Abstract
European-Western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche and to Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein has rightly claimed to represent a high standard. In ancient times and in the Middle Ages there were vivid exchanges with non-Western traditions, especially Egyptian and Arabic philosophies. But since the philosophy of European Enlightenment, a large part of European-Western philosophy maintains that philosophy of a high standard exists only here. This statement can be called Eurocentric and is highly contestable. The clearest and strictest foundation of philosophical Eurocentrism is given by Hegel. By analyzing and criticizing his concept of philosophy in Section II, I will discuss Eurocentrism in philosophy. In Section III, I will proceed to indicate the conditions necessary to overcome it.

Keywords
eurocentrism, Hegel, philosophy of religion, intercultural philosophy, sub-Saharan Africa, world history.

I Introduction
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1 This article is based on my Dutch article »Hegels eurocentrische filosofiebegrip,« in: H. van Rappard, and M. Leezenberg (eds.), Wereldfilosofie. Wijsgerig denken in verschillende culturen, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010, pp. 43–59.
changes with non-Western traditions, especially Egyptian and Arabic philosophies. But since the philosophy of European Enlightenment, a large part of European-Western philosophy maintains that philosophy of a high standard exists only here. This statement can be called Eurocentric and is highly contestable. The clearest and strictest foundation of philosophical Eurocentrism is given by Hegel. By analyzing and criticizing his concept of philosophy in Section II, I will discuss Eurocentrism in philosophy. In Section III, I will proceed to indicate the conditions necessary to overcome it.

II What Is Eurocentrism in Philosophy?

Hegel worked out a concept of philosophy, which expresses in a clear and strict manner what philosophy means in the European tradition. At the same time he claimed that philosophy in this clear and strict sense exists only in Europe. This claim is characteristic for the thought of the European Enlightenment, to which Hegel at least partly belongs. Therefore one can say that in the thought of this period of history a Eurocentric concept of philosophy prevailed. To give approximate time limits, Eurocentrism in philosophy can be seen as having been founded in the period from 1750 to 1830. The manner in which Hegel founded Eurocentrism still holds sway in European-Western philosophy up to the present day.

Eurocentrism, as it prevailed during European Enlightenment, was advocated in England by John Locke and David Hume, in France by A. R. J. Turgot and Voltaire, and in Germany by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Immanuel Kant, to give some examples. This means that during this period it was in play all over Europe. For the origin and dissemination of Eurocentrism, the idea of progress is very important. This idea means that world history as a whole, with all of its relevant developments, comes to its absolute peak in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this way it is possible to frame a concept of history that covers the whole world. However, this possibility comes at a high price. Although certain periods of history are judged in a differentiated way, as for instance the high estimation of Greek and Roman

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2 Also see N. Zack, The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism and its Comfortable Legacy, pp. 85–98 in this journal.
antiquity, »Europe is the standard within which all the different phenomena in space and time get their place as historic stadia.« Europe of this period of time understands itself as superior with regard to all other times and cultures, and – as will be shown later – Europe defines what philosophy or science is.

Before this period of prevailing Eurocentrism, during the years from 1689 until 1714, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz exchanged letters with Catholic missionaries, who lived and worked in China, about the culture and philosophy of this country. He admired Chinese philosophy and wanted to learn from it. And already in the years 1780 and then on a bigger scale since the beginning of the nineteenth century, philosophical Eurocentrism has been interrupted by an interest in Indian philosophy. During this period, important philosophical texts of the Indian tradition were translated in England and in Germany. The first English translation of the *Bhagavadgita* by Charles Wilkins appeared in 1785. Henry Thomas Colebrooke translated parts from the *Vedas* and in 1805 he published an *Essay on the Vedas*. A translation of the *Bhagavadgita* into Latin by the German poet and philosopher August Wilhelm Schlegel appeared in 1823 and was accessible to the learned public throughout Europe.

These were first steps, which show the rise of an interest in Indian thought as genuine philosophy. A milestone in this history was the essay by Wilhelm von Humboldt from 1826, in which he interpreted the *Bhagavadgita* in the context of the great work *Mahabharata* from the early history of Indian philosophy. A year later, Hegel wrote a lengthy review of this essay. In this review he appraised Indian thought in detail, which he estimated highly, but which he did not recognize as philosophy or – precisely speaking – not as »proper« philosophy. I will explain that a little bit later.

