism is not a rejection of grand stories in terms of scope, but in terms of narrative or myth.²⁷

It can generally be said that postmodernists, along with many other contemporary philosophers, are perspectivists, i.e., recognizing that we are not God and do not occupy an absolute, all-encompassing point of view, but only see whatever we see from a particular standpoint. Can perspectivism be seen as just another word for relativism? It is relativistic in the sense that it is the dual aim that our insights, whether

²⁴ Smith, 130.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁶ Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "'Science' Rejects Postmodernism," *Educational Researcher*. 31, No. 8 (2002): 25.

²⁷ Smith, 131.

they be factual or normative, are relative to the standpoint from which they are made and that the standpoint we occupy inevitably betrays that it is not an absolute standpoint.²⁸

Postmodern anthropology is based on the concept that as humans we are all “social constructs” wherein our outlooks and perceptions are all the result of the influence of culture.²⁹ From this perspective a postmodernist would say that our thoughts and actions are pre-determined for us by society and the cognitive approach that surrounds us. Rather than seeing the mind as a mirror of nature, the postmodernist would argue that we bend nature through the lens of our setting, culture and language.³⁰ As such, to know objective truth, we would have to transcend our cultural setting which, according to postmodernists, is impossible. In place of objective truth, or metanarratives, postmodernists point to local narratives, or stories about what “really works” for particular communities, but which are not valid beyond that local community. In response to the United Nations debate on human rights, the American Anthropological Association issued a statement in 1947 stating that moral standards are relative to cultural and societal frameworks, and that there is no way of demonstrating that the values and morals of one society are better than those of another.³¹ Therefore “objective” truth must be truth which is independent of individual or cultural

²⁸ Westphal, 152.

²⁹ Leffel, McCallum, 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Zachary Stein and Theodore Dawson, “‘Its all good’: Moral Relativism and the Millennial Mind,” *Research Gate*. October 8, 2004, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228510007_It's_all_good_Moral_relativism_and_the_Millennial_Mind. (accessed February 1, 2018).

(community based) belief. If something is objectively true, it is true for everyone regardless of whether they acknowledge it or not. Postmodernists claim that since all “truth” is locally determined, objective truth is an impossibility.³²

Though postmodernism has largely been a movement among intellectuals, it has still deeply affected the broader culture.³³ Postmodern tenets may seem academic and somewhat arcane, but they are being taught throughout all levels of education. College graduates, teachers, journalists, lawyers, judges, and political leaders have been immersed in this type of thinking. Knowledge is no longer seen as absolute truth, but rather in terms of rearranging information into new paradigms, and that humans construct models to account for their experiences. These “models” (metanarratives) are “texts” that are constantly being revised. These models are now just stories and indistinguishable from what was once assumed to be knowledge.³⁴ Classical scholarship would pursue what is true, beautiful and good. Postmodernists now seem to only seek what “works”. If we seek only what works and there are no absolutes, if truth really is just relative, then there can be no stability, no real meaning in life. If reality is socially constructed through our metanarratives, then moral guidelines are only shelters for oppressive power and individual identity is an illusion.³⁵ In the postmodern narrative, tolerance becomes the cardinal virtue. In this way of thinking, the principle of cultural

³² Leffel, McCallum, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

diversity means that every like-minded group constitutes a culture that must be considered as good as any other culture.³⁶ Openness and tolerance that rejects all moral absolutes are the mandates of the postmodern ideology.³⁷ In this manner, postmodernism is more than just a movement among intellectuals; it greatly affects our broader culture.³⁸ As a result, those who do not conform to the new “tolerance” mandate are considered arrogant, which actually translates to intolerant, and has taken on an entirely new meaning. Intolerance used to refer to bigotry or prejudice, i.e., attacking people or excluding them because of who they are or what they think. In that sense, intolerance is offensive. But to be intolerant now means that you assert that some beliefs are true, and others are false.³⁹

Objective truth means that some things are true independent of an individual or cultural belief. When something is objectively true (like the existence of the moon), it is true for everyone whether or not they acknowledge it. Objectivity assumes that we all live in one reality, even though we may experience it differently.⁴⁰ However, to the postmodernist, the objectivist or absolutist is seen as both naïve and dangerous and mired in arrogance.⁴¹ Postmodernists call us to accept that all beliefs are equally valid.

³⁶ Veith, 195.

³⁷ Leffel, McCallum, 1.

³⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

Instead of one truth, we have many truths. Openness without the restraint of reason along with tolerance without moral appraisal are the new postmodern mandates.⁴²

Analytical philosophy (Anglo-American philosophy of the 20th century) has written off the primarily Continental philosophy (19th and 20th century philosophical traditions from mainland Europe) of postmodernism. During a recent conversation with a PhD professor of philosophy at a local college, it was expressed that postmodernism was essentially non-existent in our culture, perhaps with the exception of the arts. This tug of war between these two schools of philosophy is common and ongoing. However, to suggest that the postmodernist movement has not affected, or continues to affect, our pursuit and understanding of truth seems to be short-sighted.

Millennial Subculture

Millennial is a term used to describe those individuals born between approximately 1977 and 1997. This moniker is attributed to social historians Neil Howe and William Strauss.⁴³ Millennials followed the Gen Xers (born between 1965 and 1976, Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), and finally the Builders (born between 1921-1945).⁴⁴ The new GenZer's are those born in 1998 and later. There is a reason why Millennials are gaining more and more media attention. They represent a very large group and numbers equate to influence. According to the National Center for

⁴² Leffel, McCallum, 6.

⁴³ Chip Espinoza, "Millennial Integration: Challenges Millennials Face in the Workplace and What They Can Do About Them," *Dissertations & Theses*. 118. 2012, <http://aura.antioch.edu/etds/118>. (accessed September 20, 2018). 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Health Statistics, 83 million people were born between 1977 and 1997 compared to approximately 75 million Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964.⁴⁵ The purpose of examining the Millennial Subculture is that they represent the largest demographic since the Baby Boomers and have started to define our social, political and ethical culture.

A generation's cultural experiences make every new generation of Americans unique. Millennials are defined not just by their numbers, but by their moment in history.⁴⁶ Millennials have grown up in an age of crack cocaine, designer drugs and the AIDS epidemic. As young teens, they have seen the pain of the L.A. riots and graphic violence of the Branch Davidian standoff. They have seen terrorism, foreign and home grown, become a part of the American lexicon. They have grown up with violent video games and sexually charged advertising, television and movies.⁴⁷ They have grown up with an increasing divorce rate, day care, single parents, latchkey lifestyles, and the technological revolution that has put the joystick squarely in their hands. In 1997, approximately 60% of children under the age of six had mothers who worked outside of the home compared to 18% in 1960, and nearly 61% of U.S. children aged three to five were attending preschool compared with 38% in 1970. Also, in 1997, nearly 60% of households with children aged seven or younger had personal computers.⁴⁸ In the

⁴⁵ Espinoza, 23.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

1960's 5 % of live births were to unmarried women. In 2011 the percentage of live births to unmarried women was 42%. These numbers imply that, Millennials are much more likely to have come into this world without married parents than was the Boomer generation.⁴⁹ The historical context that Millennials have experienced has shaped this group with unique characteristics.

Various research has attempted to define the characteristics of Millennials. These Millennial characteristics have included: (a) internalization of the belief that they are special (others have said narcissistic), (b) living sheltered lives, (c) self-confidence, (d) team-oriented, (e) conventional in their thinking, (f) feeling pressured, and (g) high achieving.⁵⁰

Millennials have generally believed that they are more special than other generational groups. When it comes to the work place, a common characterization of this group is that they have a sense of entitlement.⁵¹ Millennials tend to feel powerful. They have been pampered, nurtured and told how great they are from birth and as a result, they believe in their own worth.⁵² Raised by indulgent parents, they also have a sense of security (sometimes false) that is not shared by GenXer's. This sense of self-worth can lead to narcissism. An analysis of data from the Narcissistic Personality

⁴⁹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 46.

⁵⁰ Brian Bourke & Heather S. Mechler, "A New Me Generation? The Increasing Self-Interest among Millennial College Students," *Journal of College and Character*, 11, no: 2, (2010) DOI: 10.2202/1940-1639.1034, 2.

⁵¹ Espinoza, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 27.

Inventory showed that levels of narcissism increased significantly among college populations from 1982 to 2006, and over half of the increase occurred between 2000 and 2006. More recent studies show that the current levels of narcissism are close to those of celebrities. Increasing levels of self-interest and particularly narcissism among Millennials are revealing. However, even though they are self-confident and narcissistic, they still tend to look to external forces, especially parents, for direction and approval.⁵³

Unlike earlier generations, Millennials have delayed the attainment of traditional markers of adulthood such as marriage, child rearing and financial independence to explore potential adult identities.⁵⁴ In Western culture, adolescence is usually a gradual transition from childhood to adulthood. In the United States the age at which a person moves from being an adolescent to being an adult may vary, not only due to cultural expectations but also because of state laws determining the age at which one may work, obtain a driver's license, marry, or go to war.⁵⁵ Five key developmental tasks to move one into adulthood are: leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child. In 1960, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men had completed all these tasks and had become adults by the age of thirty. In a recent estimate, just 46 percent of women and 31 percent of men had completed the transition by the time they had reached thirty years of age.⁵⁶ Because these experiences

⁵³ Bourke, Mechler, 156

⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁵ Espinoza, 23.

