

Faith Without Religion, Religion Without Faith

Kant and Hegel on Religion

[Abstract: The World, understood as a system of meaningful relations, is for Hegel the exclusive product of the human mind. In this, Hegel stands together with Kant in direct opposition to the Christian metaphysical tradition, according to which reality reflects God's ideas. For both Kant and Hegel, faith and religion therefore acquire new meaning. Yet, that meaning is just as different for each with respect to the other as it is for both with respect to the Christian tradition. This paper explores these differences, taking Kant's and Hegel's differing attitudes towards evil as the litmus test for differentiating their respective idealism.]

One striking feature of the Mediaeval *Summæ Theologiæ*—take that of Thomas Aquinas as an example—is that they unfold along two quite distinct lines of development at once. Along one line, they follow the Biblical account of God's creation of the universe and, in particular, of the progenitors of the human race. They explore the consequences of the fall of these last from God's grace through sin, and of God's redeeming intervention in the history of their descendants by means of the Incarnation. And, finally, they lay out the course of the gradual return of the whole human race back to the Creator in a new and glorified form. Along this line, the *Summæ* were intended as historical accounts of the *res gestæ*, inextricably bound together, of two personalities—that of God, on the one side; and that of the human individual, on the other. Along a second line, they follow instead the logical thread running across a series of distinct treatises— theology, metaphysics, physics, psychology, ethics, and what we would nowadays call “socio-political theory.” In the medium of scientific abstraction and at different levels of such abstraction, these treatises develop the attributes of the two personalities who are the subjects of the history otherwise recounted along the other line of development. In the *Summæ* themselves, the two lines blend with no apparent break. The historical account naturally provides the space for scientific explanation based on conceptual abstractions, and these abstractions just as naturally refer back to the historical subjects of which they are the predicates.

Because of an intricate historical process that does not concern us here, these two lines eventually fell apart, each giving place to a variety of new *genres* of writing. Two of them can easily be recognized as late as in the culture of the German Enlightenment. On the one hand, there are the post-Cartesian scholastic manuals of philosophy intended for academic consumption, the successors of the treatises *de Deo, de natura, de angelis, de homine*, etc., that once constituted the more scientific components of the *Summæ*; on the other hand, replacing now the other, more historical side, all kinds of devotional tracts designed for private edification. In these tracts the individual human being's standing before God, his fears and hopes, are graphically depicted and subjected to close scrutiny—all in an effort to help him come to terms with his historical situation emotionally. The role of these tracts is, as it were, one of spiritual therapy. In the German

Enlightenment, they were part of a broader cultural phenomenon known, even at the time, as “popular philosophy.” By far the best known and most widely used among them was a little book by the theologian Spalding entitled *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (The Vocation of Humankind)*¹—the very title that Fichte was to affix to his own philosophico-devotional tract of 1800, when the *Aufklärung* had already run its course. From just before the middle of the eighteenth century and then throughout its second half, Spalding had made it a career, as it were, of publishing and re-publishing this booklet, updating it each time by drawing from the latest philosophical trends, eventually even incorporating in it fragments of Kant’s critique of reason. The interesting point for us is that, from the beginning, Spalding’s intention had been to establish a “system of life” (“*ein system des Lebens*”) by performing, in the first place, an inventory of the human mind. For this he planned to rely on his natural power of reflection. His goal was to determine what he could believe with certainty and, on this basis, also to establish what he should do, and what he could hope ultimately to gain.² In effect, Spalding was already posing the three question with which Kant was to sum up his system at the end of the first *Critique*—“what do I know,” “what must I believe,” “what can I hope for.”

I am bringing these historical considerations into play in order to get a handle on a complex theme that I want to develop. I suspect that Kant knew nothing about the Mediaeval *Summæ*. If he did, he would certainly have resisted any connection to them. Yet he must have known (and if he had not noticed it from the beginning, Reinhold should have made him aware of the fact at the time of the Mendelssohn-Jacobi dispute) that his critical system did more than just a job of scientific house-cleaning. It also accomplished a cultural synthesis. Kant might have thought that his system did not have, *as system*, a subject matter specifically its own—apart, that is, from the operations of theoretical and practical reason which is the task of critical reflection to limit and balance against one other. But in fact there was such a subject. It was the

¹ Johann Johachim Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, new improved ed. (Leipzig: Erben und Reich, 1774). This is the edition I have used. The first edition goes back to 1748, and there is a “new revised” edition as late as 1794. Spalding was also the anonymous author of another popular pious tract in which he defended the reasonableness of religion and gave an account of his religiosity and of how he came to it. *Vertraute Briefe, die Religion betreffend*, 2nd improved and enlarged ed. (Breslau: Löwe, 1785; 1st ed. 1784).

² Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1774), 1-5. Spalding concludes: “Everything in nature persuades me that righteousness and happiness belong together, and that they also always come together if external circumstances do not disrupt this otherwise so essential a bond. Such a pervasive tendency for order must, however, be fulfilled; and only its realization would remove the confusion and contradiction that would otherwise obtain. If I were to consider this life as the final human state, I would not be able to make my thinking on the matter fall in one piece. The moment I however expand my vision..., everything falls conceptually into place.... The moment I am assured that the great originator of all things—the one who at all times acts according to the strictest of rules and the noblest intentions—cannot possibly be willing to annihilate me, I need not, so I believe, fear any other destruction.” (P. 54-56, *passim*, my translation) See also Norbert Hinske’s very instructive article, “Das stillschweigende Gespräch: Prinzipien der Anthropologie und Geschichtsphilosophie bei Mendelssohn und Kant,” in *Moses Mendelssohn und die Kreise seiner Wirksamkeit*, E. J. Engel, N. Hinske, eds. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994), 136-156.

historical human “self” of which the “I” who is the subject of the theoretical part of those operations, and the “I” who is the subject of the practical part, are idealized shapes arrived at by way of scientific abstraction. In his mundane life, this self is confronted by the problem of having to engage in action that commits his being totally, but which he must none the less performs in a worldly context that offers neither unambiguous direction nor promise of success. In the medium of its idealized model of experience, the system tries to recapture reflectively the state of mind of precisely this self—identifying the conflicting interests that motivate him, and reconciling them in principle by limiting each. At one point the system calls for faith, and counsels hope—both under the control of reason, yet presumably the same faith and the same hope which the historical self must nurture from the beginning (even before any scientific reflection has taken place) if he has to act at all. In a final attempt at retrieving this self in his most empiric shape, the system then turns its critical attention to the sense of “being evil” that affects the self’s most intimate experiences, and to the religious practices that this sense has spawned since time immemorial. This is what Kant does in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.³

I am suggesting that in the medium of his system Kant was reclaiming for scientific reflection that area of irreducibly individual experience which Spalding, among others, was making the object of devotional meditation. And he was thereby providing for his otherwise purely idealized model of the mind the kind of existential matrix which the Biblical story of creation, the fall, and redemption, provided in the *Summae*. One can understand, therefore, why the Jena theologians—Kant’s first self-professed disciples—should have been attracted to Kant most of all because of his system;⁴ or why, from the moment when Reinhold voiced his call for reform, the primary object of such a reform was immediately assumed to be “the system.”⁵ There was a perceived lack of fit, so to speak, between the historical individual who is the subject of the activities for which the two Critiques supply the categories, and these activities themselves as normalized by those categories. The one (i.e. the individual self) is not necessarily recognizable in the world as represented through the others. One can also understand why, at the end of this process of reform—in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (which is, incidentally, the only work of Hegel we shall consider here)—why, in this work, the

³ *Die Religion Innerhalb die Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793), George di Giovanni, trans., in *Immanuel Kant, Religion and Rational Theology*, Allen W. Wood, George di Giovanni, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 39-215. Henceforth referred to as *Religion*, followed by the standard Academy Edition pagination (AK).

⁴ For the earliest reception of Kant by the Jena theologians, see Norbert Hinske, “Der Frühkantianismus an der Universität Jena von 1785-1800 und seine Vorgeschichte,” in *Der Aufbruch in den Kantianismus*, Norbert Hinske, Erhard Lange, Horst Schröpfer, eds. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 231-243.

⁵ For Reinhold, see George di Giovanni, “The Facts of Consciousness,” in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of German Idealism*, George di Giovanni, H. S. Harris, eds., trans; revised edition, George di Giovanni, ed. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 9-19.

subject matter is, quite explicitly, the historical self.⁶ As defined by Hegel, the problem that this self must resolve is how to recognize himself in representations that are necessary to the process of self-knowledge but which, precisely in order to create the intentional space required for the recognition, must be universal—therefore abstracts from his individuality. The problem is still one of lack of fit between the subject of experience and the universal predicates that such a subject attributes to himself on the basis of his experience. There are elements of his self that fail to obtain official standing—“spoken presence,” so to speak—in the social, conceptual, world that the subject establishes around himself. Left to themselves, these elements carry on an anonymous, unconscious, life of their own that in fact conforms to a deeper logic than the one on which the subject’s official world is built. Ultimately, therefore, they undermine and destroy the latter. The conscious self is thus “fated” (this is Hegel’s word)⁷ by this unconscious counterpart.

