

Philosophical orientalism in comparative philosophy of religion: Hegel to Habermas (& Zîzêk) *

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Abstract: The paper examines how “natural” philosophical theology is developed in Hegel from a comparative perspective when Hegel charts a history or rather epistemological diagram of world theologies, and locates within this idiosyncratic matrix the respective theologies and cultures of Western, Eastern and other civilizations. The paper demonstrates how Hegel’s thinking and trajectory has had an indelible impact in the Philosophy of Religion discourse, particularly where there is both a silence on and attempted inclusion, or systematic exclusion, of the comparable and incomparable theological cultures other than of the West. For example, the influence on Habermas who attempts to come to terms with religion in his otherwise secular-Enlightenment (neo-Kantian) philosophy bereft of metaphysics and theosophy. How this discourse fares in the perspectives also of Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Zîzêk on world theologies is visited toward showing how tragically ill the closed fields of philosophical studies in the West augurs for religious cultures and philosophies of the West’s others that Hegel along with other 19th century *philosophes* had placed outside the bounds of rational significance or *Vernunft*.

Keywords: Orientalism, philosophy of religion, Hegel, Habermas

Orientalismo filosófico na filosofia comparativa da religião: de Hegel a Habermas (e Zîzêk)

Resumo: Este artigo examina como a teologia filosófica “natural” é desenvolvida em Hegel, a partir de uma perspectiva comparativa, quando Hegel mapeia uma história – ou melhor, um diagrama epistemológico – das teologias mundiais, e localiza dentro dessa matriz idiossincrática as respectivas teologias e culturas do Ocidente, Oriente e outras civilizações. O artigo demonstra como o pensamento e a trajetória de Hegel possuem um impacto indelével no discurso da filosofia da religião, particularmente onde há um silêncio sobre, e tentativa de inclusão, ou exclusão sistemática, das culturas teológicas comparáveis e incomparáveis diferentes das ocidentais. Por exemplo, a influência sobre Habermas, que tenta chegar a um acordo com a religião em sua filosofia que, sob outros aspectos, é iluminista e secular (neo-Kantiana), desprovida de metafísica e de teo-filosofia. Examinamos também como esse discurso tem um custo também nas perspectivas sobre teologias do mundo de Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty e Zîzêk, para mostrar como estão tragicamente enfermos os campos fechados de estudos filosóficos ocidentais com relação às filosofias e culturas religiosas diferentes das do ocidente, essas que Hegel, com outros *philosophes* do século XIX colocou fora dos limites da significância racional, ou *Vernunft*.

Palavras-chave: orientalismo, filosofia da religião, Hegel, Habermas.

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1 Introduction

First, a word on Philosophy of Religion: this discipline as all students of philosophy would know concerns itself with the long-drawn-out tussle between judgment of reason over faith, and of the approach through language and conceptual analysis versus some direct or intuitive access to the truth of beliefs testified to in scriptural wisdom and articulated in philosophical (“natural”) theology. The late Ninian Smart lamented that philosophy of religion as practiced in disciplinary-bound departments rests on two dogmas, namely, a singular focus on problems of natural theology enacted in propositional analysis (in the context mostly of Western mono-theism), and, its neglect of *religions*, as a totality of worldviews, ranging over a wide compass of doctrines, ideologies, myths and symbolic patterns, sacred practices, and ultimate concerns (Smart, 1997; and also, Smart, 1995). Smart went on to suggest a three-tiered prolegomenon for the philosophy of religion, structured around the *comparative* analysis of religions, the *history* of religions, and the *phenomenology* of a range of (religious) experience and action (Smart, 1995, p. 31).

However, the “comparative” component in philosophy of religion had long been established and practiced, among European philosophers and religionists who had some, however sinister, interest in religious philosophies of the East as of other non-Western cultures. Herder, Novalis, Hegel, Schopenhauer, later Deussen and even Nietzsche to an extent dabble in this area. I wish to start with Hegel as he was arguably the most influential of 19th century philosophers in the development of the discipline came to be known as the Comparative Philosophy of Religion. Indeed, he was ‘the single most influential figure in the overlap between German Indology [Oriental scholarship] and philosophy’ (Mandair, 2009, p. 121). He effected most if not all of the key changes in European thinking from the 1790s to the 1820s, including in philosophy of religion. His most sustained engagement in this area appeared in his posthumously published *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, wherein he provides an *ontotheological* schema that overrides the stereotypical versions of religions emerging in the science of religions *Religionswissenschaft*.

What I am interested in sketching out here is the extent and depth of Orientalism that informs his, doubtless quite remarkably scholarly and informed, intervention in this field. He left behind quite a legacy that has in the 20th and now 21st centuries continued its impact on an array of significant German and European thinkers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Habermas, and Zizêk. I cover their dis-evocations briefly in the final section.

Second, a word on Orientalism. The thesis draws on Schwab (1984) and later Said’s overly celebrated work, *Orientalism*, wherein “orientalism” is elucidated as a “technology of power” by which Europe or the Occident authorizes itself to represent the silent other, in the image of its own invulnerable (or vulnerable) essences and universalized self. Said candidly notes: “The construction of identity [of one’s self]... involves the construction of opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us.’ Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others’.” (Said, 1978, p. 332). In the construction of the ‘Orient,’ a construction that highlighted the European’s (and later, the American’s) ease of access to (and manifest destiny in) Asia, particular pains were taken to evaluate the ‘Other’ in terms of European achievement, society, literature, and so forth. In addition, Said points out:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (Said, 1978, p. 332)

The West engaged itself in asymmetrical transcreations of non-Western texts, and displacement of indigenous understandings, by re-framing and encoding the signs precisely within Euro-centered imaging of the world. This thesis is only now being fully tested in the context of European readings of non-Western philosophy of religion in both its comparativist and home-spun modalities. We are less concerned about exclusions than about what gets represented and by what voice of authority or authenticity precisely in the inclusions or invaginations. In this selective vignettes from this investigation, and I start with beginnings of the historicization of world-time that traces the location of the East or Asia at large in contrast to and within the Enlightenment Western imaginary, with a particular focus on the constructions of India and China in the European mind.