⁵⁶ Kinnaman, 47.

typically developed social, cognitive and moral growth in young adults of prior generations, such as working to support oneself, entering into a long-term relationship, and raising a family, these have been put off at the expense of finding oneself. It is possible that the development of certain capacities such as moral judgement may also be delayed.⁵⁷

As a result, are Millennials a more relativistic generation? But what is relativism? It is generally held that there are two types of relativism: cognitive and ethical. Cognitive relativism is a label given to a variety of views that question the existence of universal truths. This view maintains that facts and truths about the world around us do not actually reflect reality, i.e., the world cannot be known; there are only different ways of interpreting it. Ethical relativism is a label given to the view that questions the existence of moral universals. This view maintains that there are no moral principles or guidelines by which everyone is obliged to live. What is good or just cannot be determined. There are different ways of interpreting what it means to be moral.⁵⁸ Relativism's view is that knowledge or truth is only relative to persons, cultures, societies and frameworks; in other words, multiculturalism. Multi-culturalism is a dominant center of gravity on college campuses today. We no longer live in a world where everyone sees things the same way.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bourke, Mechler, 150.

⁵⁸ Stein, 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

Millennials are the first generation to grow up in a culture of multiculturalism. This “freedom culture”⁶⁰ has resulted in competing worldviews. Through technology, Millennials have experienced the risk-free exploration of worldviews, lifestyles and perspectives that may be geographically and culturally remote.⁶¹ Millennials’ transition into adulthood is increasingly affected by broader social and cultural patterns fostering differentiation, multiculturalism, diversity and individualization. As a result, a form of relativism, which holds that any opinion is as good as any other, is becoming the default philosophy of American Millennials.⁶²

Today the influences of technology, pop culture, media, entertainment, science and an increasingly secular society are intensifying the differences between current and past generations.⁶³ Millennials are immersed in a pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over wholeness and opinion over truth.⁶⁴ Today’s culture is discontinuously different in that the cultural setting in which young people have come of age significantly changed from what previous generations experienced in their formative

⁶⁰ Stein, 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., 5.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kinnaman, 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 30.

years.⁶⁵ Personal news is no longer real until it is posted on Facebook. Constant access where everyone is an expert creates a “my-sized” epistemology.⁶⁶

The Millennial subculture has had, and will continue to have for some years, a profound impact on our current changing culture and epistemology.

Popular Culture

Popular culture is based on the tastes and mores of ordinary people rather than the educated elite. It is generally recognized as the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that are dominant in society at a given point in time, so it may be seen as fleeting. For this reason, it is somewhat difficult to define, and yet it impacts much of what we see and hear around us. Popular culture consists of the arts, events, sports, trends, and people (celebrities) that fascinate society and take precedence in peoples’ mind. These would include movies, music celebrities, politicians, books, toys, and fashion, and are often referenced to show a commonality of tastes.⁶⁷ High culture has been traditionally reserved for those who are culturally elite, whereas popular culture typically appeals to a broad audience that has ready access to the various items, images, and stories of popular

⁶⁵ Kinnaman, 38.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁷ Mike Coper, “The iPhone as Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), October 26, 2011<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-iphone-as-hitchhikers-guide-to-the-galaxy/>. (accessed October 23, 2018).

culture. Popular culture is a ‘culture of the people’ and is determined by the interactions between people in everyday activities: style of dress, the use of slang, greeting rituals and the foods that people eat.⁶⁸ As such, the media has played a large role in making icons of popular culture available, and to some extent, directing what is, or becomes, pop culture. There are many sources of popular culture, but its primary source is mass media, primarily popular music, film, television, radio, video games, books and the internet. Because it affects and influences our everyday lives, it is also subject to rapid change in the technological world in which we live today where people are drawn closer together by ever present forms of media. In so doing, it allows large masses of people to form a collective identity. In this sense, it provides opportunity for both individual happiness and communal bonding.⁶⁹ It is grounded in expressions of shared experiences that can be seen as fundamental to our society, including the values and beliefs that have shaped it such as integrity, community, compassion, courage, sacrifice, respect, hard work and justice.⁷⁰

The best popular culture doesn’t preach or shout slogans, but rather, it engages our imaginations with stories, images and songs. This creates an imaginative world that

⁶⁸ Timothy Keller, “Politics and Culture,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), December 3, 2010, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/politics-and-culture/>. (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Jim Taylor, “Popular Culture: We are What we Consume,” *Psychology Today* (blog), December 8, 2009. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/200912/popular-culture-we-are-what-we-consume>. (accessed June 4, 2018).

reveals how the artist believes the world is or should be. All popular culture provides us with an alternative vision of the world. This is where the power of popular culture lies.⁷¹

It is suggested that urbanization has been an important ingredient in the formation of popular culture. People who once lived in small villages or farms found themselves in large cities which expressed great cultural diversity. These people would begin to see themselves as a collective group because of common, or popular, forms of expression. As such, many scholars trace the beginning of popular culture to the rise of the middle class brought on by the Industrial Revolution.⁷²

To understand today's culture and its impact on evangelism it is important to understand the growing influence that popular culture has today. Many think that popular culture is only various forms of entertainment: television, movies, music or what is found on the internet. But popular culture is anchored in expressions of shared experiences that are much more fundamental to our society, including the values and beliefs that shape it. There is a concern, however, that popular culture is no longer an expression of our collective experience and that there is a serious loss if this is the case. If popular culture is primarily a form of entertainment where we are unwittingly influenced by "The Biggest Loser", "Knocked Up" or Jay-Z, are we also influenced by the messages that underlie this entertainment and which form the basis for a synthetic

⁷¹ Ted Turnau, 2013. "Advice for the Pop Culturally Perplexed." *Table Talk Magazine*, April 1, 74.

⁷² Keller, "Politics and Culture."

culture of greed, consumption and win at any cost ?⁷³ The prominence of popular culture is such that universities now offer courses and programs in popular culture and scholarly institutions host web sites dedicated to pop culture.⁷⁴ It is for these reasons that we look at two prolific areas which impact popular culture: technology, and television/film.

We live in an age where technology is ubiquitous, and information is instantly available. Whether it is television, smart phones or computers, we have become a culture of “screens” where much of our information is received visually on a screen. The convenience of this mode of information can, at times, be overwhelming. Our quest for information no longer requires typing as we can simply speak to our devices and they readily respond to our needs. However, the very technology which can connect us with the desired information can also have a numbing and insulating effect that can create as much distance in our relationships and community as it attempts to bridge. Technology can inadvertently create these gaps between people by simply texting or emailing rather than an actual voice call. And even a call is a far cry from what would have been the mode of communication in the past, the letter. Social media can also create this numbing effect. Friends are made whom we have never met or with whom we have never had a conversation. The “high points” of our lives are shared

⁷³ Keller, “Politics and Culture.”

⁷⁴ Cosper, “The I-Phone as Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.”

electronically showing how perfect and wonderful life is which can be alienating to those who are hurting and broken, thus furthering the distance between us.⁷⁵

Television and film have had a major impact on popular culture. This impact has been elevated due to the various technologies which provide immediate and easy access to both film and television. Television has made a shift from what had been traditionally seen as broadcast programming to cable access which allows the viewing of hundreds of channels including sports, news and popular programming. Due to this anywhere accessibility, consumers no longer must talk to others around them while waiting in a line but can instead view their favorite programming from a sit-com to reality-TV, to popular films. However, accessibility to what has been considered traditional television and film has now also allowed equal access to both “soft” and “hardcore” pornography. Studies are finding a connection between health risks in adolescent and young adult females and the best-selling porn novels that began with *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The study found that compared to nonreaders, females who read at least the first novel were more likely than nonreaders to have had, during their lifetime, a partner who shouted, yelled, or swore at them and who delivered unwanted calls/text messages; they were also more likely to report fasting and using diet aids to lose weight at some point during their lifetime. Compared with nonreaders, females who read all three novels were more likely to report binge drinking in the last month and to report using diet aids and having

⁷⁵ Cosper, “The I-Phone as Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.”

five or more intercourse partners during their lifetime.⁷⁶ The study further goes on to state:

“The problematic depictions of violence against women in popular culture- such as in film, novels, music, or pornography – create a broader social narrative that normalizes these risks and behaviors in women’s lives. Our study showed a strong correlation between health risks in women’s lives-including violence victimization- and consumption of *Fifty Shades*, a fictional series that portrays violence against women.”⁷⁷