In the *Phenomenology*, the problem is in principle resolved at the end of Chapter 6, when the characters who are acting out, under Hegel’s careful conceptual guidance, the historical experience under observation at that point, begin to speak a language which, in being social, is at the same time religious.⁸ Evil becomes an issue and, as one would expect, religion emerges as the subject matter of the chapter immediately following. It is clear from the start of the chapter that Hegel considers this human phenomenon (i.e. religion), and the language in which it is realized, the product of the self’s attempt to give representational form to his reality *as individual*; and that, though it is only at this point that it comes in for official consideration in the *Phenomenology* (for it is only now that the Hegelian phenomenologist has developed the adequate conceptual means for the job), the phenomenon is in fact more fundamental than any analyzed so far. The experience which is at its basis has in fact provided the existential matrix for the rest all along. At this point, therefore, the *Phenomenology* starts all over again, retracing all previous experiences—interpreting them, however, all as abstract moments of the one great work on the part of the historical self to understand himself and his

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. IX, Wolfgang Bonsepien, Reinhard Heede, eds. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980), 366.9-13. Compare this text with the other on p. 363.3-8; religion, which is the shape of existent spirit, has been the object of the *Phenomenology* from the beginning, but only implicitly. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, tr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 413, 410. I shall refer to the critical edition of this work as *Phä.*, followed by page and line numbers, and, in parentheses, by the page and/or paragraph number of the English translation.

⁷ *Phä.* 363.27 (410, § 674). For a summary of what has been going on in the *Phenomenology*, see the opening pages of Ch. VII, *Die Religion*, pp. 363-366 (§§ 672-680). For Hegel’s definition of “fate,” see *Phä.* 200.19-25 (219): “It is what is called *necessity*; for necessity, fate, and the like, is just that about which we cannot say *what* it does, what its specific laws and positive content are, because it is the absolute pure Notion itself viewed as *being*, a *relation* that is simple and empty, but also irresistible and imperturbable, whose work is merely the nothingness of individuality.”

⁸ I am referring to the last section of the Chapter, “Conscience, the Beautiful Soul, Evil and its Forgiveness.”

world.⁹ This retracing was already done once, at the beginning of Chapter 6,¹⁰ when earlier shapes of consciousness are re-introduced in their proper social contexts, and will be done once more, but in the form of a conceptual summing up performed in the medium of pure thought, in the final chapter—the one dedicated to “absolute knowledge.”¹¹

I now want to explore in some detail the meaning that religion acquires in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, at the end of Chapter 6 as well as in the following two chapters. I have brought Kant to the scene—and there he will remain throughout—in order to provide historical as well as conceptual elbow room for situating Hegel in proper perspective. There is both deep affinity yet startling contrast between these two thinkers—a complex relationship to which I can try to give provisory expression here in the form of a question. Why does Kant’s system demand a moral faith but leaves no rational space for religion apart from the practice itself of morality (duly accompanied by appropriate devotional feelings and emotions)¹² whereas for Hegel religion has autonomous as well as fundamental standing as a human phenomenon but, precisely for that reason, at the end no longer requires faith (whether moral or otherwise)?¹³ This question will guide our reflections. I begin with Hegel, then move to Kant, and return to Hegel at the end.

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There is another, more particular, question that I need to raise first, and for that I must bring into play the theme of “language” in the *Phenomenology*. Of course language is an issue in the *Phenomenology* from the beginning,¹⁴ as it must be because of the problem that affects the consciousness that *we* (the Hegelian phenomenologists)¹⁵ are investigating. The things that this consciousness assumes as its natural habitat have

⁹ See Note 6 for the relevant texts.

¹⁰ *Phä.* 238.3-27 (§ 521).

¹¹ The whole final Chapter VIII, “Absolute Knowledge,” is the reflective comprehension of the meaning of the experience that has been the object of observation and of one-sided analyses from the beginning.