The interest in Indian philosophy, the translations by the English orientalists, and the contributions of A. W. Schlegel and Humboldt did not change, however, Eurocentric thought in the general public’s consciousness. Also the philosophy departments of the universities went

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3 J. Rohbeck, *Die Fortschrittstheorie der Aufklärung. Französische und englische Geschichtsphilosophie in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt: Campus, 1987, p. 87. This sentence, and all quotations from German texts in this essay, are translated by me.

on to judge non-European thought in the same way as Hegel. Exceptions are Arthur Schopenhauer, who studied Buddhism, and Paul Deussen, who knew a lot about Indian culture and compared Indian and European philosophy. Also, in a certain period of his work, Nietzsche was a follower of Schopenhauer, as is well known. And he had friendly contacts with Deussen for quite a long time. In the second half of the twentieth century there is a remarkable interest by some European philosophers in non-Western philosophies, especially those of the Far East. This is true for the later Martin Heidegger starting from about 1950, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well for other European philosophers from this period who are still regarded as exceptions. I will come back to this later in Section III.

What does Hegel’s Concept of Philosophy Mean for the Judgment of the Philosophies of Non-Western Cultures?

In a certain sense, the works of Schlegel and Humboldt mentioned here can be seen as the beginning of Comparative Philosophy, which in addition to European-Western philosophy also studies the philosophy of the Far East: India, China, and somewhat later also Japan. This philosophical work, which is similar to Comparative Religious Studies, has led to remarkable results. Here I will just mention the names of Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto, Helmuth von Glasenapp, Gerard van der Leeuw, and Gustav Mensching. Comparative Philosophy, however, at that time and up to now is mainly not dealt with in the Philosophy departments of the European-Western universities, but in the rather small departments of Indology, Sinology, and Japanology or Comparative Religious Studies. This work does not penetrate the general public’s consciousness either. Philosophy departments confine themselves to European-Western philosophy. Hegel’s concept of philosophy is obviously still effective here, even if philosophers do not follow Hegel any more, as for instance is the case with Neo-Kantians. In this connection it should be mentioned that the judgments of non-Western cultures by Kant are radically negative in a way similar to those of Hegel (see below).
What, According to Hegel, is »Proper« or »True« Philosophy?

Hegel’s Eurocentric concept of philosophy is expressed in the review of Humboldt’s essay and also especially in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy, in which he differentiates between »preforms« of philosophy and what he calls »proper« or »true« philosophy.

According to what he writes in his review of Humboldt’s essay, Indian thought with its »sources of philosophy,« which reach back far in history, merely represents »preforms« of philosophy. Indian religion, cosmogony, theogony, mythology etc. cannot be called philosophy, because therein you can find »many fine reflections,« which are, however, mostly combined with »arbitrariness of fantasy« and »superficial representations« (Hegel 1971: 203). That can be seen for instance in the fact that the »outer appearance (the maja)« of the highest God Brahman is manifold in an unclear way (ibid.: 198). The »many shapes which he [Brahman] adopts always get more in number and also more arbitrary« (ibid.). Brahma, in whom Brahma emerges as subject »appears mainly in relation to Vishnu or Krishna and to Shiva in a more definite shape and as one figure of Trimurti, the Indian Holy Trinity« (ibid.). That, for Hegel, is a really important idea. Examined in more detail it is a lesser form of Trinity, »which only in Christianity has developed to the true idea of God« (ibid.: 199). In the Indian representation it »has grown out to something wrong« (ibid.).