Popular media such as this “turns the moral universe upside down” by casting traditionally evil characters as good.⁷⁸ In the past, in fantasy stories, the goal of a hero was to protect women from evil by slaying the dragon. In many of today’s fantasy stories, the hero is the dragon.⁷⁹ If you are convinced that a dragon, or vampire (as in the *Full Moon* series) can only be judged as bad after you have gotten to know him, you are more likely to give all the dragons and vampires a chance to prove their character before making a judgement.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Bonomi A.E., J.M. Nemeth, L.E. Altenburger, M.L. Anderson, A. Snyder, and I. Dotto, 2014, "Fiction or Not? *Fifty Shades* Is Associated with Health Risks in Adolescent and Young Adult Females," *Journal of Women's Health* (2002). 23, no. 9: 720-8.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Joe Carter, “*Fifty Shades*, *Twilight*, and Teaching Young Women to Desire Abusers,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), September 2, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fifty-shades-twilight-and-teaching-young-women-to-desire-abusers/>. (accessed May 31, 2018).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Fifty Shades of Grey has been described as “mommy porn” because of its popularity with older women.⁸¹ However, there is an even larger dragon in the room when it comes to actual pornography. With technology, pornography is more ubiquitous than ever and indiscriminate to the age of its viewers. This availability leads to normalcy. Unfortunately, this has led to a rise in violent porn. With such easy access, it has become more uncontroversial to view. A recent study found that 39% of college age males and 23% of college-aged females said they had viewed bondage porn as teens, and 18 percent and 10 percent respectively said they had viewed rape porn. While the bodies and minds of these young people are in key developmental stages, children are viewing images that portray women as objects to be used in whatever way a male desires.⁸² This increasing consumption of violent pornography has impacted the judgement-free mainstreaming of pornography. With films such as the aforementioned *Fifty Shades of Grey* or others, a popular culture of nonchalant acceptance of pornography has been created.⁸³

The purpose of reviewing these three areas has been to present the state of our current culture and how they have affected their respective epistemological approach to the pursuit of truth and how it has been developed into an overall worldview. The order in which they have been presented is intended to suggest a progression of thought.

⁸¹ Carter, “Fifty Shades, Twilight and Teaching Young Women to Desire Abusers.”

⁸² Jacob Phillips, “How the Normalization of Pornography Fuels the Rape Culture,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), November 26, 2014. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-the-normalization-of-pornography-fuels-the-rape-culture/>. (accessed May 28, 2018).

⁸³ Ibid.

Postmodernism had the impact of deconstructing foundationalism which lead to the negation of epistemic certainty. With the negation with certainty and absolutes, the Millennial subculture moved on to cognitive and ethical relativism which like its predecessor questions the existence of universal truths. In this, all “truths” are personally applied, thus what is good, bad or just is a personal decision leading to an emphasis on self-interest and ultimately narcissism. Due to technology, media and entertainment, Millennials are immersed in pop culture that that prefers speed over depth and opinion over truth. With the loss of universals and the emphasis on a personalized epistemology, moral, and ethical code, Popular culture now has a free reign without the boundaries of foundational truth.

CHAPTER 3

GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

Biography

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in Stuttgart, Germany, on August 27, 1770 and became the most prominent Continental philosopher in the nineteenth century. Hegel's father, Georg Ludwig, was *Rentkammersekretar* (secretary to the revenue office) at the court of Karl Eugen, Duke of Württemberg. His mother, Maria Magdalena Louisa, was the daughter of a lawyer at the High Court of Justice at the Württemberg court. His mother died of a "bilious fever" when Hegel was thirteen. Hegel and his father also caught the disease but survived.¹ Hegel had two younger siblings, Christine Luise (born 1776) and Georg Ludwig (born 1776).

At a young age Hegel was taught Greek by his mother contributing to his love of Greek philosophy while still in High School. At an early age, Hegel went to the German School. Several years later he entered the Latin School. In 1776 Hegel entered Stuttgart's gymnasium *Illustre* where as an adolescent he began to read voraciously and copied long extracts into his diary. His studies at the Gymnasium concluded with his graduation speech entitled "The Abortive State of Art and Scholarship in Turkey".² At

¹ Terry P. Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 3.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

the age of eighteen he entered the Tubiner Stift, a Protestant seminary attached to the University of Tübingen, to study first theology and then philosophy in 1788. There he became friends with his roommates the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and the philosopher Friedrich von Schelling.³ These friendships had a major influence on Hegel's philosophical development, and for a while the intellectual lives of the three were closely intertwined.⁴ All three admired Hellenic civilization and Hegel immersed himself in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Lessing during this time. Hegel received his theological certificate from Tübingen in 1793 and became a family tutor in Bern and Frankfurt for six years. During this period, he wrote the text which has become known as the *Life of Jesus* and a manuscript titled "The Positivity of the Christian Religion". Hegel moved to a similar position in Frankfurt in 1797. While in Frankfurt, Hölderlin had an important influence on Hegel's thought. While in Frankfurt, he wrote the essay "Fragments on Religion and Love" and "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate".

In 1799 he moved to Jena with the encouragement of his friend Schelling, who had the position of Extraordinary Professor at the University. There Hegel became an unsalaried lecturer at the University of Jena after submitting an inaugural dissertation on the orbits of the planets. There he lectured on "Logic and Metaphysics" and gave joint lectures with Schelling on an "Introduction to the Idea and Limits of True Philosophy". In 1802 he and Schelling founded the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, to which both

³ Louis P. Pojman, *Classics of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 914.

⁴ Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, . (Summer 2018 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/hegel/>. (accessed June 14, 2018)

contributed. In 1805 Hegel was promoted to the position of Extraordinary Professor (still unsalaried).⁵ Becoming financially strained, Hegel was under great pressure to complete his book on the introduction to his system. As a result, he wrote and finalized his major work, *The Phenomenology of Mind*. This work was completed just as Napoleon was engaging Prussian troops at the Battle of Jena on October 14, 1806. Despite the fact that Napoleon chose not to close down the University of Jena, the city was devastated, and students left the university in mass, thus making his financial situation worse.

Hegel then became the Headmaster of a Gymnasium in Nuremberg in 1808 where he stayed until 1816. It was there in 1811 that he married Marie Helena Susanna von Tucher and had his two sons, Karl Friedrich Wilhelm and Immanuel Thomas Christian. It was during this time at Nuremberg that Hegel published his second major work, the *Science of Logic*, in three volumes. (1812, 1813, and 1816). He received offers from several universities and chose to join the faculty at the University of Heidelberg in 1816 where he continued to develop his ideas. While at Heidelberg, he published *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817) which was a summary of his philosophy for the students attending his lectures.

Hegel accepted the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1818. While at the University of Berlin, he published his *Philosophy of Right* in 1821. As he lectured there his fame spread and attracted students from all over Germany and beyond. In October 1829 he was appointed Rector of the University (a senior official) which

⁵ Pinkard, 223.

lasted until 1830. Hegel was discouraged by the riots for reform which were taking place in Berlin that year. In 1831, the King of Prussia (1797-1840) Frederick William III decorated Hegel with the Order of the Red Eagle, 3rd Class for his dedication and service to the Prussian State.⁶ It was in August of 1831 that a cholera epidemic reached the city of Berlin. With the epidemic Hegel left the city, moving to Kreuzberg. When the new school year started in October, he returned to Berlin thinking the epidemic had subsided. Hegel died at the age of 61 of cholera on November 14, 1831.⁷ He was buried on November 16 in the Dorotheenstadt cemetery.

After Hegel's death, Schelling was invited to take the chair at Berlin, supposedly because the government had wanted to counter the influence that Hegel's philosophy had exerted on a generation of students. Since the early times of Schellings collaboration with Hegel, his philosophy had become more religious and he thus criticized the rationalism of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's followers split into two factions; the Right Hegelians advocated a Protestant orthodoxy and political conservatism of the post-Napoleon restoration period. The Left Hegelians, also known as the Young Hegelians, interpreted Hegel in a revolutionary sense which lead to an advocacy of atheism in religion and liberal democracy in politics. Left Hegelians also influenced Marxism, which inspired global movements. Hegel's dialectic was the starting point in Marx's development of his materialistic dialectic.⁸

⁶ Pinkard, 192.

⁷ Pojman, 914.

⁸ Redding.

The Historical Setting for Hegel's Writing

The most common characteristic of thought and philosophy during the first half of the eighteenth century was the dominance of reason, or common sense. As would be expected from this, the times were unemotional and intellectual. Tradition and old superstitions were being swept away from the demands of rightfulness and reason that now claimed authority. However, as the eighteenth century moved on, reason's authority received considerable push-back. There became a renewed appreciation of the classical and a revival of a sense of the supernatural in religion, often obscure, but none the less a departure from pure reason and intellect.⁹ Most contemporary scholars of Hegel paid little attention to the philosophy of religion. They did not criticize the religious dimension of his thought, perhaps thinking that Hegel shared the commonly shared anti-metaphysical, anti-religious stance of postmodernity.¹⁰

An early and effective leader in this movement, or shift, was Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in France, though similar movements were occurring throughout Europe. Nowhere was this movement more evident than in Germany.¹¹ The philosophy of the eighteenth century had seemed to lead nowhere. Wolff had affirmed that the value of pure reason was the only way to certainties. Locke and Hume had pointed to experience as the only path to knowledge. British and German philosophers seemed to be at odds

⁹ Williston Walker and Richard A. Norris and David W. Lotz and Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner, 2014) 627.

