

KANT AND HEGEL: Basic insights of their philosophies and their critique of religion – contemporary relevance and future perspectives

(an outline of six lectures about Kant and Hegel by **Prof. Michael Welker**)

Kant and Hegel are regarded as the most important German philosophers with an enormous radiating power over the centuries. They developed fascinating theories of knowledge they also offered a very subtle critique of religion. The six lectures will offer introductions into their groundbreaking thought and will illuminate their transformative critique of religion, called “Aufhebung der Religion” by Hegel.

The first lecture describes the revolutionary development of the transcendental philosophy and Kant’s program of a “Critique of Pure Reason”. It explains the developmental logic behind it in the history of Western philosophy in general and in Kant’s own intellectual development in particular. It unfolds Kant’s complex epistemology, including his theory of self-consciousness.

The second lecture offers an introduction into Kant’s ethics, presented in several of his books, particularly in his “Critique of Practical Reason”. It shows the power of this transcendental ethics, his theory of autonomy and freedom, but also its limits. The lecture explains the dissatisfaction with the “formalism” of his ethics and the attempts to improve the foundations of philosophical ethics. It moves on to an explanation of problems of moral communication and ethical orientations in the contemporary West.

The third lecture unfolds basic structures of Kant’s theory of religion, presented in his book “Religion Within the Boundaries of Reason Alone”. It shows that this theory is deeply rooted in his moral philosophy. The lecture will explain the important difference between the denunciatory and a transformative critique of religion. It will explain why the transformative forms of critique of religion, developed by Kant and Hegel, have been more effective than the more dramatic sounding denunciatory forms.

The fourth lecture will deal with the fascinating genesis of thinking that we find in the writings of the young Hegel. It will show that Hegel confronts himself already with the challenge of a multi-systemic approach toward political, philosophical, moral and religious reality. Today, many thinkers in the West regard this as the challenge of “postmodernity”. The lecture will explain why Hegel develops a complicated theory of the spirit, in order to cognitively and normatively control the complexity of the diagnosed cultural situation.

The fifth selection deals with Hegel’s very complicated yet very famous book “Phaenomenology of the Spirit”. It will try to raise an interest in a non-reductionistic multi-thematic philosophizing and philosophy. Epistemological, moral, political, aesthetic and religious investigations are woven together in this philosophical masterpiece. Dealing with this book helps to appreciate intricate philosophical methods, such as the “dialectics”.

The sixth lecture reconstructs Hegel’s complex critique of religion in his early writings (esp. in his book “Faith and Knowledge” = “Glauben und Wissen”), in his “Phaenomenology of the Spirit” and in his lectures on the “Philosophy of Religion”. Again, the great power of a transformative critique of religion will be demonstrated. Opportunities to cast a view on further developments in the so-called Left-Hegelianism and its critique of religion will be given.