In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel classifies religion in three stages: *natural religion*, *religion in the form of art*, and *revealed religion*. In each of the three stages, the godhead is an absolute master that is served by humankind. But the relationship between master and servant is submitted to variation. In *natural religion*, the godhead is an absolute power that leaves no room for human independence. At the level of *religion in the form of art*, the human being recognizes its own essence in the divine essence: man has learnt to understand himself as a free being. However, at this stage, freedom has not yet emancipated itself from nature. Here, freedom only exists as the freedom that is incorporated in natural relations. Spirit and nature shape a harmonic unity. Only at the level of *revealed religion* is freedom understood as the essence of nature: the natural world can become valid as the reality in which the divine freedom manifests itself. Now, man can understand himself as the ‘son of god’. He not only recognizes oneself in the divine freedom, but also knows this freedom to be a super-sensual, absolute being that manifests itself in human freedom.

Therefore, the position of *religion in the form of art* is in between: it is the transition from *natural religion* to *revealed religion*. It already expresses freedom, but this freedom is still immediate, i.e., encased in natural relations. For this reason, the development of religion in the form of art consists of freedom’s emancipation from these natural relations. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the equivalents of the stages of the *religion in the form of art* (the stages of the *religion of the Beauty*) maintain this in between position and, therefore, their development is also aimed towards the emancipation of freedom. However, the systematic elaboration of the development of these equivalents in the *Lectures*...

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lags behind the exposition of religion in the form of art given in the *Phenomenology*. As a result, my discussion of *religion in the form of art* takes its starting point from the *Phenomenology* and will, now and then, refer to subsequent versions in the Lectures.\(^2\)

*Religion in the form of art* is already a religion of freedom. Therefore, religion in the form of art belongs to the people who shaped freedom the first time, namely, the Greeks, who created the first form of a democratic state (the polis). The fundamental basis for the existence of religion in the form of art is the ethical world of the polis.\(^3\) The freedom that is practiced in the ethical institutions expresses the divine substance. It is no accident that the name of the city-state Athens is also the name of a goddess.\(^4\) Goddess and city-state coincide. But there is also a distinction: Athens is also represented by a statue. In this sense, the statue can be understood as a copy or ‘duplication’ of Athens. To understand this duplication of Athens, the immediate form of the freedom of the polis has to be discussed.

2. **THE POLIS AS THE IMMEDIATE FORM OF FREEDOM**

The city-state of the polis cannot be understood as the expression of a universal concept of freedom (nowadays, we would say, ‘as the expression of human rights’), but is bound to a specific, traditional content. Freedom is immediately identified with the specific view of the citizens of a specific city-state. Therefore, Hegel remarks: “On account of this unity, the individuality is the pure form of substance which is the content, and the action is the transition from thought to actuality merely as the movement

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\(^2\) It is conspicuous that Hegel places the Jewish religion, time after time, prior to the religion in the form of art. However, this becomes comprehensible when one realizes that the god of the Jewish religion anticipates the religion in the form of art insofar as it expresses pure freedom, but falls subsequent to it insofar as this freedom does not yet appear in the world.


\(^4\) “The essential being of the god is, however, the unity of the universal existence of Nature and of self-conscious Spirit which, in its actuality, confronts the former. At the same time, being in the first instance an *individual* shape, its existence is one of the elements of Nature, just as its self-conscious actuality is an individual national Spirit.” *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford UP 1977, p. 428. [Hereafter all page numbers referring to this work will appear in parentheses PhSp within my text].