2 The beginnings

A visionary named Joachim of Fiore in 12th century (1135-1202) had proposed that history moves through three phases or epochs (not unlike Hindu *yugas*, only in the reverse), namely the Age of the Father (or of Law, identified with the Old Testament), the Age of the Son (or of Grace, exemplified in the New Testament) and the Age of the Spirit (*ecclesia Spiritualis*), the 'Third Age' which would usher in the age of John the evangelist outstripping the church. There is a higher order of ascendancy as each Age passes into the next, the last of which escorts history into its apotheosis. (I am using Tillich's work on Theology of Culture here.) Joachim's ideas on the inexorable movement of history continued to be influential from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century and even after. Spectacularly, the night before the Holy Roman Empire fell to Napoleon's thumbing wellington boots at Jena in September 1806, Hegel completed his *Phenomenology of the spirit*. The massive tome ends, appropriately, with an ontotheological schema reminiscent of Joachim of Fiore's announcement of a New Age of the Spirit to complete the Ages of the Father and the Son. And like Goethe, Hegel concluded that the irreversible event signaled the end of the Middle Ages (Hegel, 1967, p. xx).

Hegel takes over this idea and presents it as the central doctrine of the Incarnation, which symbolizes, in Burbidge's rephrasing, 'the divine initiative as passing through three stages that reproduce the first, the second, and the third negation. In the first, God limits himself and becomes finite – an individual man specifically located in space and time. In the second, this individual dies; his finitude is cancelled. In the third, the negative force of his death is dissolved, and he becomes universally present as the resurrected Christ' (Burbidge, 1992, p. 126; see also Tillich, 1964). History has an inner determination that moves it dialectically through certain necessary phases; in history Hegel discerns a deeper spiritual regularity underlying various national and folk cultures.

Hegel, born a Lutheran in 1770, kept close ties with the Prussian monarchy all his life – for its promises, in the post-Napoleonic age, of a progressive state in which the *Weltgeist*, and thus human freedom, is more fully realized. Now, unlike earlier Christian visionaries who did not care to delve into the history of the heathens, Hegel saw it as his calling to provide a detailed account of the location and status of *other* people and their cultures in his schema of past and future movement of history. Why? Because Hegel was moved by an universal teleology. For this, Hegel owed a debt to Herder.

Hegel therefore attempted a "grand narrative" that would trace the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit in and through the process and progress of history, guided by the self-awareness of reason (*Vernunft*). He thus had to develop an account of both history and philosophy, and their interconnectedness, on the world stage, or world-history, and of the dramatic self-disclosure or instantiation of the universal, absolute truth, in the finite; and so he had to map the relative stages of growth or, shall we say, incremental determinations of the universal in the thought-systems, i.e. languages, cultures, literatures, religions and socio-political life of all peoples everywhere. And for this he created a diagram, to which we shall come shortly.

The relative stage of development of the Spirit through the march of Reason (*Vernunft*) in each culture, as collective of individuals in a given environ, is reflected inevitably in their respective productions, i.e. their thinking, literatures, religions, magical practices, social institu-

tions, and the maturity or lack thereof of the apparatus enabling self-determination or freedom in political and civil life. The task of philosophy, as he elaborates in *The Philosophy of Right*, is not to build or yield a “plastic” world out of ideal imagination but to understand reality and be reconciled with all its aspects and diverse manifestations. This much is well known and meticulously rehearsed in Western scholarship on Hegel; but what is not often acknowledged or recognized is the theoretic implications and impact of such a philosophy of history/culture on non-Western people’s perception of the cultural alterity, and on the constitution, internally as it were, of their own identity, location, and *topoi* vis-à-vis the West (which one might call “internal orientalism”).

Hegel realized that his world-picture (*Weltbild*) would not be complete unless he came to terms with the history and philosophy of even the much older, and seemingly primitive phases of extant (perhaps even on the verge of being extinct) civilizations. Asia, he noted, in *The Philosophy of History* (Hegel, 1956, p. 99), is the real theatre of the unfolding drama. But history is not to be simply a set of veritable descriptions, a people’s self-narrative, nor historiography as historians understand it; rather it is the deeper philosophical *meaning* – hermeneutic – that is implicit in these happenings: hence the philosophy of history. It was this commitment to the necessity of history and universality of intellectual culture, albeit in different and muted stages of development and determination, that virtually compelled Hegel to give serious consideration to the history, thought and culture of the East. At least references to India, China, or Asia at large, did not fall deadly upon his philosophical ears; for even today these words are taken to designate regions of exclusive interest for geographers, regionalists, area studies specialists and social scientists – forgetting often that India is only contingently connected with Asia (or that “South Asia”, a nisnomer, was created by America CIA to remap its strategic imperial interests); and that historically India was the leading seat of Indo-European civilization before Greece, let alone the rest of Europe, awoke to their own potentials steeped in the same Indo-European roots. Be that error of geographical deception as it may, nevertheless, interests in the exotic literature, arts, and cultural artifacts of Asia had been rife since Romanticism had reached a crescendo in Hegel’s time, thanks to the hard work of philologists and orientalists who produced volumes of translations of works brought over mostly by missionaries and found in the libraries of Alexandria, Persia, Bagdad and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, it augurs ill for thinkers on the new frontiers of disciplines such as philosophy of religion, critical theory, cultural studies, feminist thought, even environmental and applied ethics, not to speak of the David Lewis’ so-called “plurality of worlds” (i.e. only of the modal logical not lived worlds), to have remained closed or blind-folded for these developments, or have only taken an exotic, orientalized interest in the achievements and legacies of the East. Thus, at the close of 19th century Max Müller, the classic patron of British-German Indology, was still discovering Europe ‘in this cradle of the human race, the native land of the highest philosophy’ (Müller, 1967, p. 10; Müller, 1928). But the recovery of the old disclosed an “idealism”, a happy blending of religion (i.e. the “Hindu Bible of *Vedas*”) and philosophy (of the *Upanishads*) in the “Science of Religion”, which, like medieval theology, enriches our “new world” but is not equal to its modernist challenges. It is in part a misfounded legacy of this dialectic of the reconfigured intellectual periodicity that trumps the superiority of the Greek (Hellenic) origins of Western philosophy (which is echoed again and again from Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, to Richard Sylvan despite his openness to Jaina logic). The disjunctured world (read, “New World”) culture, or Richard Rorty’s denigration of any philosophy’s claim to distinctiveness (for a Martian wouldn’t notice the difference, as he once said to me), that in part accounts for why philosophical interest in Asian religions (for a comprehensive philosophy of religion) has remained enclosed and emasculated within the province of various specializations (the languages, civilization and area-studies, religious studies, and marginally in theology or divinity schools). Such interests remain withdrawn from the domain of serious philosophers who thus need not feel obliged to engage with it on its own conceptual or philosophical terms. Where it makes a slight mark beyond the margins, it takes on yet another form of exoticism, the intellectual orientalism of the 1990’s, for instance.