In the Introduction to his Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Hegel deals with Indian thought and with Chinese thought as well. In Chinese thought he finds only very abstract »notions and oppositions« (Hegel 1959a: 214). Here he is referring to the figures and lines seen so often in the Chinese tradition, where one is continuous and the other one interrupted. »The first figure is called Yang, and the second one Yin« (ibid.). They are the »principles of all things« (ibid.). They are combined with each other in many ways, so that sixty-four figures are created, which determine matter as a whole. From the different combinations, the sky, the water, the fire, the thunder, the wind, the

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mountains, and the earth are derived. »One can therefore say,« Hegel concludes, »that here from oneness and twoness all things have come forth« (ibid.: 215). The first continuous line, the Chinese »also call Tao, the origin of all things or nothingness« (ibid.). In other texts of the Chinese tradition it is said »that from five elements the whole nature is made, namely from fire, wood, metal, water, and earth« (ibid.). Statements of this kind are, however, according to Hegel, not philosophy, because they »depart too much from empirical observations« and not from thinking (ibid.). A systematic order is missing, everything »stands there higgledy-piggledy.«\(^7\)

In the field of ethics Hegel finds within Chinese thought »only poor morals« (ibid.). He gives a low rank to the teachings of Confucius, as they contain »a lot of common sense« and a »mainly popular morality,« but no »speculative philosophy« (ibid.). Therefore Confucius’ thought cannot be regarded as »proper« philosophy. Although some of his ideas are »not without spirit,« they do not belong to »true« philosophy. Confucius was more »a practical political leader« than a philosopher (ibid.).

With regard to ancient Indian texts, Hegel finds within them – similar to what is stated in the Humboldt review – quite »interesting general ideas« (ibid.: 216). Being is thought of as »originating and perishing« and as the »representation of a circulation« (ibid.: 217). The well known »metaphor of Phoenix,« which comes from the East, expresses »that death is part of life, that life passes into death and death passes into life, that being itself is already the negative and the negative is the positive, affirmative, and that the one turns over to the other, and that life in general exists only in this dialectical process« (ibid.). On the other hand Hegel is critical of how these ideas »only occur incidentally« and in the context of Indian religion. They are »general, but totally abstract ideas« (ibid.). They are not presented in a connected manner, which departs from thinking as such. Therefore this is not »proper« philosophy. Because these ideas are thoroughly intermixed with mythological representations they cannot be considered within the history of philosophy (ibid.).

The »mythological forms of philosophy,« as he terms the efforts of the Indian tradition, are embedded by Hegel in the more general statement, that »religion as such, like poetry, contains philosophical

\(^7\) »Wir sehen daran, wie Alles kunterbunt unteneinandersteht« (ibid.: 215).
ideas« (ibid.: 216; my emphasis). For that statement he refers above all to ancient Greek religion, to Homer, and to the poets of the tragedies; but also Friedrich von Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are mentioned in this connection. These texts express, like Indian religion and poetry, »deep and general ideas« about »fate« and about »life and death, being and perishing, originating and dying« (ibid.). This way of expressing ideas, however, will not be adopted in the history of philosophy. For this history limits itself to the systematic display of pure thinking (ibid.).

The Authoritative Meaning of Hegel’s Science of Logic

For Hegel there is only one measure when it comes to judging what thinking as pure thinking is.8 What conforms to this measure is recognized as »true« or »proper« philosophy. This measure is his Science of Logic. Therein pure thinking is represented in its different forms. This representation is systematic and interconnected. It deals only with thinking itself and nothing else, and therefore with pure thought. Thinking carries out a reflective movement by directing itself on itself and thinking can thus represent what it finds in itself. By doing that, Hegel can be seen as going back to Aristotle’s νοησιϚ νοησεωϚ, thinking of thinking, or to Kant’s list of categories in his Critique of Pure Reason. Hegel starts with the thought of »pure being,« which he interprets as the immediate or the undetermined. »Pure being« can only be thought of by passing over to »pure nothingness.« Pure nothingness has to keep away all mediation and determination from pure being. The permanent movement of this process of thinking forms the dynamic unity of being and nothingness, and Hegel calls this »becoming.« As such, it forms the operational base of dialectical thought, which proceeds in many variations from a thesis via an antithesis to a synthesis.