¹² The canonical definition of religion as understood by Kant was provided by Carl Christian Ernst Schmid, the author of the first and at the time very popular Kant-Lexicon. In the second edition of his *Wörterbuch zum leichtern Gebrauch der Kantischen Schriften* (Jena: Kröker, 1788) § 384, we read: “Religion is the representation of the laws of reason as divine commands, and of virtue as the conformity of a will with the will of a holy and generous creator of the world—which creator has the will and the power to bring about the most accurate balance of happiness and morality. Through religion, consciousness of merit turns therefore into hope of enjoyment of happiness.” (My translation.) Cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, AK V, 129.

¹³ I shall qualify this claim at the end. “Faith” retains meaning in Hegel, but in the sense of the trust individuals must place in others, their society, their historical situation. Hegel explicitly distinguishes between “religion” and “faith.” *Phä.* 266.32-33 (§487, p. 297).

¹⁴ The theme of language is set from Chapter I, where Hegel shows that any attempt to make cognition depend on some simple intuitive apprehension of an object is bound to fail. Experience entails the use of language, and is subject to the latter’s universalizing effect, from the beginning.

¹⁵ Cf. *Phä.* 61.5-7 (55, § 67) This “*wir*” and its “*Zuthat*” persist throughout. At the end, the standpoint of the phenomenologist and that of the consciousness being observed merge, since the latter has become philosophical, and the phenomenologist can thereby recognize his own past in the observed experience.

already been spiritualized, as objects of its reflection, by the work of language; they are in fact already its own products. But the consciousness in question believes that they are on the contrary simply given to it—as if meaning were to be found in nature ready-made. Because of this false belief, it *in fact* always ends up saying the opposite of what it means to say. But it does not know that that is what it is doing; hence, it unwittingly falsifies itself.¹⁶ At least for “us” (the phenomenologists), the creation in the medium of language of a world in which the rational self can be at home because it is his own product is thus a theme of reflection from the beginning. It becomes, however, an explicit theme also of the consciousness that we are investigating only when it too is forced to acknowledge the power of the spoken word. This event happens in the setting of culture, at the time when the historical self is engaged in the work of imposing some order on the many spiritual entities that once owed their standing to custom—as if anchored in nature—but now, because of the Roman idea of law and the Christian belief in a transcendent God, both of which have had the effect of cutting loose their presumed natural moorings, behave as it were like drifting spiritual masses.¹⁷ These entities, be they families, clans, property titles, civil authorities, courts, or the like, are now in need of being reassembled in a stable social compact. And this is a work done in the medium of language, by way of applying to them such distinctions as between the good and the bad, the noble and the ignoble, the useful and the useless.¹⁸ The power of the spoken word becomes apparent in the course of this distinguishing. The historical self comes to realize that his judgements do more than just voice distinctions. In voicing them, he actually brings them into existence. It is only inasmuch that the courtiers call the king “King,” thus setting him apart from other courtiers, that the king acquires his special standing as “King.”¹⁹

Here I come to my question. Its relevance to our subject of religion will soon become apparent. The phenomenon of “moral consciousness” comes on the scene as a product of advanced culture. It marks the point at which the historical self will not acknowledge anything as having true being unless it is *as it ought to be*, i.e. as conforming to the self’s rational norms. Anything else is relegated to the realm of mere

¹⁶ The schema for this experience is given in the Introduction, *Phä.* 58 ff. (§ 81 ff.). The first instance is given in Chapter I, where Hegel exposes the self-deception of “common sense.”

¹⁷ For the description of the effect that the idea of “right,” as embodied in the figure of the Roman Emperor, has on the ethical world based on custom, see *Phä.* 263.14-264.6 (§§ 482-483). The world defined by Roman Law is one that witnessed the rise of such forms of self-consciousness as stoicism, scepticism, and Christianity (the latter as “unhappy consciousness”). At the beginning of the world of culture, when the individual begins the work of appropriating nature by imprinting his mark on it—now aware, but only abstractly, of his transcendence with respect to it, hence of his right of dominion over it—his own spiritual components appear to him as themselves parts of the nature to be appropriated, held together there by connections as fluid as those between the elements of physical nature. Hegel refers to these components abstractly; in actual history, they would assume the form of social (but yet to be socialized) entities. Cf. *Phä.* 264.23-32 (§ 484); 269.13-29 (§ 492).

¹⁸ The whole section on culture is here relevant, *Phä.* 267 ff. (§§ 488 ff.). Hegel defines culture as “that through which the individual acquires its validity (*Gelten*) and actuality.” *Phä.* 267.26-27 (§ 489, p. 298).