And here Herder's influence is preeminent. But for Herder's curious interest in the learnings of other cultures, especially of the ancients, among whom he valued most the by-gone heritage of the Indo-Europeans, Hegel's history of philosophy would have remained confined to providing a genealogy of *ecclesia spiritualis* centered entirely on its life-currents in Western history with its origins in the Greek *polis*. *Contra* early Said, in Herder the East or what came to be identified as the Orient does not begin as the West's or Occident's "other", its distant enemy and so on; rather the former marks the historical condition for the possibility of the latter in a dialectical space created by his idea of *aufhebung* (negating and synthesizing), the necessary movement of the infinite over the finite. Temporal cultures are not necessarily marginal to the present; they may even be central to it; it is only that their memory has receded from sight, along possibly with all its artifacts (Merkel, 1939, p. 90).

3 Hegel and the Oriental Renaissance

Hegel was thus open to the findings of the orientalists at a time when there was an immense euphoria over the so-called European "Re-discovery" of the East. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to uncover and assess the seriousness of Hegel's detailed attention to the sources which were becoming available in the early 1800's. In the 18th century, philologists and linguists had discovered the Indo-European family of languages, that rivaled the Semitic *lingua* in its dating or antiquity, inclusiveness, range of dialects, literary output, and affinities with the European speech. Sanskrit drew the greatest excitement, in view of its historical links with Ancient Greek, Latin, Old German, Old Lithuanian and even English, but also for the vast amount of texts and literature of the East that had suddenly reached the doorsteps of the West, where scholars had begun training in Sanskrit, after the fashion of the East India Company (English and Dutch) administrators posted in India. The Romantics, like Herder as we saw a little earlier, were impressed by the worthy contribution of Indo-European to the whole history of human thought. So there was a new-found scientific self-consciousness based on the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe. But an Orient only of the long-gone past, as Herder was to pronounce, and decidedly not of the present-day nepotistic or corrupted Asia or parts of North Africa, and certainly not the more recent Islam (forgetting that it was Arabic scholars who had preserved Aristotle's texts and developed among the first scientific instruments after borrowing "zero" and other mathematical notations from India). The new signal (or "buzz") word was "Aryan" (Airyan) (the term itself comes from Sanskrit *ārya* meaning "the noble", as the Buddha was also called – signifying the mythic descendants and linguistic predecessors of the original Indo-European inhabitants, possibly somewhere in Central Asia, now confined to Europe. Curiously, from being a designation for a linguistic family resemblance in the trade of philologists the paradigm is transposed on to a racial type: hence is born the myth of the Aryan race, which via Herder, Schlegel and possibly Hegel survived for its appropriation two centuries later in the ideology of Nazism: races of the mind.

3.1 Hegel's historicism

More crucially for Hegel, an element that marked early 18th century Oriental scholarship was historicism – the belief, still in a crude form, that history has its own teleology, *telos*. i.e. purpose, direction, end-goal – that there is progression within it regardless of human intentionalities, contingencies or accidentals; and that all cultures are inextricably entangled in this forward-thrust. (Hegel's emergent idea of evolution entailed in this schema is neither organically grounded nor materially-based, but is thoroughly intellectual, which is also spiritual, for it turns out that philosophy and religion have the same object, i.e. eternal truth and its explication in history. Nietzsche and Marx were to invert this evolutionary matrix, of course.) If that is the case, then, again the Orient must inevitably hold out great secrets for historical anthropology in collaboration with philology and indeed philosophy. Hegel was unnerved that no one had yet tried to articulate the whole history of philosophy, the role of religion within it, its relation to freedom and the state, and the spaces occupied by the new-found intellectual traditions of the

Orient. Such an account in part would show up fatuous gaps, ‘extreme of vanity’, in the humanistic secular worldview coming into vogue, which erased the topoi of divine providence in human freedom. A properly-effected philosophy of history – which is also the history of philosophy – must be able to show how the Spirit is mediated through nature, substantiality, ideality and thinking, i.e. Concept (*Begriff*), to yield the unity of spirit in rational knowledge, and how each stage of development is dialectically related to the preceding and futural stages (Hegel, 1985, p. 149).

Hence Hegel’s interest and work in religion was supervenient on his reworking of the teleology of history under critical gaze and hermeneutical thought of Philosophy. As Spivak points out, ‘Hegel places all of history and reality upon a diagram. What we have in Hegel’s narrative (reading of the time-frames that in turn produces history of philosophy) is not an epistemology, but an epistemography, a graduated diagram of how knowledge comes to be’ (Spivak, 1999; also cited in Mandair, 2009, p. 150). And this knowledge is in the concept that history generates. Even his concept of God was barely related to scriptural and faith-based believe in God as a personal, creator being; his idea of God as *Geist*, Spirit, was rather more monistic (one might even say nondualistic) than it was monotheistic (Prabhu, 2010); he had already dismissed the kind of pantheism that philosophers such as Spinoza, Herder and his younger contemporary Schopenhauer came to be associated with; “theism” of the hitherto existing verities was where he was going – in fact he too declared the death of God in as much as for him God had negated himself (GOD), emptied himself into the matrix of progressive history in order so the Spirit could realize its full infiniteness and Absoluteness (Mandair, 2009, p. 135; Hegel, 1984, p. 14, cited in Halbfass, 1988, p. 87). This historical progression of the *Geist* (we might still refer to this conception as God* for our purposes) is delineated through three differentially interrelated modes of inquiry, each creating a discourse or rather presupposing a discourse) which can be readily identified with, namely, *history* (of people and regions), *philosophy* (which covers ethics and polity), and *philosophy of religion* (which includes theology). Under each one of these modalities, Hegel includes extensive discussion of the Oriental world and discursively gives measure to the total contribution and worth of the corresponding Oriental tradition to this particular face of truth. Thus under “philosophy of religion” he develops a very complicated history of religion and theology – beginning with primitive folk practices or magic, through *cultus* or nature-worship and man-worship, developing into particularity without actual freedom, to moments covering abstraction of the essences of things, consequent escape into phantasy and imagination, partial fulfillment in abstract unity in substantiality, followed by an emergent self-consciousness of Being in human person or the subject, to the final concretization of the universal spirit in total freedom within the utopian state (Hegel, 1984; see also Bilimoria, 2014). The structure he gives to these broad configurations (namely, of Identity, Difference, Ground; Abstract Universal, Concrete Particular, Concrete Universal; Unity, Plurality, Totality; Immediacy, Rupture, and Reconciliation) is basically reduced into and identified with the triad of Indeterminacy, Determinacy, and Self-Determination – which parallels the triadic structure of the Concept in terms of Universality, Particularity, and Individuality (in *Philosophy of Right*) (notice the variations in the order), juxtaposed with the triad of negation of logic (the movement from thesis, anti-thesis to higher thesis). Within each there is what Hegel calls *aufgehoben* or sublation, assimilation, of the prior to the latter, more determinate stage. (Each process is from a different disciplinary viewpoint that Hegel deploys.) (Hegel, 1969, pp. 60-61; see also Halbfass, 1992). It should be noted, if not already obvious, that these sequences in history are identical with the sequences or moves ‘in the logical deduction of the conceptual determination of the idea’ in the systems of philosophy, and so it follows that ‘every philosophy is a particular stage of development in the whole process and it has its specified position at which it has its true value and meaning’. Yet Hegel scholars have resisted the clear signal given by Hegel here that he intends to approach history of other philosophies equipped with a prejudged or this wondrously crafted a priori hermeneutics.