¹⁰ Peter Crafts Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 250.

¹¹ Walker, 627.

with one another. This period saw the rise of German Idealism. This was a movement in philosophy that began in the 1780's and lasted until the 1840's. The best-known representatives of this movement were Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Though there were differences between these philosophers, they all shared a commitment to idealism. German Idealism was unique for its systematic treatment of all of the major parts of philosophy; logic, metaphysics, epistemology, moral and political philosophy and aesthetics. German Idealism shared the thought that all of these parts of philosophy would find a place in a general system of philosophy.¹²

It was the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to create a new starting point of modern philosophy, and in doing so to give a value to feeling which earlier philosophers had ignored. Kant's philosophy was the fulfillment of rationalistic, Enlightenment religion, but also the critic of the Enlightenment in showing its limitations and weaknesses. In doing so he undermined the Enlightenment's hold and revealed the need for new approaches.¹³

Rousseau had a major influence on Kant with his discovery of the deep hidden nature of man. In 1771 Kant's major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, struck a serious blow to the philosophy of the time. Kant's system of philosophy was very much like a theory of knowledge. In this, he seemed to side with both the British and the Germans. Like Locke and Hume, he believed that something outside of ourselves, a stimulus or event that he referred to as the "percept", would come into our minds. But

¹² Colin McQuillan, "German Idealism," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/germidea/>. (accessed September 20, 2018).

¹³ Walker, 628.

like Leibniz and Wolff, he supported the idea that the mind has certain intuitional qualities that are transcendent, in that they do not come by or through experience. It is time and space that create the framework in which these perceptions are ordered. Once received, the mind classifies what comes to it from without under its own laws; these are the categories. Therefore, our knowledge is the result of two elements, perception from without, to which form is given by the laws, or categories, of the mind.¹⁴ This system developed by Kant was known as formalistic, or transcendental idealism, because the human self, or transcendental ego, constructs knowledge out of its sense impressions. When it came to religion, Kant set forth his ideas on the basis of practical rather than theoretical or pure reason. It was a rationalistic, Enlightenment faith that he presented. Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Reason* presented morality as the content of practical reason and essentially reduced religion to theistic ethics. His contribution to Christian theology was not his rationalizing interpretation of doctrines, but his emphasis that human feelings are the basis of practical religious conviction and moral conduct.¹⁵

Hegel was the pivotal philosopher between Kant and Marx (1818-1883). He was greatly influenced by Kant and yet criticized him and transformed his system into Absolute Idealism. This shall be further discussed later in this paper. Later, Marx provided the same treatment to Hegel in criticizing and transforming his dialectical idealism into dialectical materialism.¹⁶ Though influenced by Kant, Hegel believed that Kant had brought philosophy to a new crisis point by denying knowledge of

¹⁴ Walker, 628.

¹⁵ Ibid., 629.

¹⁶ Pojman, 914.

metaphysical truth. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with first principals and seeks to explain the nature of being or reality (ontology), the origin and structure of the universe (cosmology), and is closely associated with the study of the nature of knowledge (epistemology). Hegel rejected Kant's theory of knowledge due to its claim that we had no metaphysical knowledge and that we must be in ignorance regarding the think-in-itself, meaning ultimate reality. Hegel believed that Kant's system contained an apparent contradiction. Kant said that we are both ignorant of the thing-in-itself, i.e., reality, and that we know that it exists. In this approach, Hegel said that if we are ignorant of reality (what Kant describes as the noumenal world) then we cannot know that it exists at all, and that it causes our perceptions.¹⁷

Hegel thus transformed Kant's categories of the mind into his system of Absolute Idealism and designed a comprehensive and coherently justified metaphysical system. Where Kant thought his categories were purely subjective, a part of the inherent structure of our minds, Hegel argued that they had an objective reality.¹⁸ Hegel completed the revision of Kant that Fichte and Schelling had begun, and in doing so devised one of the grandest "architectonic" answers to the question of how the world holds together ever developed. What is important is that he achieved this, not by rejecting Kant, but by "completing" his work.¹⁹ Though we assume that the world is unified, we as humans cannot grasp this unity ourselves. Our minds can only perceive

¹⁷ Pojman, 914.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 263.

what is present to us now as we are temporally and spatially limited. As a result, our knowledge is partial and relational. However, though human minds cannot know all of reality at once there must be some mind that can, because, as Kant had established, things do unify by themselves and they require a mind to make their existence intelligible. This mind must be capable of seeing and perceiving the world in its completeness and must be free of time and space. Hegel's name for this entity was the Absolute. As such, this Absolute can perceive the entities that Kant's philosophy created as independent and opposed, i.e., mind and phenomena. These are just two aspects of an organic whole, partial ways of understanding an indivisible unity.²⁰

In the end Hegel believed that his philosophy, unlike that of his predecessors from Descartes to Fichte, should be taken not as a stage in philosophy, or a particular period of development in the history of philosophy, but as the final culmination of this history, uniting and doing away with all previous knowledge within itself.²¹

Hegel's Dialectic and the Ascertainment of Truth

The foundation of Hegel's resolution or transformation of Kant's inherent contradiction was resolved through the development of his dialectic. Hegel defines "dialectics" this way:

²⁰ Menard, 264.

²¹ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 370.

There are three aspects in every thought which are logically real or true: (1) the abstract or rational form, which says that something is; (2) the dialectical negation, which says that something is not; and (3) the speculative-concrete comprehension: A is also that which is not, A is not-A. These three aspects do not constitute three parts of logic, but are moments of everything that is logically real or true. They belong to every philosophical concept. Every concept is rational, is abstractly opposed to another, and is united in comprehension together with its opposites.

These three aspects of Hegel's triad are often referred to as the thesis, to which there is an antithesis, which is eventually resolved through the synthesis. Dialectic methodology was not a new phenomenon. Hegel's dialectics is a particular method of argument which, like other dialectical methods, relies on a contradictory process between opposing sides. Hegel acknowledged that his dialectical method was part of a philosophical tradition stretching back to Plato, but he criticized Plato's version of dialectics. He held that Plato's dialectic dealt only with limited philosophical claims and was not able to get beyond skepticism or nothingness. According to the logic of a traditional *reductio ad absurdum* argument, if the premises of an argument lead to a contradiction, it must be concluded that the premises are false which leaves us with no premises or with nothing. One must therefore wait for a new premise to arise arbitrarily from somewhere else at which time we determine whether those new premises lead back to nothingness or contradiction. Hegel believed that reason necessarily leads to contradictions which leads to new premises which will lead to additional contradictions. As a result, Hegel argued that because Plato's dialectic cannot get beyond arbitrariness and skepticism, it can only generate approximate truths and as such,

falls short of being a genuine science.²² Hegel's dialectic differs from Plato's in that it removes the arbitrariness from the process. In the second moment of his dialectic something he describes as "self-sublimation" occurs described by the German verb *aufheben*. Hegel says that *aufheben* has a double meaning; it means both to cancel (or negate) and to preserve at the same time. This dialectical moment thus involves a process of self-sublimation, a process in which the determination from the moment of understanding sublates itself, or both cancels and preserves itself, as it pushes on to or passes into its opposite.

The third moment of synthesis thus has a definition, or content, because it grows out of and unites the particular character of those earlier determinations and is a "unity of distinct determinations".²³ As such, Hegel believed that his dialectical method was above the arbitrariness of Plato's to the level of true science. His justification for this rests on four legs. First, because the determinations in the second moment sublimate themselves, his dialectic does not require some new idea to arise arbitrarily. The movement to new determinations is driven by the nature and character of earlier determinations, and this movement is driven by necessity which drives or forces them to pass into their opposites. Second, because the determination that arises is the result of the self-sublimation of the earlier moment, there is no need for some new idea to show up from the outside. In this, the new determination grows out of the process itself.

²² Julie E. Maybee, "Hegel's Dialectics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Winter 2016 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/hegel-dialectics/>.(accessed November 12, 2018).

²³ Ibid.

Unlike Plato, nothing extraneous is introduced. Third, because the later determinations sublate earlier determinations, the earlier determinations are not completely negated. Instead, the earlier determinations are preserved in that they remain in effect within the later determinations. Later concepts thus replace, but also preserve, earlier concepts.