¹⁹ Cf. *Phä.* 278.12-25 (§ 511, p. 311).

appearance.²⁰ Moral consciousness thus represents the triumph of spirit over nature— spirit’s at least intentional final recovery within its reflective ambit of any human phenomenon that might otherwise appear to trace its genealogy back to plain nature. Hence, as one would think, it marks also the triumph of language, since the latter is spirit’s first spiritualizing arm. It is spirit’s body. But then, why—this is the question—why does Hegel fault this kind of consciousness on the ground that it allegedly lacks language; because, as he says, it is “dumb”?²¹ In the *Phenomenology*, this criticism motivates the next development that then leads directly to religion.

I shall get to an answer in a moment. First I should point out that questions of this kind force one to reappraise the nature of the *Phenomenology*, and to recognize how much it—and Fichte’s early *Wissenschaftslehre* as well—still belong to the already mentioned late Enlightenment’s movement of popular philosophy, despite the bitter criticisms that both Hegel and Fichte directed against its practitioners.²² It was the cultural goal of this movement to define human self-identity (which Hume had put into question) by retracing its genesis back to experience. Its aspirations were also behind Jacobi’s attack on traditional metaphysics, waged on the ground that metaphysical abstractions undermine the possibility of the “I.” They motivated his often repeated claim that all intelligibility should be traced back to an original relation between this “I” and a “Thou” which is its defining counterpart.²³ Now, if we look at the *Phenomenology* with this consideration in mind, we can see that it is from the start an attempt to establish a “honest speaker,” as it were; I mean to say, someone who can say “I” without thereby placing this “I” either in a world of pure universals, or, contrariwise, in a world of supposed things of nature—both of these “worlds” being in fact products of his own reflection. In both cases, he would thus be displacing the “I” at a distance from himself,

²⁰ *Phä.* 324.30-325.24 (§§ 599-600); 331.17-20 (§ 612).

²¹ *Phä.* 351.24 (396). I wonder whether there is a reference here to Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant says that all inclinations are “dumb” before the law, though they work secretly for it. AK V, 86; Lewis White Beck, tr. (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1956), 89. “Feelings” are associated with the body of the individual who must ultimately be the one who speaks.

²² For a more virulent example of Fichte’s criticism, see J.G. Fichte, “Vergleichung des vom Hrn Prof. Schmid aufgestellten Systems mit der Wissenschaftslehre,” *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, III.4 (1796): 267-320. The “Schmid” in question is the same referred to in note 12. One of Hegel’s earliest published essays was devoted to a criticism of the standpoint of “common sense” in the person of Mr Krug. Appeal to “common sense” was a mainstay of the popular philosophers. The extent of the influence of this movement can be gathered from the fact that Wilhelm Traugott Krug, whom Hegel pillories in his essay, acceded to Kant’s chair of philosophy at Königsberg. G. W. F. Hegel, “Wie der Gemeine Menschenverstand die Philosophie Nehme, Dargestellt an den Werken des Herrn Krug’s,” *Kritisches Journal*, I.1, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. IV, pp. 174-187. English translation, “How the Ordinary Human Understanding Takes Philosophy (as displayed in the works of Mr. Krug),” in *Between Kant and Hegel*, pp. 293-310.

²³ For a brief study of Jacobi’s connection with Thomas Reid, and of his early theory of the origin of “sense,” see George di Giovanni, “Hume, Jacobi, and Common Sense: An Episode in the Reception of Hume in Germany at the Time of Kant,” *Kant-Studien*, 88(1997): 44-58. One should not judge the movement of “popular philosophy” in Germany simply on the basis of Fichte’s or Hegel’s criticisms. Despite its obvious conceptual meagerness, it played an important role in raising to rational reflection all aspects of social life.

since he—historical individual who *in fact* operates in a world which is just as intelligible as is visible—cannot legitimately identify with it in either place. Needed, in other words, is one who can honestly speak in first person, without in fact assuming a third person standpoint that leaves his actual self unvoiced.