3.2 *The location of religion*

What, however, of religion *per se*? As Herder had already decreed, empirical details of what people do when they follow or practice a religion is of little value to Hegel's quest; 'the empirical plurality of religions is unreliable (Mandair, 2009, p. 144). What Hegel is after is a criterion for judging and classifying the *being* of a religion, the extent to which God (as he conceives of the Absolute/Infinite) appears objectively. 'as an object of knowledge for a particular religion... The soil for religious knowledge – knowledge of God – is *thinking*. God can be obtained only by thought' (*ibid.*). That much is the acknowledgement of the *subjective* in the sense of the Cartesian *cogito*. Human beings distinguish themselves from the beasts by virtue of the power of thinking, and they alone have religion. Paraphrasing Hegel's passage Mandair observes: 'Not all religions correspond to the concept; and yet they must contain it, or else they would not be religions'. The question is how and to what extent and in what different ways the concept is present in them; in most religions the concept remains "*unthought*" or unmanifest, or not-yet or perhaps just partially determined. And so an 'inferior god or a nature god [or no god as in Buddhism and Jainism] has inferior, natural and unfree human beings as correlates' (Mandair, 2009, p. 146; but see Forbes, 1975, who rejects the notion that Hegel's system was based on any *a priori* foundation). Because they lack the concept, these religions have never produced anything like the ontological Argument we have in western theologies, beginning with Al-Farabi and St Anselm and Descartes (God is that than of which a greater cannot be thought; and the proof is in the thinking itself of God's being and one cannot think of him as non-existent). 'The only way to avoid thinking about God is *not to think*. And that is what has been so characteristic of Oriental religions. The ontological proof determines the distance that is to be placed between the history of European religions and the prehistory of Oriental religions' (Mandair, 2009, p. 147).¹ What Hegel is really doing is making the shift from God to reason or thinking as that which grasps truth about the world, as Heidegger pointed out: that is the ontotheological move he was critical of (Heidegger, 1978, p. 110).

Recent Hegel scholarship places itself in a better position to consider the form, content and style of scholarship that Hegel brought to bear upon the subject matter of his analysis. Hegel possessed a near-encyclopedic familiarity with material, for which he relied on the eminent Indologist Franz Bopp, and consulted English translations of Sanskrit works by Colebrooke and William Jones; but he shared nothing of scholarly respect and grounding in Buddhist thought, its sophisticated argumentations, mode of deconstructive reasoning, dismissing them as the 'navety of emptiness'. Nor had Hegel much acquaintance with the metaphysics of the *Upaniṣads* that Schopenhauer at least brought to Western philosophy (there is no evidence that Hegel read closely Duperron's *Oupenakhat*). When he later comes across the detailed empirical-analytical pursuits of Sāṃkhya and Nyāya, he modifies his account, though not his substantive view.

For the Chinese material Hegel drew upon missionary accounts and very early renderings of rather difficult and enigmatic tracts from Confucian and Taoist chronicles. Through this maze of Oriental ponderings Hegel was able to find instances or examples of philosophical ideas and concomitant religious practices of people, whether temporally or spatially at a distance that, as it were, fitted the bill for each system regarding *cultus*, ethico-politics, metaphysics-cum-theology. For example, the Chinese emperor is characterized as the ultimate example of the divination of man (and man at that), in whom the particular power of Providence is concretized, but where subjective freedom is utterly absent and the universal power is not at all manifest. This is the moment of Determination, and no further. Confucius, admits Hegel, was something of a moral philosopher, but not yet speculative, which begins to show signs with the Tao (Hegel even sees the trinity in the Tao, but this marks a lousy identity of finite and infinite). The Tao

¹ But see Dale M. Schlitt (1990), section on 'Determinate Religion' (II. 3) where he refers to Ignatius Viyagappa's *G. W. F. Hegel's concept of Indian philosophy*. Viyagappa (1980) shows that Hegel closely analyzed some of the *Upaniṣads* and came very close to the essence of their meaning. Both Jaeshcke, editor of the new German edition of the Hegel lectures, and Hodgson, the editor of the English translation, have paid close attention to Hegel's use of sources.

too stopped developing with the divergent dynasties forestalling real progress; consequently the China of Hegel's day was where Europe was 2,000 years ago!

Hegel apologizes on behalf of the spirit for the journey to have taken the long haul of 2,300 years (if that is measure for antiquity, would 50,000 years of Aboriginal history mean that the spirit was smashed out in its own intoxicating slumber?) 'The universal and knowing spirit has time; nothing presses it. It has at its disposal a mass of peoples and nations whose development has been precisely a means to the emergence of its consciousness'. But even the Greeks, at the dawn of this awakening do not fare much better in comparison to the achievements of the modern world. Hegel sums up the differences between these three moments in the following terms: 'in the East only one man, the despot, is free; in Greece, some are free; but in Germanic life all are free, i.e. man as man is free' (Mandair, 2009, p. 173). There is nevertheless progress from thought to Concept, whose development too has to be traced through history.

In the pure abstract thought, of the Oriental consciousness, there is no place for the Concept, because thought messed up with substance cannot be self-determining, which capacity emerges first in Greek consciousness. Here thought differentiates, gathers differences, and returns to the unity of the Concept; no difference is made between thought and being, between subjective and objective, and the concomitant consciousness of this opposition. This period of naive metaphysics gives way to the third, which is 'the fixing of these differences and consciousness of them'. This is the philosophy of the modern European world, Christian and Germanic philosophy- and through the Germanic people the other European nations, Italy, Spain, France, England, etc. (he would have added North America and Australasia, of course) have acquired a new shape. So philosophy is also if not entirely the prerogative of a certain people; it is not just an abstract, much less, accidental development of ideas, theories, logics, and other modalities of systematic thinking. In the West, then, we are on philosophy's proper grounds.