Proceeding in ascending fashion, Hegel shows which steps from the immediate and undetermined lead to always more mediation and determination. Through this approach he derives the categories of quality, quantity, relation and modality, which are well known from

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Kant’s list of categories. Interestingly, Hegel does not start with the categories of quantity, like Kant did, but with those of quality. In addition to Kant’s list, the theory of concept, sentence, and conclusion is dealt with, which shows how a probative argumentation has to proceed. By doing that, Hegel goes back to some central themes of formal logic which have been worked out in the history of logic since Aristotle, and he shows how they form part of his dialectical way of thought. In the end he comes to the »absolute idea,« in which all steps of mediation and determination are summed up. Every step is critically self-referential. Thus it becomes completely clear what, according to Hegel, »thinking« or »pure thinking« means.

Because pure thinking does not accept any authority outside of itself, it is at the same time the expression of absolute freedom. And the absolute freedom of pure thinking demands, in the social and political relations of the human world, the realization of freedom in the best possible way by a »free constitution« (Hegel 1959a: 227).

The Science of Logic forms the foundation of Hegel’s »system of philosophy,« as he presented its blueprint in the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences. Herein the theories of pure thinking and its applications are represented. This concept of pure thinking is used as a measure in order to judge where in European history and in other cultures particular ways of thought, which have this specific form, can be found and can be recognized as »proper« philosophy.

This position is in itself completely clear. Its Eurocentric character lies in the claim that Hegel’s Logic and his »system of philosophy« are absolutely and universally valid and therefore can be used at any time and everywhere as a standard. With this claim it is forgotten, however, that Hegel’s philosophy and his presentation of pure thinking in the Science of Logic are worked out in the German language of the beginning of the nineteenth century and that they make use of conceptual tools predominant in European philosophy in that period of history. Hegel is not aware of the cultural and historical dependence of his philosophy. This dependence is expressed in the whole development of thinking from the immediate and undetermined to absolute mediation.

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and determination. That means, thinking is from the very beginning directed to its end: thinking of mediation and determination. Outside of this way of thinking, no other ways are accepted. By means of this thinking, Hegel wrongly claims, everything can be thought of and known and can find its place in the totality of thought.

With this concept another one is directly connected: that everything capable of being thought of and known can also be made. For reality corresponds with this way of thought. Reality is only and can only be thought of in the way as it is explained in the Science of Logic and the »system of philosophy«, which is built thereupon. But the way of thought as it is represented in Hegel’s philosophy is not really »pure thinking.« It does not exist independently from the language of its time and by the same token depends on the given social and historical situation.

For this reason, the foundation of Hegel’s concept of »proper« or »true« philosophy is problematic. But this concept is obviously used when Hegel decides where philosophy can be found or not. He answers himself the question: »where do we have to begin with the history of philosophy?« by saying »It begins there where thinking as pure thinking emerges, where it is generally present, and where this purity, this generality is essential, truthful and absolute« (Hegel 1959a: 224). This is, according to Hegel, the case in ancient Greece and is connected with the fact that political freedom flourished there (ibid.: 234–235). This statement means at the same time: in the thought of »the Oriental world cannot be spoken of proper philosophy« and there the freedom of the person is not even in principle discussed (ibid.: 227). As for the beginning of philosophy with the ancient Greek people, Hegel states that they do have the freedom of thought, but that real freedom still is affected with a restriction, for, as we know, in Greece slavery still existed (ibid.: 235). The principle of political freedom is already there, but is only realized with a group of free citizens.

**The Application of Hegel’s Concept of Philosophy in Judging Non-Western Cultures**

The difficulty that we have pointed out in connection with Hegel’s notion of »proper« or »true« philosophy also has consequences for his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. In these Lectures it is a
decisive criterion whether a certain part of the world is dealt with in the history of the world, if »proper philosophy« can be found there. In the Introduction to the Lectures some general arguments are given why in the Far East, in both Americas and Australia before the colonization, and on the many islands between South America and Asia and first of all in sub-Saharan Africa no state, no highly developed religion and no philosophy, no mere »preforms« of philosophy have existed, and therefore no history has taken place.\(^{11}\) History is for Hegel a history of states, which, according to his clearly falsified concept, did not exist in these parts of the world. Research in cultural anthropology has proved that, for instance in sub-Saharan Africa, different types of states have existed, which have changed and developed in the course of time.\(^{12}\) The same is true for central Mexico and the Andes of South America.