This is a problem that emerges in the *Phenomenology* at every turn, under innumerable forms. It takes on an especially significant one in Chapter V, at the point where the would-be pure natural scientist (your uncompromising observer of “just facts”) tries to individuate spirit by the singular characteristics of somebody’s bone structure—by the bumps in one’s skull.²⁴ For Hegel, this is as extreme an attempt at finding a recognizable identity for the self-conscious “I” as possible; for that reason, however, just as extremely misguided in its strategy, and also, for Hegel’s purposes, as extremely revealing. Its truth lies in the fact that the “I” must indeed be embodied. But it fails in not recognizing that the only ‘body’ adequate to the intended task would have to be already subjectivized. To this extent, therefore, even as “body” it would have to be already a product of spirit. But the only adequate body of spirit is language.²⁵ The phrenologist gives unwitting testimony to this failure by the language he uses in plying his pretended science—on the one hand, exhibiting the skull as a thing of nature; on the other, investing it with meanings that presuppose the independent activities of spirit; in this way misrepresenting spirit as well as nature. The phrenologist literally does not know what he says.²⁶ Though in a conciliatory tone, and perhaps tongue in cheek, Hegel was raising against the likes of Lavater (who dabbled in physiognomy) the same accusation that in his usual truculent style Fichte had earlier raised against Christian Ernst Schmid (that other great proponent of popular philosophy). Fichte had complained that Schmid was trying to exhibit facts of consciousness as if pickled in alcohol.²⁷ Hegel was now saying that the phrenologist embodied spirit in a dead bone.²⁸

But it is in the summing up at beginning of Chapter 7, after consciousness has already recognized that the only body adequate to spirit is a socialized one,²⁹ that we get a full diagnosis of the problem that has affected consciousness from the beginning.³⁰ In the context of the classical ethical community, the individual presumed that the role that he or she plays in society is assigned to each by nature, primarily on the basis of gender distinction.³¹ Each, therefore, literally acts out a *staged role* in the community, according to a pre-assigned script that has been handed down through tradition from time immemorial and therefore abstracts

²⁴ I am referring to the section on physiognomy and phrenology, *Phä.* 171ff. (§§ 309ff).

²⁵ See what Hegel has to say later, *Phä.* 351.11-18 (§ 652).

²⁶ See especially, *Phä.* 190.31-191.39 (§§ 344-346).

²⁷ “in Weingeist ... aufbewahrt.” See note 22 above, “Vergleichung des vom Hrn Prof. Schmid aufgestellten Systems mit der Wissenschaftslehre,” p. 309.

²⁸ Cf. *Phä.* 192.4 (210).

²⁹ This experience is developed in Chapter VI.

³⁰ *Phä.* 363.21-33 (§ 674); cf. 242.26-243.5, 244.14-245.17 (§§ 449, 450, 452).

³¹ *Phä.* 250.33-251.4 (§ 463).

from all the most intimate interests that none the less still motivate the individual in action. For action necessarily engages this individual in the totality of his or her being.³² In the ethical community, however, there is no official language for such interests, save the oracle—a form of speech inherently cryptic except in retrospect—and the shapeless whispers of the furies, these shadowy figures of once living individuals who acquired universal standing only by dying, and now wreak their revenge on the community because of the harm it once did to them as individuals when still alive.³³ Thus it happens that in this social world one can deliberately undertake the endeavour (quite legitimate according to official script) of acquiring a kingdom by way of destroying an opponent and marrying a queen, only to discover that what one has actually done is to kill one's father and marry one's mother. There was no clearly articulated language to probe these dark possibilities inhabiting the individual. The individual thus falls prey to a dark mechanism of retribution over which the spoken word has no control.³⁴ Religious drama steps in to help the situation emotionally.

According to Hegel, Antigone is the one who puts an end to this whole situation by obeying the voice of her conscience—to this extent, therefore, genuinely acting in first person for the first time.³⁵ But, when extended into social categories, this language of the “I” is immediately transformed either into the abstract voice of the Emperor that proclaims the law for everyone in general, without respect for individual particularities, or the contentious voice of individuals who, without the protection of the language of tradition that Antigone has killed, now vie with one another in order to secure universal standing for their clan, their family, their property.³⁶ And between the tumult of the lawyers on the one side, and the impersonal voice of the Emperor arbitrating their disputes on the other, individuals are still left to their personal devices (to ritual and belief) in order to find meaning for their lives or consolation for the tribulation of being born and dying. Nor do things necessarily get better as social cultivation progresses, and the law begins to speak in a more nuanced voice—one that reaches even to the more private aspects of individual existence, and the individual himself, for his part, begins to think and act, even as individual, with universal interests in mind. For at the end of this process (I have jumped to the end of the eighteenth century), when the truth has finally been proclaimed that the good of the whole of society and that of the individual are one and the same, so that to act for oneself one must act in the first place for the sake of the whole, the fact still remains that it is impossible for the individual not to promote his private cause even when deliberately acting for the public

³² *Phä.* 251.9-23 (§ 464); 255.33-34 (§ 470: “Doing directly expresses the unity of actuality and substance...”); 256.15-34 (§ 472).