Hegel goes on to fill in more details of the post-Greek evolution of Western philosophy, and sub-divides the periods to embrace Roman and Neo-platonic movements, followed by ferment of the Scholastics in the Middle Ages — and it is here that there is a lone mention of the Arabic and Jewish philosophers (not by name, although he had already repudiated Spinoza); and the third, most critical period, being the formal phase led by Bacon, Boehme, and Descartes. '*Cogito ergo sum*', Hegel's ultimate sentence in this uniquely idiosyncratic survey notes, are the first words in his system: and it is precisely these words which express modern philosophy's difference from all its predecessors' (Mandair, 2009, p. 173).

At least one could surmise that Hegel in his Teutonic moments felt a strange affinity for India, as he found empathy for its 'natural thinking'. That triumphalist historicity that privileged the West alone, notwithstanding, by a mysterious historical fiat, the Brahman of Indian religion appears speculatively to be a kindred of the infinite Absolute, but that is all it is: a mere speculative abstraction; Brahman is an identity without difference. As the "universal substance" it is still indeterminate and unmediated by self-reflection and self-othering, and as such Brahman is a superficial transcendence which has not found concretization as true subject (Mandair, 2009, p. 151). And Hegel notices a hiatus and incommensurable difference between this metaphysical idea of 'abstract unity without determination', 'dry and barren spiritless substance' and the proliferate polymorphic perversity of the cultic Hindu polytheism with its myriads of 'supersensuous' gods, 'voluptuous' goddesses in their 'wildest sensuality'; which occurs when the purely subjective 'substantiality' (Substantialität) is made the object of worship and devotion, and is evoked via the mythic-phantasmogoric representation as the many-headed, multiple-armed cosmogenic Brahmā (masc.), to grasp all of which the uncharted aberrations of pure aesthetics would not be sufficient (Halbfass, 1988, pp. 89-90; Hegel, 1985). In this respect the experience of "being-in-itself", predicated on the creation, through religious practice of the 'emotionless, will-less, deedless pure abstraction of mind, in which all positive content of consciousness is superseded' is not unlike the wondrous dreamy state of a mother just given birth to the child, or indeed to a state of dreaming or phantasy, in which the subject is fully absorbed in or immersed with the object, and the subject is not grasped as subject because its egoity is not differentiated from the objective. (Even Freud and Lacan would recognize the workings of the collective un-

conscious in this symbolic articulation.) In this *cultus* state of being-dead-to-the-world, the ego has no affirmative relation to God, but one of absorption in the abnegation or nothingness in God, bringing it closer to the pantheism of Schelling, Jacobi and Lessing that Hegel wasted no time disparaging (Mandair, 2009, p. 151).

So the dazzled Hindu philosophers pronounced, possibly in the state of semi-somnambulism ‘I am Brahman’ (not that Brahman is and I am experiencing it, etc.). But philosophy cannot let the divine ‘float away in feeling or in the mists of devotion’. And indeed contemporary philosophy would not. What Hegel finds lacking in Hindu religion is at this stage reached in their philosophy, ‘thinking is still a substance, the in-itself. It is a thinking that cannot yet be applied, not yet grasped in categories, unable to say anything objective about God (that God exists or has a determinate being) since this one substantiality is merely present as pure being-within-itself that remains abstract, purely by itself’ (*ibid*). In such thinking God is merely *abstractum*. This kind of being, Brahman, exists in self-consciousness only, in the abstraction of understanding as posited by me (the seeker). The subjective “I” is the only affirmative element that is present when the Hindu says in and to himself: “I am Brahman”. This is “natural thinking”, not yet conceptual and categorical thinking. Unable to differentiate being from *nihil* (=chaos/time/nature) they are unable to account for the ontological difference between being and beings. As a result, Indians – and for that matter all Orientals – ‘can only think God in *not* thinking, or in *thinking nothing, thinking emptiness*. God cannot be identified with nothingness, god is not nothing’ (Mandair, 2009, p. 148). So if you have a religion or espouse a religious worldview you can easily work out where you stand in the progression of history and in proximity to the concept by placing yourself within the panopticon diagram as the particular in relation to the universal. Hegel climbs out of the threatening void of Western culture by displacing the void/passivity onto an Other (Orient) who stands in for its passivity, to that extent he declares: ‘I am Western/European’ (Mandair, 2009, p. 409).

Hegel clearly seems to have a great deal of trouble in accepting the richness of India’s religious life and its representations, and a little less trouble with Hinduism’s philosophical abstractions. Perhaps this shows the prejudices of his time, of the Christian mind which abhors any presence of the pagan, and of his scholarly type which favors the abstract concept over the seemingly irrational and fantastic appearances of popular religion, myth and the *cultus*. For India Hegel felt that these two poles characterized the whole of the cultural matrix but were articulated in such a way that no real resolution was possible on Indian terrain alone. Such a resolution of opposites was left to those cultures further along the developmental and, it seems, “evolutionary”, sequence. As recent scholars have pointed out, particularly Michael Hardt and Negri in their influential work *Empire* (Hardt & Negri, 2000), such metaphysics that valorizes modernity ‘could not take place but against the backdrop of European expansionism... and the very violence of European conquest and colonialism’ (cited in Mandair, 2009, p. 154). However, Mandair adds, the real threat for Hegel from the colonized was not physical but intellectual – a threat to the very design of the *concept*. Hence the ontotheological schema can be considered a diagram of power – a discourse of knowledge as power as Foucault following Heidegger’s insight on the hidden agenda of modernity – that at the same time provided a means for controlling the constituent and subversive forces within Europe and championed a revolutionary plane of immanence (what Spinoza had hoped for a different kind of modernity that was more embracing), as well as a ‘negation of non-European desire’. But even Marxists and those committed to secular modernity fail to see ‘the polyvalent nature of the Hegelian schema as a diagram of power that exerted a theoretical and practical influence on colonial, neocolonial’ (Mandair, 2009, p. 155) and now postcolonial/globalized formations of power. It has had an indelible influence on the Humanities and Social Sciences, the history and philosophy of religion included, and has worked its way into the Frankfurt Critical School also, whose key representative Habermas as much guilty of its imbrications as were a galaxy of neo-Hegelians in the last century.

4 After Hegel: modern Europeans unthinking the East.

In the final part of this paper, I wish to draw out more explicitly the consequences of Hegel's thinking for the reception of Asian philosophy and Comparative Philosophy of Religion in the West. The focus will be on three figures of twentieth-century philosophy, the phenomenologists Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, and the modernist-poststructuralists Habermas and Slavoj Žižek (representing the somewhat the Germanic Marxian-strain).