Fourth, later concepts both determine and also surpass the limits of earlier concepts. Earlier determinations sublate and pass into others because of some weakness, or restrictedness in their own definitions. As such there are limitations in each of the determinations that lead them to pass into their opposites. Hegel thus notes that “that is what everything finite is: its own sublation”. Fifth, because the synthesis, or speculative moment, includes the unity of the first two moments, Hegel’s dialectic leads to concepts or forms that are increasingly comprehensive and universal. This ‘play’ (Hegel’s own name for the process) once finished can and must begin again immediately.²⁴ And finally, because this process, or ‘play’, leads to comprehensiveness and universality, it drives to completion in the “Absolute” to use Hegel’s term. The “Absolute” concept is therefore unconditioned because its determination contains all other concepts that were developed earlier in the process for that subject matter. Because this process unifies all earlier determinations, there are no left-over concepts outside of the “Absolute” which might define it.²⁵ The “Absolute” thus becomes the final “truth” for that subject matter.

²⁴ Barth, 387.

²⁵ Maybee, “Hegel’s Dialectics”.

This is where Desmond takes exception with Hegel. He proposes that Hegel seeks a dialectical-speculative solution to the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence. To Hegel there is no absolute transcendence as “other”. According to Hegel the absolute form of being is dialectically self-determining. Hegel’s absolute is self-determining being.²⁶ According to Desmond, Hegel rejects an “objectivized beyond, for an immanent self-surpassing process of self determination”. As a result, Hegel presents a ‘counterfeit double of God’ to the extent that God’s divine transcendence as ‘other’ results in being speculatively redundant in his version of “God”. Hegel may use the term God, but the God he references is not the same God of the Scriptures as he negates God’s autonomy and transcendence.²⁷

For Hegel, all truth is to be found in the continuous completion of this process. Error is found in stopping and staying at one of the moments of the dialectic. Error, lying and sin, for Hegel, only signify the obstinate one-sidedness, a lingering and stopping which represent a departure from obedience to the self-movement of the concept.²⁸

Hegel and Religion

As a young man Hegel’s early theological writings showed a concern with the positivity of Christianity. He was concerned because due to the positivity of

²⁶William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017) , 5.

²⁷ Ibid., 6.

²⁸ Barth, 388.

Christianity, it had to be discovered outside of human reason, intuition or experience, and could only be revealed through some supernatural event.²⁹ However, it seems that as a mature man, Hegel considered himself a Lutheran and a Christian philosopher. He would likely have considered himself a Christian, however not in the orthodox sense. Though he came from a Lutheran family, he never appeared to have a strong sense of piety.³⁰ It appears that Hegel's mother had a background of piety, though his father was a good Burgher with a sense that one has to make his own way in the world. It may be that Hegel reflected both of his parents, though if there was a piety he endorsed, it was closer to a kind of devotion to the ethical forms of worldly life of the bourgeoisie.³¹ The guardedness or concealment of his personal views may be reflected in the story that when asked about his belief in personal immortality, it was said he simply said nothing and pointed to the Bible.³² It may be that Hegel had no conviction concerning personal immortality since when he did speak of it, it was with reference to the immortality of a type of universal cognition, not of the human person but of general humanity.³³

It is known that after Hegel's death his wife was disturbed by several points she read in the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion as they were being prepared for publication. And it is said that she also had concerns about things 'vexatious for faith'

²⁹ Stephen D. Crites, "The Gospel According to Hegel," *The Journal of Religion*. 46, no. 2 (1966): 247.

³⁰ Desmond, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

³² Pinkard, 577.

³³ Desmond, 16.

in several of his earlier writings.³⁴ Additionally, Hegel's son, Immanuel, was initially hostile to Schelling (now the Philosopher at Berlin) and his march to dismiss, and "stamp out the dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism in Berlin". But his defensive stand softened as he was won over by Schelling, and in his later years spoke of his father's philosophy as an "interesting" departure from orthodoxy, which may have been suitable for its time, but now required an understanding of God closer to orthodox theism.³⁵

Hegel saw the world as the mind of God, dialectic and trinitarian in structure. His interpretation of Christian themes is a common in his lectures and writing. His lectures on the philosophy of religion are particularly ripe with his views on Christian history and the Christian claim to such an extent that there can be little doubt regarding the importance of the Christian faith to him personally.³⁶ However, Hegel believed that we must move beyond religious images in seeking pure thought. There was a need to move from religion to philosophy. To grasp true thought we must move beyond religion. He believed that God was a necessary concept to move history forward. Hegel saw Jesus as a necessary concept and his birth and death as a historical event. He believed his birth not only happened, but was necessary to happen. It was a historical moment and as a result nothing would be the same. The problem with Christianity, however, was that it stops with our centering on God. He believed that rather than concentrating on God, we need to realize that the same god-consciousness is available to all of us. He believed that the divine consciousness is in all of us and as such, we needed to look beyond God.

³⁴ Pinkard, 577.

³⁵ Ibid., 624, 663.

³⁶ Ibid., 246.

This line of thinking eventually led to a god/man perspective. Hegel believed that philosophy was theology to the extent that it raises religious symbols to thought and reveals the rational content of religion and in doing so presents the reconciliation of God and the world.³⁷

Hegel's writings have had a major influence on modern Protestant thought, even though its impact is often not recognized or acknowledged by the very theologians who have most clearly reflected it.³⁸ Throughout theology the ideas, original with Hegel, and particularly among existentialist-oriented thinkers can be found.³⁹ Hegel is thought to be orthodox to the extent that he reestablishes the conditions of the possibility of knowing God as opposed to the modern doctrine that nothing can be known.⁴⁰

However, despite the positive influence of Hegel's reading of the Gospel, his views also produced a major crisis of faith in European thought. It can be reasonably argued that the developing controversy over the truth of Christianity originated not so much in the Enlightenment, but more so by the successors of Hegel. These successors, Strauss, Bauer, Feuerbach, Marx and Kierkegaard, were the pre-eminent figures in philosophy who worked in direct relationship to the philosophy of Hegel and who laid out some of the most serious issues that continue to confront Christian thought today.⁴¹ Hegel's

³⁷ Hodgson, 247.

³⁸ Ibid., 246.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 259.

⁴¹ Hodgson, 259.

philosophy of religion was a response to the challenge of theological agnosticism, which he believed undercut the central conviction of orthodoxy that God makes Himself known, that the nature of God can be clearly seen in the world, and that man has the ability to grasp the idea of God.⁴²

It is not a certainty that Hegel intended to create a crisis; instead, he intended to create a philosophy of reconciliation in which nature and history, religion, politics and culture are integrated into a single vision of the truth. As such, Hegel's philosophical task was much more comprehensive than any theology is likely to be. What seemed to create the crisis was that Hegel insisted on claiming that the truth revealed in the Gospel is universal and therefore related to every possible source of truth. Hegel seemed to be attempting to show that this truth is not a choice item of information, but rather a form of consciousness in which human existence is fulfilled in all of its functions.⁴³

As noted earlier, after Hegel's death in 1831 his followers split into left, center and right factions over the issue of religion. The publication of David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was at the center of the controversy. The conservative right claimed that Hegelianism reflected Christian orthodoxy. The left saw it as a humanistic doctrine reflective of the historical emancipation of mankind. But Hegel regarded the existence of atheism and secularism to be deeply dissatisfying, thus he sought to re-integrate religion, rationality, and life, but within the context of modernity. Hegel believed that more of dogmatics was achievable in philosophy than in theology itself.⁴⁴

⁴² Hodgson, 259.

⁴³ Ibid., 247.

⁴⁴ Hodgson, 259.

While officially declaring that philosophy and religion had the same essential content, i.e. God, Hegel indicated that the conceptual form of philosophy dealt with this concept in a more complete manner than that which could be achieved in the imagistic representational form of religion. Many of his opponents were suspicious that Hegel's concept of God was void of its proper meaning in the process of his philosophical translations and resulted in Hegel be suspected of pantheism or atheism.⁴⁵

It would seem that Hegel had some level of belief in Christianity but didn't believe that it provided a rational explanation for the God/man relationship. His Lutheran theological background seems to be a part of his concept of Absolute Spirit. At the same time, Hegel did not think that orthodox Christianity provided enough of the answers to man's questions. Through it all, Hegel believed he aligned himself with orthodoxy, but with little interest in the details of confessional distinctions and doctrinal arguments.

⁴⁶As noted earlier, Hegel had set out to develop a philosophical approach which would answer, rationally, all of man's questions. In doing so, and in light of the shortcomings of Christian orthodoxy, he determined to raise religion to a higher, philosophical level that orthodoxy on its own could not achieve.

⁴⁵ Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel".

⁴⁶ Hodgson, 260.