³³ *Phä.* 258.3-18 (§474, p. 287).

³⁴ *Phä.* 252.35-253.2 (§ 467); 255.7-24 (§ 469).

³⁵ *Phä.* 255.25-256.4 (284, §§ 470-471).

³⁶ *Phä.* 262.28-263.29 (§§ 481-482).

interest.³⁷ Hence, in order to be true to his intention, he must acknowledge himself to be, precisely when acting in a public function, at the same time a traitor. Destruction is what the individual both deserves *and needs* in order to be true to himself. His voice must give place to the sound of the guillotine's blade.³⁸ In a way, we are back to the ethical world of classical antiquity—inasmuch, that is, as the individual becomes a universal only in death. But there is a crucial difference. In that ancient world, this fate of the individual was perceived as appointed by nature, and was suffered by him as part of the general disposition of the cosmos. Now it is instead clearly recognized as the necessary result of the logic of the accepted social structure, hence as something that the individual must himself actively will.

Here we have the answer to our more immediate question. There is indeed a problem reconciling the individual with the universal. And this problem—quite apart from any logical formulation or logical solution we might want to give to it—has social significance. It finds expression in the language of the public and the private, the social and the personal, in the medium of which a society legitimizes its institutions and practices. A flaw in this language has repercussions that affect the individual at the most personal level of existence. Strange as it might seem, in the earlier stages of culture that Hegel considers, the individual is protected from the worse consequences of any such flaw because of the underdevelopment of the language in official circulation. It extends to general distinctions alone, and therefore leaves room for an unofficial sphere of discourse within which the individual can manage his own affairs in more natural-like ways. According to Hegel's analysis, even this sphere is in fact reclaimed by society (but only in principle) inasmuch as its official language “doubles up”³⁹ (Hegel's image) into a language of “insight,” on the one side, and of “faith,” on the other.⁴⁰ The one declares that there is nothing in human experience that it cannot comprehend in general, though is unable to spell out what it is in detail. The other acknowledges, on the contrary, that there is a lot that it cannot comprehend, but none the less seeks to deal with it, in detail, in the medium of images—as if “in a glass darkly.” Both, in their different ways, implicitly admit that actual social discourse leaves much unsaid. There is a large segment of experience that has been rationalized only in principle, and in which custom, belief, religious cult, or any intimate individual practice, therefore have their place. It is precisely this unrationalized “left over,” so to speak, that is no longer available to the individual in that advanced state of culture that we have just considered. There, by applying the principle of utility, insight pretends to have absorbed and dissolved into its light all the content of faith.⁴¹ It now parades as an

³⁷ *Phä.* 320.14-25 (§ 591).

³⁸ *Phä.* 320.25-33 (§ 591).

³⁹ *Phä.* 265.16-17 (§ 486).

⁴⁰ *Phä.* 288.29-289.20 (§ 529, p. 324). For an account of the dispute between the two, and the historical precedents of Hegel's text, see George di Giovanni, “Hegel, Jacobi, and Crypto-Catholicism, or, Hegel in Dialogue with the Enlightenment,” in *Hegel on the Modern World*, ed. Ardis Collins (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 53-72.

⁴¹ *Phä.* 314.8-12 (§§ 579-580, p. 353).

actual social discourse capable of rationalizing even the most minute aspects of human existence. In that situation, there is no unofficial but still allowed niche where the individual can find refuge. He is left to suffer unprotected the full brunt of the flaw that was inherent in social discourse from the beginning, namely its incapacity to apply universal predicates to the individual subject without dissolving the latter into them. The ultimate consequence of the flaw is revealed only now. The individual cannot honestly act as individual for society without at the same time preparing to be destroyed by it.