The kinds of religion present in these regions are »primitive« according to Hegel, because they do not know about a singular highest being, on whom everything is dependent and from whom everything gets its explanation, which is what could be expected in a community which is organized as a state. Also, in a state, one person is in the top position and makes the necessary decisions (this will be dealt with in more detail when the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion will be examined). Another step from religious representations to philosophical concepts, which is missing in those »primitive« religions, would be necessary, if one wants to get from a religious explanation of the world and of humanity to a philosophy which is based on pure thinking only.

The exclusion of non-Western parts of the world is here, in the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, somewhat less radical than in those on the History of Philosophy. In the »Oriental world« of China, India, Persia, the Near East and Egypt, Hegel not only finds »preforms« as in the history of philosophy, but already a »first stage« of world history. For in these areas there existed already functioning states. The idea is maintained, however, where world history only reaches its aim of realizing liberty by being secured by a »free constitution« is in the Greek and Roman world of ancient Europe. This reali-

zation of liberty attains full definition in Europe north of the Alps – Hegel speaks of the »Christian Germanic world« – that is to say in the modern constitutional state.¹³

As for the states of the Oriental world, Hegel says that only one person is free, the despotic ruler. This person creates a certain stability of public life in the regions where he rules. Therefore, one can speak here about history and about a first stage of world history. Under the conditions of the aristocratic societies of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire some persons are free: the free citizens, besides whom we find half-free artisans and tradespeople as well as the totally un-free slaves, who have to work in the fields, etc. The free citizens devote their lives to politics and bear responsibility for their actions. This part of the population has time enough and is in the situation to do philosophy in the proper sense of the word. In the modern world of the constitutional states, as they have emerged in Europe north of the Alps, as a final stage of history, all persons are free. Strictly speaking, one has to say that – differing from his text – in Hegel’s time this was only true for the adult male citizens. This freedom of the citizens, which is guaranteed by a constitution, is the precondition for the definite flourishing of philosophy.

Those parts of the world, where no state, no highly developed religion, and no philosophy exist, need not be treated in the philosophy of world history, not even in the sense of a first stage of world history, where »preforms« of philosophy are possible. In these regions no freedom does exist. That is most radically the case in sub-Saharan Africa. There, »slavery forms the basic relation of the law« (Hegel 1955: 225). What Hegel writes about Africa is not only extremely negative, it also shows – unlike most parts of his philosophy – that he is badly informed. Let me give just a few examples. He describes sub-Saharan Africa as »one highland as a whole,« which has a »very small coastal strip inhabited only at certain places« (ibid.: 215). That is, of course, a nearly absurd description of the geography of Africa. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century wild groups of warriors, Hegel writes, have attacked the people of the coastal strip and have driven them to the edge

of the coast. These kinds of events, however, did not occur in the history of that region.\textsuperscript{14}

The »religion of sorcery,« which is dealt with in more detail in the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, is, according to Hegel, based on the primitive idea that man is the master of nature and gives commands to it. It is part of this religion that man »does not respect himself nor others« (ibid.: 224). Therefore it is permissible to the Europeans that they sell these people as slaves. Generally speaking, slavery is wrong. Hegel says, but in the African context he argues against its sudden abolition (ibid.: 226). In »all negro-states,« which are not really accepted as states, »the monarch has unconditional power over his subjects.« And this is »nearly the same« all over Africa south of the Sahara (ibid.: 231). This statement proves that Hegel has no idea about the different political systems in traditional African countries before the colonization by European countries. The »ethical life in the families,« which has been a main support of the African societies and still is till today, is judged by Hegel as »not strong« (ibid.: 228). If, from his dubious sources, he assumes the truth of the information that the king of Dahomey had 3333 wives (ibid.: 227), this says more about his preference for the number 3 than about the real situation in the area of what is now the state of Benin.