Heidegger for his part acknowledges that Hegel is the first thinker to situate philosophical thinking within its history and reaching back to the beginnings of the historical unfoldment of thought, to the well-spring of the possible. But he rejects the view that particular philosophies and epochs emerge from one another with the necessity of dialectical movement, as insisted upon by Hegel. Heidegger is prepared to recognize that the well-spring of other traditions of thought might be entirely different, as it surely is when we look at Indian, Japanese and Chinese thinking. He confesses that he would not have a clue what the *unthought* in these traditions might be, which he believed could only be unearthed by thinkers in those traditions who know the heart of the language. The West could likely have access to it through dialogue (not dialectic) between the languages of the East and West, i.e. through an inquiry into the different ways in which they speak. And this task he considers to be inescapable and unavoidable for Western philosophy. Firstly, to redeem the inevitable and dangerous "Europeanization of the earth and humanity", or the imperialism unleashed on the non-European world (something which Hegel thought was desirable given his belief in the goods and goals of Enlightenment), and secondly, via Nietzschean perspectivism, to help the West overcome its own representationally-laden metaphysics and find its own *Ereignis* (belongingness to the world-proper).

Heidegger would therefore give a quite different estimate of the early life of thought, or the thinking of a historical tradition. Hegel misconceived the purpose of genealogy; he hurried back towards the present and the future, while for Heidegger the beginnings still hold sparks that have to be actively recovered and *liberated* from its modernist ensnares. As for the idea of progress in philosophy, Heidegger had his doubts. While the *telos* of philosophy for Hegel was the moving forward and upward of absolute thinking; for Heidegger it is the unmasking of the difference between Being and being, and to interpret the difference of difference. Heidegger actually engaged in dialogue with Eastern thinkers and visited Japan, but read very little of Asian philosophy; Hegel on the other hand did not look far outside his Berlin window and over-read, without proper hermeneutic keys and clues, vast tracts of Eastern literature.

But Heidegger's own predecessor, Husserl in a work he wrote much later as an answer to Heidegger's *Being and time*, namely, *The crisis of European sciences*, presses a different point to the question of the beginnings of philosophy. Husserl raises the question, 'whether the *telos* which is inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilizations and histories, or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its entelechy?' 'Could it be decided', he asks, 'whether the spectacle of Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than a historical non-sense, of the world?' (Mehta, 1992, p. 192). The questions are, of course, entirely rhetorical, for Husserl is determined that it could not be otherwise. Why else, he asks, it is the case that Europeans would not want to "Indianize" or "Sinthesize" in the way, and to the extent, humanity wants to Europeanize or Westernize? So this is Husserl's judgment:

There lies (in our own Europe) something unique, which all other human groups, too, feel with regard to us, something that, apart from all considerations of expediency, becomes a motivation for them – constantly to understand ourselves properly, will never for example, Indianize ourselves. I think that we feel... that in our European humanity there is an innate entelechy that thoroughly controls the changes in the European image and gives to it the sense of a development in the direction of an ideal life of being, as moving towards an eternal pole. (Mehta, 1992, p. 192)

But this is strikingly Hegel all over again; Heidegger had merely said the term “Philosophy” is Greek in origin, and pointed thereby to its particularity and so also its self-deception (to which Christianity and its arch-critic Nietzsche alike had fallen prey to); Husserl is suggesting that the entire heritage, self-perception, and *telos* carved out for humanity is in the European with its origins in the Greek. There is no other philosophy, Indian or Chinese. Is this not merely a form of philosophical racism?

This judgment becomes somewhat more refined by the time of Merleau-Ponty, who makes the following curious observation back in the 1940s: ‘Like everything built or instituted by man, India and China are immensely interesting. But like all institutions, they leave it to us to discern their true meaning; they do not give it to us completely. China and India are not entirely aware of what they are saying. What they need to do to have philosophies is to try to *understand* themselves and everything else’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 206; see also Halbfass 1988, p. 167; in Prabhu, 2010, p. 127). Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that these remarks come from Hegel, who he suggests ‘invented the idea of “going beyond the Orient by understanding it”.’ It was Hegel, again, who contrasted the Western idea of truth as the total conceptual recovery of the world in all its variety to the Orient, and defined the Orient as a failure in the same understanding. Hegel and those who follow him grant philosophical dignity to Oriental thought only by treating it as a distant approximation of conceptual understanding. Our idea of knowledge is so demanding that it forces every other type of thought to the alternative of resigning itself to being a first sketch of the concept or disqualifying itself as irrational. Now the question, Merleau-Ponty poses, ‘is whether we can claim as Hegel did to have this absolute knowledge, this concrete universal that the Orient has shut itself off from. If we do not in fact have it, our entire evaluation of other cultures must be re-examined’ (Mehta, 1992, p. 193).

The last sentence shows the caveat: maybe we of the West are no better off and are in no position to impose our own expectations and home-bred frameworks on the thinking, ethics, life and politics of other people, that there is danger in such totalizing discourse and Europeanization. But Merleau-Ponty backtracks and invokes Husserl at this point: ‘Yet the fact remains that the West has invented an idea of truth which requires and authorizes it to understand other cultures, and thus to recover them as aspects of a total truth’. As a “historical entelechy” and as itself an historical creation, the West is ‘committed to the onerous task of understanding other cultures’ though it can [also] learn from Indian and Chinese philosophers “to rediscover the relationship to being and the initial option which gave it birth, and to estimate the possibilities we have shut ourselves off from in becoming “Westerners” and perhaps re-open them... This is why we should let the Orient appear in the museum of famous philosophers’ (Mehta, 1992, p. 193). So in the end, Merleau-Ponty, too, does not “settle the question”, and still shares, along with Husserl, the basic presuppositions of Hegel as to the reality and significance of the East beyond anthropological relics and sociological theorizing.

J L Mehta put it all rather succinctly: ‘It was Hegel who described India as “the land of imaginative aspiration”, as “a Fairy region, an enchanted world... as exhibiting the unearthly beauty of a woman in the days which immediately succeed child-birth...”’ (Mehta, 1992, p. 193). This is the Indian world, which really is a Romantic projection, such as we have seen again and again repeated in history, not so long ago in the sixties pop culture with its quest for the elixir of Indian hemp, bhang, the chillam, beads, gurus, and so on. Such an enslaved beauty of history and treasure of and wealth should surrender herself to the masters of history, to whit, to the English Lords, ‘for it is a necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans; and China will, someday or other, be obliged to submit to this fate’. In this way, Hegel cleared the house for imperialism and Western domination, discursively and textually, but also imperially and (finally) politically. There is no word that can describe this process of demonization, colonization, and subjugation.