CHAPTER 4

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Background on the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is the last of the four Gospels. The title indicates that this Gospel was written by John, who was likely the son of Zebedee (John 21:2, Luke 5:10¹). Other internal evidences point out that John was an Apostle (John 1:14) and one of the twelve disciples (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”, John 13:23). External evidence from the church fathers adds support to this identification:

Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia. (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3:1.2)

The earliest list of New Testament books, the Muratorian Fragment, dated c. 180-200, states: “the fourth book of the gospel is that of John, one of the disciples.”²

The Gospel of John provides background information on who the author was and about his relationship to Jesus. Several of these include:

1. The author of the Gospel makes a direct claim that he was a witness of Jesus (John 19:35).
2. He was an intimate friend of Jesus (John 13:23-24).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated all Bible references in this paper are from the English Standard Version (ESV) (Grand Rapids, MI; Crossway, 2006).

² Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 57.

3. He was the only disciple near the scene of the crucifixion and was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and who stood with the mother of Jesus (John 19:26-27).
4. He was a close friend of Jesus and Peter ((John 21:20-21) and went with Peter to the tomb (John 20:2).

Peter asked what was to happen to the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ who was following them (John 21:20-21). “This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). Since “the disciple whom Jesus loved” was an intimate friend of Jesus and a close colleague of Peter, the most likely person to meet this criteria is one of the “sons of Zebedee”.

There are striking differences between John and the Synoptics. This has led some scholars in the past to see the Gospel as a second-century product of the Hellenistic work in which Jesus’ message about the Kingdom of God had been “transmuted” into a Hellenistic religion of salvation and was written by a Greek thinker for Greeks.³ However, the redemptive-historical perspective on Jesus as the new temple fits better with the end of the first century when Jews and Jewish Christians were still processing the meaning of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.⁴ Manuscripts of the Gospel of John were already circulating by the early second century, which was confirmed by the discovery of p52, the earliest manuscript of John, dated ca. 125. Sound arguments have been made that John was already known and used by authors in

³ George Eldon Ladd, Donald Alfred Hagner, ed., *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001) 253.

⁴ Michael J. Kruger, ed., *Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016) 118.

the early second century, such as Papias and Ignatius.⁵ As such, the most likely date of the writing of this Gospel is the period between a.d. 70 and A.D. 100 (which was the end of John's lifetime). These dates are supported by the reference to the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1, 21:1) which was the name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century and the reference to Peter's martyrdom (John 21:19) which was likely between a.d. 64 and 66. Ignatius knew and used the fourth Gospel and since he wrote early in the second century, it would follow that this Gospel was written during the first century⁶. Some scholars have indicated that, due to John's style, high Christology, and emphasis on eternal life, that John, unlike the Synoptics, has a greater concern with theological issues than with historical ones⁷. This is further evidenced by the additional external support from Clement of Alexandria:

Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain...composed a spiritual gospel. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:14.7

The historical character of the gospel is seen in the wealth of information relating to specific places mentioned in the context of the pre-A.D. 70 period.⁸ Evidence relating to buildings, places and specific persons show that the author was utilizing historical information. The author knew that it was a two day journey from Bethany beyond Jordan (1:28, 35,43, 2:1) to Cana and a one day journey from Cana to

⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁶ Barnett, 68.

⁷ Kruger, 115.

⁸ Barnett, 66.

Capernaum (4:52). It is clear that the author was very familiar with the topography and buildings of southern Palestine. This reinforces the proposition that the fourth gospel is fact based on historical and geographical tradition rather than relying on information from the Synoptics.⁹ There are many more references to this specific information than in the Synoptics. Information provided includes specific details that exceed the more vague statements made in the other gospels. John also includes eyewitness testimony not seen in the Synoptics which point to a clear first hand account. The long discourses in John, as contrasted with the Synoptics, point to a more realistic account of what Jesus probably sounded like.¹⁰ The historical character of the book provides confidence that it is based on real events and can be trusted. The theological dimension of the gospel provides a distinctive view of those real events and a particular application to the life of the church.¹¹

The location for the writing of the Gospel of John is most likely in Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) which, at the time, was a very important urban center of the Roman Empire.

Such was the condition of the Jews. Meanwhile the holy apostles and disciples of our Savior were dispersed throughout the world. Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor, Scythia to Andres, and Asia to John, who, after he had lived some time there, died in Ephesus. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history* 3.1.1

⁹ Barnett, 61.

¹⁰ Kruger, 120.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

The Gospel of John is unique in that approximately 90% of it is unparalleled in the Synoptics, supporting the belief that it is not a secondary source . Due to the difference between John and the Synoptics, many scholars in the late 20th century began to interpret the Gospel as a second-century work from the Hellenistic world in which the message of Jesus about the Kingdom of God had been translated into a Hellenistic religion of salvation. Some of the terminology of John is similar in its idiom to the Hermetica (a collection of religious writings produced in Egypt in the second and third centuries). These writings speak of light and life, the word, salvation through knowledge, and new birth. The distinctive theological terms of the Hermetica, including gnosis, mysterion, ananias and demiourgos are not found in John. These terms are central to Gnosticism. Gnosticism is described by George Eldon Ladd as follows:

The essentials of the gnostic theology consisted of a cosmological dualism in which the material world is evil. The souls of human beings, which belong to the heavenly realm of light and life, have fallen into the material world of darkness and death. God sent a heavenly redeemer to men and women to enlighten them by giving them knowledge (gnosis) of their true nature, thus enabling them at death to escape their involvement in the material world and return to their true heavenly home. Heaven is humanity's natural home; the world is a prison. Salvation comes from knowledge imparted by the descending and ascending heavenly redeemer.¹²

The structure of John is so different from the Synoptics that at first glance it does appear to have gnostic overtones with its dualism of light and darkness, above and below, and heaven and earth. This has led some to suggest that John was written partly as a polemic to Gnosticism. Tendencies toward gnostic thinking can be found in Judaism and Hellenism, but the figure of a heavenly redeemer cannot be found in any

¹² Ladd, 254.

pre-Christian documents. Similarities between John and Hellenistic thought cannot be fully accidental. The best solution to this seems to be that John was written, as patristic tradition suggests, late in the first century to refute a gnostic tendency in the church.¹³ There has been much investigation as to the purpose of the fourth Gospel, but there can be little doubt that the center of its purpose can be seen in 20:31:

“... but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Truth Claims of the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is replete with truth claims. These truth claims are made by both Jesus and John. Jesus himself proclaims “Truly, Truly...” thirteen times using a method meant to emphasize its importance. It is the only gospel that insists that Jesus was present and divine from the beginning. But to what end are these truth claims made? The question of John’s purpose in the Gospel is focused on the central truth claim that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. The truth claims that John makes about Jesus will be examined under three headings: (1) Christ as the one and only God (Christology); (2) Christ as the source of new life(soteriology); and Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament (biblical theology).

¹³ Ladd, 258.

Christ as the One and Only God

John, even more plainly than the Synoptics, clearly identifies Jesus with the one true God of Israel. This is exhibited in several different ways. John starts with the following:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1).

John is the only Gospel that insists that Jesus was present and divine from the beginning. He affirms that Jesus is the very Creator of the world. John purposely directs “In the beginning, God...”- but places the Word (Jesus) in the place of God. John also emphasizes that it was God himself in the Word who entered history, not as a ghost, but as a real man.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

The term “Word” is translated from the original Greek ΛΟΓΟΣ , or logos. In literature, logos is one of the three Aristotelian appeals and used as a rhetorical device that includes the content in an argument that is meant to appeal to logic. In using this term, John used a language to appeal to his audience of Jews and possibly Hellenists. He then moved on to show what would seem impossible to his audience, that the logos would become flesh and walk among us would be totally contrary to the dualism of the gnostic position of the flesh as evil and the spirit as good. It would similarly be contrary to the Jewish perception of who the messiah would be.

The word “to dwell”, or “to tabernacle” is also a biblical metaphor for God’s presence. This statement implies that God himself was present in the flesh, in humiliation.¹⁴ Just as God brought light in Genesis, Jesus brought life (John 1:4) and in doing so brought light out of darkness (John 1:5). Furthermore, just as God breathed life into Adam (Gen. 2:7) Jesus breathed new life into the disciples (John 20:22) through the symbolic giving of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as the Son of God. Jesus is referred to as Son forty-one times. In a similar manner, Jesus refers to God as “my Father” (John 2:16; 5:17, 43; 6:32; 8:19, 38, 49, 54; 10:18, 25, 29) which again points to a unique relationship between the two. In so doing, it allows Jesus to make statements about how he is working “as his Father is working”(John 5:17). In the same manner Jesus indicates that he and the Father are one. Pointing back to the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus points to a special relationship with the Father in that it existed “before the world existed” (John 17:5). Jesus’ use of the term “Son of Man” has an implicit claim to his pre-existence.¹⁶ Daniel 7:13-14 and John 3:35-36 makes clear this claim. Jesus’ status as the “Son of God” is another way of articulating his status as the Logos of God. Jesus is the “Logos-Son”.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ladd, 278.

¹⁵ Kruger, 123.

¹⁶ Ladd, 277.

¹⁷ Kruger, 124.