As mentioned above, Hegel’s way of thought is Eurocentric in the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion too. Compared to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, in which the Eurocentric concept of philosophy is expressed in the clearest way, and also to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, where it is already weakened to a certain extent, it is even less prominent in the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. All religions in the world are dealt with in these lectures. Insofar as they are not in line with the »absolute religion« of Christianity, they are not recognized as »true religions,« but just as »determined religions.« Hegel construes things in terms of an ascending line that starts from the »religion of nature.« The »religion of sorcery« and the »Chinese religion of the state and the Tao« form parts of it. Also the Indian religion of »being within oneself and imagination,« the Persian »religion of light« and the Egyptian »religion of the riddle« belong to the »religion of nature.« The »religions of the spiritual individuality«

form a stadium in between on the way to the »revealed religion« of Christianity. As religions of this stage Hegel deals with the Jewish »religion of the sublime,« in which everything depends from one God, »Mohammedanism« as the extension of worshipping one God to all nations, the ancient Greek »religion of fate and of beauty,« and finally the ancient Roman »religion of suitableness.« This whole development is orientated towards one aim: the »absolute religion« of Christianity, as it is practiced in the European world. 

A More In-Depth Example of Eurocentric Thought: Hegel’s Treatment of Animism

In order to give an example of Hegel’s Eurocentric way of thought, I will present here his treatment of the first form of the »religion of nature,« namely the »religion of sorcery,« in more detail. The general characteristic of this religion is, as I have already mentioned, the »power above nature,« which the »single self-consciousness« has or means to have. This idea is, according to Hegel, »primitive,« but already contains »something spiritual.« A first form of the presence of God, who is spirit, in the human world, is here at stake. However, in the »religion of sorcery« the spirit is only present in the most simple and abstract way. Therefore, this religion is religion in the wildest and roughest form.

For a more precise description of »direct sorcery,« Hegel uses reports of travelers from the year 1819 on the religion of the Esquimaux. These people call their sorcerers »angekoks.« They believe that the angekoks have the power to make storms or calm winds or to allow whales to come close to the human habitat. They do that by using certain words, making certain gestures, and performing dances until they fall into some kind of trance. But these people have »no picture, no human being, no animal, nothing of this kind« for worshipping. According to W. Jaeschke, the editor of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, which I am using here, Hegel did not carefully read and correctly use the reports on dance, which had been given in connection

with the description of general cultural habits and were not related to religious forms of sorcery.\(^{16}\)

Hegel also finds the »religion of sorcery« in Mongolia, Africa, and China. For his detailed treatment of Africa, he uses reports of very early Christian missionaries, especially by the Italian Capuchin J. A. Cavazzi from the year 1687.\(^{17}\) Hegel is aware of the fact that these reports are not very reliable, because the missionaries are biased in dealing with non-Christian ideas and habits. But he does not try to get more recent and more reliable sources, which were available during his time. He quotes Cavazzi’s reports in detail and takes them over literally. The conjuring of spirits, the treatment of ill people with very cruel methods, and frequent forms of cannibalism are often mentioned in this context. Hegel writes about the practices and knowledge of rainmakers without giving any sources. They obviously have a great deal of knowledge about the changing situation of the weather, but they also use magical practices. Hegel talks in a similar way about medical men and women. They know a lot about medicinal herbs and they take into account the social and intersubjective relations of the patients when they try to cure them. Apart from that, they often apply magic practices.\(^{18}\) Quite different and more adequate information about the behavior of rainmakers and traditional healers was available from the extant literature, which Hegel did not use.

It must be mentioned that the practices of the persons mentioned by Hegel, belong to a higher form of sorcery, according to him. Hegel speaks of »indirect« or »mediated sorcery.« The medicinal herbs are means to make the power of sorcery work. This is possible through some kind of reflection, which is a spiritual procedure that interrupts the power of sorcery. For Hegel it is important that in this connection some form of objectiveness takes place. The medicine is applied in a conscious manner. What is worshipped attains a certain independent status in this way. Hegel also deals with so called »fetishes,« which play an important role in African religions. Animals, plants, rocks, rivers,

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\(^{17}\) J. A. Cavacci, Historische Beschreibung der im unteren Mohrenland liegenden drey Königreiche Congo, Matamba und Angola […] aus dem Welschen übersetzt, Munich, 1694. (Original Italian edition 1687.)

and also artefacts such as products of woodcarving are revered. They are used to protect places of residence or to mark holy spots, where religious practices are performed. In the context of the traditional African religions these elements also have their clear and generally accepted functions.