5 Habermas to Zîzêk modernity, subjectivity, neo-Eurocentricism

Enrique Dussel, as Prabhu has ably noted (Dussel, 1996; cited in Prabhu, 2010, p. 135),

[...] has deconstructed the concept of “modernity” and shown what a difference such a deconstruction makes to our understanding and perception. He points out that thinkers as different as Charles Taylor, Stephen Toulmin, and Juergen Habermas in their accounts of modernity have presented it as an exclusively European occurrence centering around the key events of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, and in Toulmin’s case, the Renaissance. This Eurocentrism is most explicit in Max Weber (1958: 13) [*sic*] when he introduces the “problem of universal history” with the question: ‘To what combination of circumstances should the fact be attributed that in western civilization and in western civilization only cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value? (Dussel, 1996; cited in Prabhu, 2010, p. 135)

According to this model, Europe had exceptional internal resources that allowed it to supersede through its superior rationality and organizational power all other cultures. What is forgotten in this account is the history of European world conquest and the wealth and power that Europe acquired through such conquests and the misery visited on the native peoples. The solipsism of Descartes’ “*ego cogito*” ‘is the mirror image and resonant expression of this inward looking modern subjectivity, unwilling to acknowledge the oppression it causes to the subjected peoples of the New World’ (Dussel, 1996; cited in Prabhu, 2010, p. 135).

Like most modernist philosophers, Habermas seems completely oblivious to the existence of non-Western religions except for some passing reference here and there, especially in his attempt to countenance the rise of theologic fundamentalism globally. While he acknowledges ‘the rise of religious fundamentalism, the return of religious law as an alternative to secular civil law, Europe’s *Sonderweg* with regard to religion and politics, 9/11, and issues relating to naturalism such as biotechnology in the field of genetic engineering’ (Duvenage, 2010, p. 344), the preoccupation is entirely with the challenges faced by Western modernity. In his more recent book-length recent work on *Between Naturalism and Religion Philosophical Essays* his main concern seems to be primarily focused on a defense of “soft” naturalism in which he invokes Kant’s more conciliatory approach in his philosophy of religion to ‘assimilate the semantic legacy of religious traditions without effacing the boundary between the universes of faith and knowledge’ (Habermas, 2008, p. 211). As a prefatory comment to this project, he observes: ‘Nowadays religious fundamentalism, which also exists within Christianity, lends the critique of religion a regrettable topicality’. This is really a veiled allusion to extremism of political Islam and evangelical Christianity; but there is no reference to the convoluted politics and the West’s complicity in the Middle East, especially on the rise of modern Zionism in Israel (Eisen, 2011). Still, Habermas goes on to offer an interesting insight. ‘Nevertheless,’ he remarks, ‘the focus of attention in the West has in the meantime shifted. Here, in the European part of the West, the aggressive conflict between anthropocentric and theocentric understandings of self and world is yesterday’s battle. Hence the project of *incorporating* central contents of the Bible into a rational faith has become more interesting than combating priestcraft and obscurantism.’

Here Habermas finds some solace in Kant’s project of predicating the *principle* of moral law, laws of duty and right on practical reason and the kingdom of ends as the idealistic realization of the doctrine of the *highest good*, while pointing out that Kant never did abrogate the role of religious teachings on morality, especially in the exemplary lives of prophets, saints, monks, and so on, as distinct from the authoritarianism of the ecclesiastical orders, in providing practical reason with its ‘store of suggestive and inspiring images’, in short, a needed epistemic stimulus the postulates with which it (practical reason) attempts to recuperate a *need* articulated in religious terms within the horizon of rational reflection’. We know that Kant tried to justify continuation of some modicum of religious faith as “*fides*” – from which we get fideism – within the limits of reason. Indeed, he wanted to overcome metaphysics in order to make room for faith. But there is no reference to any of the world’s religious traditions, in Kant or in Habermas, that might augment the task of practical reason in its alliance with faith. In fact, Kant is rather dismissive of and disparaging of the religions of the Tutsee, Hawaiians, Hindus and Sino-Tibetans too in rather racist terms as the people belonging to species whose reason is not yet cooked, is rather “raw humanity”, looked upon as ‘immature’ with only the more primitive or aboriginal sensibilities (Kant; see Bilimoria, 2014), Habermas wonders off to discuss Schlei-

ermacher, Kierkegaard, Karl Bath, Bultmann and a host of Christian reformists in the movement towards postmetaphysical thinking in the West. Habermas, one would have to surmise, has not freed himself from the ontotheological biases of his predecessors, so redolent in western preoccupations with the analytical (and continental too) philosophy of religion. Again we see something similar that happened in Hegel's philosophy : the binary of modernity and tradition is set up, where however the categories of tradition – ritual, myth, community, and so on, – are not realities, but categories constructed in opposition to the categories of reason to make possible the self-defining discourse of modernity (Mignolo, 2009, p. 287). Habermas is opposed to postmodern and postcolonial flirtations with the deeply religious that does not submit to – at least in the integrative way in which Kant promised – to the critical benchmark of rationality. Habermas in particular questions the very presence of the term—*post*—as a sign of the problem being addressed rather than an epistemological and political solution disclaimed in these intellectual fads, something that might however pass in time, as all trends do. Habermas in his influential work *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* criticizes what he saw as Foucault's attack on the principle of the Enlightenment, arguing that because Foucault's version of poststructuralist theory hollowed out reason, the result of his theoretical stance could only be unreason or the authoritarian decision-ism of the legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Such an attack on reason, Habermas warned, would put the whole Enlightenment project of critique at risk, in particular the much needed critique of ideology (*a la* Ricoeur) which Habermas revised through discursive action theory in order to take into account postmodernity (see Bilimoria, 2009).

But Habermas, not unlike most Frankfortian modernists who are inextricably linked via Marxism to Hegel, is guilty of what Charles Taylor has termed as 'acultural for believing in the linear transition of all societies to single end-point, a modernity that is immune to the immense cultural markers of difference which exist among them' (Taylor, 2001, pp. 179, 192, 179). It leads to an evasion of the present plight of those whose religions might oppress but might also otherwise hold out redemptive values. However, the greater oppressor in the wider global techno-industrial globalization scape might be "the Europeanization of the earth and humanity", the monolithic cultural forms of secularized Western Christianity.

Foucault was more circumspect in that he saw history as both a form of knowledge and power at the same time, like any other discourse. He envisaged a sober conception of history in which he replaced genealogies for infinite teleology, and cautioned against linear history of any kind, least of all as a grandiose historicization of the other. Foucault was then the most un-Hegelian of philosophers and still provides the best redress to Hegel's systematizing and totalizing tendencies.