Jesus as God can also be clearly seen in the seven signs John highlights ranging from changing water into wine at Cana (John 2:1-11) to raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46). John also points to the divine nature of Jesus using a series of “I am” statements. They are important because Jesus himself makes these statements. The Gospel of John includes seven such statements, seven being significant symbolically, as it often speaks of completeness or fullness. The “I am” statements are exclusive and make promises which could only be delivered by a being with God-like powers: permanent rescue from spiritual darkness (John 8:12), resurrection from death (John 11:4), access to the almighty (John 14d:6) and freedom from hunger and thirst (John 6:35). The seven “I am” statements can be seen as a revelation that Jesus is both God and Savior. This is further emphasized in John 1:18:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

At the same time John also shows that Jesus is not only truly God but also truly man. In verse 2:12 John indicates that Jesus “went down”, he traveled as a human. In the Gospel, Jesus traveled several times to Jerusalem. When Jesus reached Jacob’s well in verse 4:6 we learn that Jesus was “wearied” from his journey. Just as with any man traveling great distance on foot, Jesus tired. At the same well in verse 4:7 Jesus asks for a drink. He needs to replenish and refresh his earthly body as any man would.

The Gospel of John clearly describes the fact that Jesus was God, but also it is important to John that we realize that he was also truly a man.

Christ as the Source of New Life

In the first chapter of John, he points out that the Word came in the flesh as a revealer. He came to reveal life to man (John 1:4), light (John 1:4-5), grace (John 1:14), truth (John 1:14), even God himself. The word “life” or “lived” is used forty-four times throughout the gospel. When a believer is said to participate in the renewal of creation, it is a new life, eternal life, a life through faith with the arrival of the Word.

...that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:15)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life... (John 3:36)

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life so also the Son gives life to whom he will (John 5:21)

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life... (John 6:35)

John clearly points out that Jesus is the giver of eternal life and a life in God’s kingdom. The kingdom has arrived and through Jesus we are citizens. Eternal life is not just a future reality, but already has begun.

Christ as the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Multiple verses in John have a direct reference to the Old Testament, pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures. As he opens his Gospel with “In the beginning...”, a clear reference to Genesis 1 and the creation story of light and life is made. Creation then becomes the context from which John tells the story of Jesus as the one who was present when the world was created.

Jesus also describes himself as the “lamb of God” providing a foretaste of the sacrifice he was yet to make as the perfect lamb, without blemish, to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Additional references showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament include:

1. John 3:14 – “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life”. Just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent (Num 21:9) so that those who had been bitten would live, Jesus must be held up so that those who believe in him may have eternal life.
2. John 1:51 – “And he said to him (Phillip), ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man’”. This would have been seen as referring to Gen. 28:12, Jacob’s dream of a ladder the top of which reached heaven with the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
3. John 6:35 – “Jesus said to them, ‘ I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’”. Earlier in this chapter in verse 31, Jesus speaks of the manna from heaven that God provided their ancestors (Ex. 6:14), but how now the bread of God is now Jesus who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.
4. John 7:37-38 – “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”. This is a reference to Is. 12:3 “with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”.

Finally, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is arrested, parallels the Garden of Eden. In Eden, God’s creation is condemned; in Gethsemane, creation is renewed. These are but a few examples of how the fulfillment of the Old Testament is clearly shown to be completed in Jesus, the Christ.

The remaining truth claims in John's Gospel are intended to support these opening salvos, that Jesus is in fact God with us. John's purpose is to encourage Christians in their faith, to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God in the face of undermining interpretations that were rising in the church. John is pointing out that a correct understanding of Jesus' identity is critical. Christology is central to the book, as eternal life is dependent on a correct relationship with Christ.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ladd, 273.

CHAPTER 5

HEGELIAN TRUTH vs GOSPEL TRUTH ACCORDING TO JOHN

Hegelian philosophy's purpose is to show that there is a level of intellectualism which can take religion and theology to a higher and more rational level. His philosophy was intended to be the end of philosophical inquiry. Hegel was confident that his dialectic would provide the ultimate rational solution for truth. His solution was the answer for all questions. There is an obvious overconfidence in Hegel's dialectical pursuit of the "Absolute". However, was Hegel's "Absolute" the God of the Bible? To Hegel, did his "Absolute" need to be the God of the Bible? There are those who believed it was.

Hegel interpreted modern cultural awareness to itself in an unprecedented fashion by saying that at the deepest ultimate level it was concerned with the claim of truth. This claim takes a form possible only if the truth is God, and God is the Master of men. This is the meaning of Hegelian apotheosis of thinking, thinking as distinct from mere feeling; this is the meaning of Hegel's intellectualism, which has so often been condemned; man lives from the truth, and only from the truth. Truth is God, whom he dares not forsake if he is to remain human.¹⁹

Others like Desmond did not believe that Hegel's "God" was the same God of the Scriptures. He believes that Hegel had created a counterfeit God focused on immanence but lacking transcendence. Others like Marx and Feuerbach took Hegel's dialectic and removed any semblance of God from it, replacing it with a humanistic materialism.

¹⁹ Barth, 397.

Truth in the Gospel of John is Jesus. It is a declarative truth which stands on the self-claims of Jesus, and the redemptive history of the Old Testament. It is an eternal truth that was witnessed by the miracles he performed and the promised resurrection and ascension. Historically it proved to be a truth worth dying for. It was a truth mandated by God and not man.

A comparison of these two methods of the ascertainment of truth provide a more clearer picture of the distinctives of each. Hegel's dialectic contains a very low, if existent at all, Christology. Hegel acknowledges the historicity of Jesus as a necessary event, but when asked about eternity and the immortality of the soul, he simply points to the Bible without comment. In John there is a high level of Christology. As noted above, John's major purpose was to show that Jesus was the Christ, and the only way of restoring man's relationship with God.

Hegel's dialectic leads to a rational 'Absolute', which is ultimately a self-determination based on the intellect of man. This logically begs the question, (as pointed out by Desmond) as to whether this is a God of our own creation, based on our own processes, or the God of the Bible. The Gospel of John presents God as sovereign over creation and self-determining. God is not the creation of our rational thinking but a transcendent (and immanent), loving creator who desires a relationship with His creation.

Hegel's philosophy has been described as a form of creative destruction. Through his dialectic's process of sublation concepts are created and then meet a partial death through synthesis, only to go through the same triad again and again. In John we are presented with the opportunity to experience a "new creation" in Christ. This

comparison suggests that Hegel's dialectic represents a form of entropy and death, whereas Jesus promises a new creation, a type of anti-entropy, eternal life.

In Hegel we see a form of dualism within the dialectic. The dualism is represented by thesis and antithesis with the bridge being the resultant synthesis. The Gospel of John presents a different dualism represented by heaven and earth with the bridge being Jesus the Christ. The dualism of Hegel's dialectic is an infinite loop which will (or may) end at the 'Absolute'. The dualism presented in John is not an infinite loop but ends in eternal life with Jesus.

Hegel believed that his dialectic provided the answers to all questions, but did it? He provided a speculative philosophy, far short of certainty. John's answer to this is not speculation, but certainty; certainty that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah who is fully God and fully man and because of this is man's only way to restoration with God.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPACT AND APPLICATION TO CONVERSATIONAL EVANGELISM

The purpose of this paper is to consider the extent to which Friedrich Hegel's dialectical approach to the ascertainment of truth—in contrast to the presentation of absolute truth claims in the Gospel of John—has impacted Western culture so thoroughly that it informs the content and direction of conversational evangelism at the local neighborhood level.

Though Continental philosophers have generally written off any influence that Hegel has on thought today, it is the contention here that such a conclusion is premature. Though clandestine in its appearance, it is clear that Hegel's legacy continues to impact individual epistemology and our culture today. Though Lyotard argued that Western foundationalism was teetering on decline, postmodernism replaced the Enlightenment foundationalism with a new, less direct, foundationalism based on skepticism and uncertainty. At the heart of postmodernism was a creed of negativity. Though this negativity is intended to be destructive in rejecting other concepts and epistemic certainty, it does in the end lead to new individualistic concepts of truth. The result of individualistic truth, instead of one truth, is that these competing truths are based solely on a self-determinate epistemology. This process of breaking down continues as an ongoing paradigm shift in our culture. This brief description of postmodernism can be seen as containing elements of the Hegelian dialectic. In this manner postmodernism

takes a foundationalist thesis which is then negated by the antithesis of a challenge to its veracity. Sublation then occurs resulting in a new self-determined foundationalist thesis (albeit that this thesis by postmodern definition lays no claim to truth, simply a rearranging of information into new paradigms) which can then be challenged again and the process continues. The major difference between Hegel's 'play' and a postmodern thought process is that Hegel actually claims a final solution which is the 'Absolute' and postmodernism's only claim to truth is that there can be no objective truth.