But according to Hegel, all those elements belong to the lowest and roughest form of religion. In China the religion of the state is developed one step further. The power of sorcery and all power over nature and human beings are attributed to one person, the emperor. By the way, the Chinese religion is not part of the lowest form of religion in all the different renditions of these lectures. In these cases Chinese religion belonged to the »religions of being within oneself and of imagination« (Hegel 1985a: p. 185–197), like the Indian religion.19

The Anchorage of Hegel’s Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy in His »System of Philosophy«

In his 1821 book Elements of the Philosophy of Right, Hegel’s Eurocentrism, as it is expressed in the above mentioned Lectures, is anchored in his »system of philosophy.« As is well known, in this book Hegel gives a more precise presentation of the passage on the »objective spirit« in the encyclopedic presentation of his system of philosophy, which he first had published in 1817. In the chapter »The Civil Society,« which follows after the presentation of right and morality and the philosophy of the family, and which precedes the treatment of the state, we find a justification of colonialism. This phenomenon has to be conceived of as a necessary and also a legitimate consequence of the inner dynamics of civil society. The civil society is, in Hegel’s time, – and to a certain extent also today – »in an action without restraint«

19 In another article I have shown that these presentations of Hegel, which are badly documented and which uncritically take over the biased views of Christian missionaries, can be confronted with texts of the younger Hegel from the years 1799–1801/02, when not the concept of »spirit« but the concept of »life« is in the center of his thinking. Departing from these texts, quite a different and much more adequate treatment of animistic religions is possible. See H. Kimmerle, »Religion of Nature,« in B. Laschagne, and T. Slootweg (eds.), Hegel’s Philosophy of the Historical Religions, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 1–19.
By that it »proceeds within itself in population and in industry« (ibid.). The contradiction between luxurious life on the one hand, and dependence and misery on the other hand leads to a situation in which »wealth« is concentrated in relatively few hands and a big mass of poor mob is produced. Thus the specific problem of the civil society becomes obvious, that it is »despite of its excessive riches […] not rich enough« (ibid.: 201), that of the riches, which come forth from the industrial production with its division of labor, do not exist enough to prevent the excesses of poverty and the origin of poor mobs. On the level of the civil society there is no solution for this problem.

This problem leads to the phenomenon of colonization, among other things. Civil society is driven outside of itself by its inner dialectics, its inner and outside limits. The first step outside of its own limits is the »pressure to the sea.« By that it becomes clear that the sea does not only divide one from another, but also connects people and grows out to the »greatest medium […] of commerce« (ibid.: 202). After this first step a next one follows, namely the »means of colonization, to which the fully developed civil society is driven.« In this situation one part of the population, that is to say the colonizing people, goes back to work on the land, which they used to do before the industrialization of Europe. Another part finds in the colonized areas new markets to sell products or new treasures of soil (ibid.: 203). That people live in these areas, who own the land and who have their own ways of production, is not relevant for Hegel. For him, only the free citizens of the European states are human beings with rights. The colonized areas are, for him, something like the sea, an empty space, into which the dynamics of the civil society can penetrate. Therefore, Hegel’s argumentation, coming from what he calls »proper philosophy,« can be regarded as an ideological justification of colonization. The broad influence of Hegel’s philosophy, also beyond his followers, can be explained because it has »grasped its time in concepts.«

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III The Need for Intercultural Philosophy

Hegel’s concept of philosophy can be regarded as a paradigm for what philosophy is in Europe and for Europe since the Enlightenment. Philosophy only exists in Europe and in the Western world. And, more than anything else, understanding philosophy in terms of »proper« or »true« philosophy gives Europe and the Western world its superiority in relation to the non-Western parts of the world. Differing from that view Intercultural Philosophy asserts that philosophy exists in all cultures of the world, not only in Europe and the Western world. This implies the thesis that philosophy belongs to the human condition and that it gives human beings dignity as well as many other things. This means at the same time that the philosophies of all cultures are of the same status and that they can communicate with each other on the same level.