While there has been this shift away from the Hegelian idol, there are still some who would see it proper to rekindle the Hegelian "cunning of reason", as the late Stephen Toulmin did, though stripped of its progressive and providential aspects. Toulmin wants to extract a guarantee of rationality from human history and inscribe it within the evolutionary, or revisionary, enterprises of professionalized disciplines. But he does not say why he thinks he is justified in extending this expectation upon the peoples of other worlds that may not be committed to the rationality of reason (Prabhu, 2010).

Agnes Heller once said that the Hegelian adventure of World Spirit was not consciously meant to be a fiction, but neither was it meant to be the reconstruction of facticity. One must wonder then what it was meant to be? A script for a dinner party? Clearly, such grandiose philosophical histories become weapons in the hands of unscrupulous colonizers of one sort or another, and while Hegel and Schopenhauer may have fallen out of favor in modern or post-modern scholarship their ghosts still haunt the modes of discourse within the academy and outside it, in the phenomenon of "Orientalism" and neo-colonialism (Dussel, 1996).

And finally to Slavoj Žižek who seems to have embarked on the path of resurrecting despite his – or perhaps in cohorts with – commitment to Left-Marxist anti-capitalist anti-liberal-democratic-multiculturalism and intensely postsecular and political, even revolutionary ideals, of the Hegelian kind. How so? By bringing the political into the erstwhile formulations of Cartesian subjectivity as the common ground (commonality) for the universal. Of course, neither

subjectivity nor the universal are as they stood in Descartes' *cogito*, the subject, and Hegel respectively; rather in contemporary discourse they appear to be stripped of their excessive, un-freedom, repressive and exclusivist paradigms, which has led to the rejection of the unified transcendental Subject (God, Man, Nation, etc.), the universality, and instead the void proliferated by decentered multiple subjectivities (gay, feminine, ethnic, religions) corresponding to the theoretical movements of postmodernism, postcolonial theory, and their ideological complement, New Age Gnosticism – all of which he finds unpalatable and unwholly-making. 'Žižek confronts these false alternatives by using Lacanian psychoanalysis to reappraise the standard narrative of German idealism, mainly of Schelling and Hegel' (Mandiar, 2009, p. 398; see also Žižek, 2000). For they dared to confront head-on what he calls "constitutive madness of reason" (radical madness, in Derrida's terms). The subject in its "night of the self" is a paradoxical creature, not without self-contradictions and inner tensions, etc. It follows, or perhaps a theory in tandem, is that if that is what the particulars are constitutive of in the world/void then there cannot be a conception of the universal of human subjectivity, other than the purely abstract. 'Rather, universality is a site of unbearable antagonism... or minimal difference with itself. So subjectivity becomes a ground play of the political and awaited universalization' (*ibid.*). And here, like Habermas, Žižek does not rule out the role of religion, indeed in the postsecular ideology it is a necessary dialectical force to be reckoned with. However, the "return to the religious" – the phrase is something of a cliché now – is the old authoritarian, orthodox, God-centered, anthropocentric, Church-decreed religion of faith and revelation, but rather of the kind St Paul discovered on the road to Damascus; and here he follows in the footsteps of Tsow Bidou who has also written approvingly on St Paul. However, he feels threatened by the alternatives that the Western – albeit in certain quarters of the Arts in the academy and popularly in the 'New Age-Yoga' faddism – is naively gulping down its belly, in particular Eastern "nihilisms" and the "Asiatic multicultural multitude" (Žižek, 2001; see also, Žižek, Crockett & Davis, 2006) portending the rapid Asianization of (what remains) of the West, or of the world at large (e.g. Chinese expansionist ambitions in Tibet, Japan, Taiwan, South China Seas, now reaching across the Indian Ocean to the Pacific on one side and Africa and the Americas on the other side). But this economic imperial (if not exactly colonial) ambitions have been learned (vengefully perhaps) from Europe's own provincial and parochial self-legitimations of its past and glorious colonialism, or the presumed inevitable "Europeanization of the earth" syndrome. Whither the "Leftist Rebel Jesus"?

At a key-note address to the American Academy of Religion five years back, Žižek provocatively aligned Jesus not with the Incarnational divinity within the Trinity (the possible suggestive polytheism aside) but with the hero of the Young Marx and Engels, the frontline fighter and social struggler dear to all Marxists-Leftist revolutionaries: 'That is the Jesus I would put my rational faith on!' (Žižek, 2009). Here is Žižek's theo-humanist confession in more concise terms, discoursing on the true nature of dialectic:

And that is why I have always liked the radical eschatological Christian vision whereby the idea is that when humanity fights for salvation, for good against evil, then this is something that not only concerns humanity but, in a way, concerns the faith of the universe and the fate of God Himself ... The whole point is to historicize the so-called eternal questions, not in the sense of reducing them to some historical phenomenon but to introduce historicity into the absolute itself ... And here again, we are back to Hegel and Schelling, because if there is anything to learn from German idealism it is precisely this dialectical attitude. This can also be found in Heidegger and the perspective of how the disclosure of Being requires the human in the sense of *Dasein* (being-there). That is to say, the contingent humanity is at the same time the only site of disclosure of the absolute itself. (Žižek & Daly, 2004, pp. 88-89)²

² See also more maverickly, www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/videos/.

The long and short of it is that Žižek, enamored of the achievements of Schelling and Hegel, makes a similar move of climbing out of the passivity/madness of reason (in Derridean terms) by hoisting the void/passivity on an Other. What he knows of and says about Europe's *other* are derived from his Occidental predecessors, Hegel, Marx, Husserl and Heidegger in his references to the "pre-modern societies" and what is lacking in them and why their anti-colonialism is not as fantastic an achievement as critiques of Orientalism have assessed it to be. So Mandair rightly asks: 'But does Žižek not make the same move in his effort to reconstitute a "progressive /leftist" Eurocentricism out of Christianity's self-sacrifice?' (Mandair, 2009, p. 409; see also Žižek, 2000). The oppressors await yet to be liberated from their own worst enemies: their reason, whether that of the sanity of science or the insanity of natural theology.

Dedication

I am dedicating this paper to the memory of the late Professor Max Charlesworth, Founder-Editor of *Sophia. International Journal in Philosophy of Religion* (Springer), who encouraged and guided me in developing our (Australasia's) own comparative and cross-cultural shifts in Philosophy of Religion, which ensued first in the landmark paper "What is the 'subaltern' of the comparative philosophy of religion", *Philosophy East & West*, 53 (3): 340-366, 2003, and later in an anthology I edited with Andrew Irvine, *Postcolonial philosophy of religion*, Springer, 2008.

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