Postmodernism would argue that a claim to any such 'Absolute' is naïve and mired in arrogance. In the end, rather than resulting in one truth, we have many "truths" that work for the individual. This type of relativistic thinking has permeated our culture and can be clearly seen in the millennial subculture.

This type of cognitive relativism has been code for the undercurrent of a Hegelian approach to truth. It has been proposed that, just as developmental stages in the life of Millennials are being delayed (developments that provide the vehicle for moral and ethical development), certain capacities such as moral and ethical judgements may also be delayed. Such delays can provide a vulnerability to popular culture and a view that facts and truths about the world around us do not actually reflect reality and that there are only different ways of interpreting them. In rejecting foundational truths, Millennials easily fall into the Hegelian/postmodern mode of skepticism. Due to the size of the Millennial demographic, it has and will continue to have a serious impact on our current changing culture and epistemology for many years.

Popular culture is the conduit through which many of the changes in our collective epistemology are transmitted. Though popular culture is based on the tastes

and mores of ordinary people (rather than the educated and elite) its change has been accelerated greatly by technology, performing arts, and social media (music, television and film). In this sense, the elite in our culture do impact how the culture interprets the world. Technology allows large groups of people to form a collective identity (perhaps a false identity). In the past, events were learned through print media or word of mouth. Local communities would then shape their moral and ethical mores based on the impact on their local character and shared foundational beliefs. Now popular culture provides an alternative, individualistic, and self-determined vision of the world. It is here that the power of popular culture is greatest and the roots of Hegelian dialectics can be seen.

Hegel set out to create the final comprehensive philosophical answer to truth which he believed he accomplished. However, his rational solution has been taken by others, modified, twisted and dissected such that it no longer mirrors his original intent. Today, these parts, as noted above, have been so absorbed into our culture that they are barely recognizable as Hegel's. One can, however, forensically approach current cultural epistemology and find the roots of Hegel's philosophy and in particular his dialectic process.

So thoroughly has this inculcated our culture that it can be seen as an obstacle to conversational evangelism. In contrast to Hegel, the Gospel of John presents a simple but authoritative description of truth. Jesus Christ is Truth. The Apostle's central contention is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God, and that belief in Him makes it possible for people to have eternal life. To accomplish this he presents the evidence of several messianic signs performed by Jesus and the evidence of

witnesses to Jesus. These witnesses include the Scriptures, John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, God the Father, the works of Jesus, the Spirit, and John himself:

He who saw it has born witness-his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth. (John 19:35)

In today's culture with its challenges to foundational truths and skepticism of moral and ethical standards, such claims of truth are no longer enough. Hegel has so influenced our culture as to create a shift in our "plausibility structures". "Plausibility structures" is a term coined by sociologist Peter Berger in the 1960's in an effort to understand modernity as a new "consciousness". Every society depends, for its coherence, on a set of plausibility structures. These are patterns of belief and practice generally accepted within a given society that determine which beliefs are acceptable to its members and which are not. When, within that society, a belief is held to be "reasonable", it is a judgement made based on the reigning plausibility structure.¹ To further explain how this has become an obstacle to sharing the Gospel, the following three real-life examples are presented.

The first example is a highly educated individual who works in the field of education and is well versed in areas of philosophy. This individual came out of a background of conservative Christianity. When asked today whether there is any truth to the Scriptures' claim that Jesus is the Messiah and the only way to restore our relationship with God, he questions the entire concept of God . In his epistemology, the only thing that would come close to supporting the claim of the existence of God would

¹ Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989) 8.

be the ontological argument, but even in that he is skeptical. He would likely say that he uses reason as a parallel authority to Scripture or tradition and that what is self evident to a Christian is not self evident to him and visa versa. When someone such as this man speaks of reason, they mean what is reasonable within their plausibility structure. I do not live in their plausibility structure, but because I live in the same culture, I know what it feels like to live in it. This person may dismiss Christian beliefs as ridiculous, but this actually shows his captivity within the plausibility structures of contemporary Western culture². It is the philosophy of Hegel's dialectic which promotes uncertainty because it is always changing and thus allows the self determination of truth which forms this present culture's plausibility structures.

The second example is a professional businessman who grew up in the Roman Catholic Church. He continues to attend mass and by all indications has faith that God does exist. However, his question is whether Jesus is the only way to reach God. Since other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and others all seem to be embraced by good moral adherents, he questions on what basis one can say that they are not as valid as belief in Jesus. He has a need to explore the options to be sure that Jesus is the only way to God. If the reigning plausibility structure is to question any type of certainty, it is much easier due to cultural pressure to conform than to challenge. The quest for certainty through universal doubt can be seen as a blind alley. This person upholds the idea that every belief should be doubted until it can be shown "true" by evidence which is beyond doubt, but this can only lead to universal skepticism and

² Newbiggin, 65, 164.

nihilism³. For most of history people have lived in societies where the dominant religion formed the plausibility structures of that culture. This is no longer the case.

The third example is another professional businessman who shows open disdain for any belief in God. Based on conversations, he simply does not see a need for God and more than that has developed an animosity toward the idea at all. This person has a moral and ethical code based on current cultural ethics and mores. He is a person who engages contemporary cosmopolitan culture and draws a sharp distinction between “facts” and “beliefs”. When reason is set against the historically shaped traditions of Christianity, the current cultural plausibility structures perform their normal functions and alleviate any possibility of God. But the idea or suggestion that God is a reality is of no interest or value according to his worldview. For this person, it is not just a matter of “reason”, even though there is no disembodied reason which can act as an impartial mediator between rival truth claims⁴; there is an emotional disconnection to the concept of God. He is waiting for the next intellectual sublation to occur so synthesis can provide an escape from facing the possibility of God.

These are examples of what is becoming a post-Christian mindset in the West. If information, ethics, and morals are constantly changing as a result of a clandestine Hegelian epistemology, wherein a reality exists until the antithesis to that reality challenges it, and through sublation, a new reality is created, then there is no true reality or certainty. What is believed or practiced today is temporal and will be subject to the

³ Newbigin, 33.

⁴ Ibid., 57.

constant ‘play’ of the dialectic until Hegel’s “Absolute” is achieved (if it can be by human determination). Through this the only certainty is that change is inevitable. There is no foundation on which certainty can rest. How then is this epistemological wall scaled to reach the truth of Jesus?

If the Church’s call is to further the Kingdom of God, we must understand these influences and be spiritually strategic in our presentation of the Gospel. But what does it mean to be “strategic”? Leslie Newbigin was a missionary who spent 40 years in India. In his book, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Newbigin provides a path. In today’s world of skepticism when reason is seen as a parallel authority to Scripture, what is happening is that Jesus is being co-opted into the reigning plausibility structure. As noted above, it is much easier to conform to this than to challenge the current plausibility structure. But it is the business of the Church to challenge the reigning plausibility structure in light of God’s revelation of the real meaning of history⁵. The Bible furnishes the Church with its plausibility structure. For if someone in history claimed to be God and the Savior of man, it would be “reasonable” to expect them to give sight to the blind sight, to heal paralysis, and even raise the dead, to have the ability to command the forces of nature: things that, even today, modern science is unable to achieve (Isaiah 35:5-6). If God exists and He is capable of revealing His purpose to human beings, then it will require human reason to understand and respond to His revelation and relate it to all other experience.⁶

⁵ Newbigin, 96.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

This means that to be spiritually strategic requires us to beware of, and not get pulled into the trap of, a dialectic discussion. Jesus himself provides an example of how to accomplish this in John 18:

³⁷Then Pilot said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus Answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

³⁸Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

Jesus is showing that we do not promote the Christian message by conforming it to the current plausibility structure. Newbigin points out that:

There is a profound confusion of thought when it is suggested that reason and revelation are two parallel paths to truth, or when, in further development of this line of thinking, it is said that alleged revelation has to be tested at the bar of reason.⁷

The Apostle John exhibited a spiritual strategy for communicating the truth of who Jesus was. He used language the people of that time understood by using the word Logos. He took words from what they knew and believed and showed them what they were missing. Just as John was written to the skeptics of his day, a part of our strategy today must be to communicate the truth in a deliberate, but winsome way.

By all accounts, Hegel believed he had developed a philosophy which answered all questions. However, the fallenness of man corrupted the best of intentions and created the confusion of Babel. We must be cautious not to fall prey to this confusion, but like Paul, in Romans 10, to pray for souls to be saved:

¹Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

²For I bear then witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³for, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to

⁷ Newbigin, 10.

establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

John makes truth claims that are timeless and not open to cultural adjustments or interpretations. He clearly states who is the ultimate source of truth. He makes clear who the final arbiter of the eternal destiny for the human race is (John 8:24). He states what is required to be a member of and accepted into the Kingdom of God (John 3:16) John identifies the source of fulfillment for human spiritual hunger and thirst (John 4:14, 6:35, 7:37). John identifies the final arbiter of right and wrong. And finally, he identifies the creator and sustainer of the world (John 1:1-3).

³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Be uncompromising, with a heart of grace and mercy.

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