With regard to the influence of Hegel’s thought during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is important to note that Neo-Kantianism in this period was dominant in European-Western philosophy. Hegel’s all-comprising »system of philosophy« is rejected and replaced by a critical justification of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless Eurocentric thought, as expressed by Hegel, still prevails – in philosophy and as a general perception. This can be explained because Kant himself was no less negative in his judgment of non-European cultures than Hegel. In his Lectures on Physical Geography, which he had given many times, a hierarchical view on the different parts of the world – with Europe on top – is formulated, and in an article from 1775 he develops a »Doctrine of Races,« in which he stresses the superiority of the white race.22

After World War I a Hegelian renaissance took place in European academic philosophy. Hegel’s philosophy was then judged as the completion of lineage running from Kant via Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling to Hegel. Eurocentrism still was fully accepted in connection with this new topicality of Hegel’s philosophy.23


23 Also Edmund Husserl who departed from an own foundation of philosophy as phenomenology embraces a view equally as Eurocentric as Hegel. See his Die Krisis der

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This was in accordance with the idea of the superiority of Europe and the Western world in the general consciousness of that time.

In the second half of the twentieth century the later Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty became interested in non-Western philosophies, as I have mentioned above. With Heidegger this was motivated by the growing discussions of his thought among Japanese, Korean and Chinese philosophers. Merleau-Ponty’s thinking allowed for a connection with non-Western ways of thought through his study of leading literature in cultural anthropology, especially that of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. And Jacques Derrida formulated an explicit critique of the ethnocentrism of European-Western philosophy, particularly regarding the low estimation of cultures with primarily oral forms of communication and tradition. He points in this connection at the paradox where with many European thinkers at the same time there existed a higher estimation of the voice and of the spoken word than of written texts. As a French citizen who came from a Jewish Berber-family in Algeria, Derrida led an intercultural existence. And he gave his thought an intercultural turn. He went, however, not so far as to study non-Western philosophies in detail.\(^24\) With the three philosophers mentioned here, their hesitant openness to non-Western thought is connected with their critique of René Descartes and the way of thought that he launched in European tradition, and by this token also of Hegel.

Comparative philosophy in Europe is still, with a few exceptions, pursued at the universities in the departments of Indology, Sinology and Japanology. But outside of universities, interest in the philosophies from the Far East is grown rapidly. By founding special »Schools for Comparative Philosophy« in Belgium (Antwerp) and in the Netherlands (Utrecht), Ulrich Libbrecht from the University of Leuven has done a lot to meet this interest. Intercultural philosophy does not restrict itself to dialogues between Western and Eastern philosophies, but studies the philosophies of all cultures. These are not just compared, but brought into dialogues with each other. Pioneers of intercultural philosophy are among many others: Ram Adhar Mall who has been

teaching at different German universities, Franz Martin Wimmer and Georg Stenger in Vienna, Jürgen Hengelbrock in Bochum, Claudia Bickmann in Cologne, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt in Aachen and in Bremen, Hamid Reza Yousefi in Trier and in Koblenz, and myself in Rotterdam. Nevertheless, some philosophers in favor of intercultural philosophy have great difficulties maintaining their position at universities.

The intercultural concept of philosophy has to be contrasted with the Hegelian Eurocentric concept. Insofar as Hegel’s concept of philosophy can be regarded as typical of the European-Western philosophy as a whole, the horizon of that philosophy has to be transcended. An important starting point has to be the intercultural concept of philosophy covering what European-Western and non-Western philosophers recognize as philosophical. What is to be done is a deconstruction of the Hegelian European-Western concept of philosophy in order to come to a critical broadening and new precise determination of the concept of philosophy, taking into account the position of intercultural philosophy.

A more detailed description of this concept of philosophy cannot be given here. For that, another presentation would be necessary. That I have always been aware of this task is obvious from the subtitle of my first book on African philosophy from 1991: »Approaches to an intercultural concept of philosophy.« Since then I have repeatedly written about this subject. More recently two shorter books have appeared, in which I go on to work on solving that problem.

—Heinz Kimmerle, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands, Emeritus