Consider now a situation in which this social arrangement is interiorized, transformed into a subjective shape of consciousness. Voluntary subjugation to the general will of the body politic gives place to respect for the internal law. We are in the realm of the already introduced “moral consciousness”—“moralistic,” I should rather say, since its distinguishing mark is not its being “moral” but its taking “morality” as the supreme form of human existence. The individual beset by this consciousness finds himself in a very difficult position indeed. For the more committed he is to his stated principle, all the more morally irrelevant must the spatio-temporal determinations that constitute his individuality become for him, since these are by nature refractory to moral order. Yet he cannot act without implicating them, since he is the individual he happens to be. The result is not just a case of falling short of one’s intended principle—because, if that were all, the individual would still be able to act yet retain his moral honesty by the simple device of acknowledging guilt and accepting the consequences (as the *citoyen* we have just considered does). The problem is rather that, according to any of the senses of “I” that his moral language allows him, the historical self is not in a position of even uttering an “I am guilty” honestly.⁴² If he places that “I” in nature, it no longer stands for a morally relevant principle of action. Hence, he cannot identify with it. If, on the contrary, he places it in that purely intelligible realm of laws in term of which he ought to act, it transcends the possibility of moral failure altogether. In this sense also, therefore, it becomes morally meaningless. Of course, the historical individual will want to believe that he is both “I”s at once—somebody in between, in the process of realizing an ideal of moral perfection. And the individual will postulate (literally, “demand”) that such is the case. But the faith that such a postulation requires only masks an insoluble problem, for there can be no process, no “in between,” when its two presumed terms allow neither

⁴² For the sake of retaining the rhetorical unity of the present essay, I have modified somewhat the course of Hegel’s argument without however altering its main direction. Hegel’s point is that the moral consciousness must alternatively claim that there is such a thing as a moral, perfect, self-consciousness, and that there is no such thing. The first claim is based on the idea of duty which, as idea, already constitutes the effectiveness (*Wirklichkeit*) of moral consciousness; the other, on the recognition that there is nothing in the present world that conforms to the moral norm of perfection. Hence, in order to reconcile these otherwise conflicting claims, moral consciousness takes as its end the realization in an infinitely distant future of a morally perfect world. But in setting up the idea of this end, and the conditions of its possible realization, consciousness gets itself entangled in a like conflict of claims. *Phä* 328.9-12 (§603, p. 369) Though stated somewhat differently, the problem still is one of individuation, i.e. of finding for the otherwise abstract moral “I” a suitable natural body. Cf. *Phä*. 332.14-24, 333.11-26, 334.24-36 (§§ 612-614, 616, 620).

movement forward (at the would-be starting point), nor (at the end point, if *per impossible* one were ever achieved) reference backward. What in fact happens when the individual self says “I” is that he places this “I” on either of those two end points yet at the same time displaces it from there. He says “I” in either a purely noumenal or purely natural sense, yet also means not to say it in that way, and knows that in saying it in either way he does not mean what he says. He is caught up in a web of sophistries that hide behind the veneer of faith.⁴³ And since there is no morally allowed residual language of the “I,” the individual is left with the choice of either staying mute or speaking a language of deception. In either case, he indicts himself of dishonesty. This, I take it, is what Hegel means when he says that moral consciousness has no language; that it is “dumb.”

We see how far reaching is Hegel’s criticism of Kant—for it is to Kant, of course, that we have returned. The criticism is an attack on the whole Kantian system. For that system was supposed to recover the totality of human experience conceptually. But it fails in fact to provide the conceptual space required by the subject of such experience precisely where it is needed most—namely in historically conditioned moral action, at the point where all the various aspects of experience come together. The Jena theologians were indeed misguided when they rushed to endorse Kant, thinking that his system offered a new justification for their traditional religious faith (unless, of course, they already knew that their faith was no longer either traditional or religious). According to orthodox Christian doctrine, “faith” is the assent to a truth which is intelligible *per se* but not *for us*—an assent that we none the less give on the basis of a subjective interest (the love of God) that makes up for the lack of sufficient objective evidence. Kant still adheres to this general formula.⁴⁴ But the difference is that, in his system, what we are asked to accept on faith is a situation which is *per se* unintelligible.⁴⁵ It is not a mystery difficult to fathom but something inherently contradictory. And the interest that motivates our assent is that of formal rationality. In a way Reinhold had it right when he portrayed Kant as the mediator between Mendelssohn and Jacobi⁴⁶—though (as is often the case with

⁴³ *Phä.* 332.25-28 (§617).

⁴⁴ “Therefore, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God. It is well to notice that this moral necessity is subjective, i.e., a need.... To assume the existence [of a highest good] is thus connected with the consciousness of our duty, though this assumption itself belongs to the realm of theoretical reason. Considered only in reference to the latter, it is a hypothesis, i.e., a ground of explanation. But in reference to the comprehensibility of an object (the highest good) placed before us by the moral law, and thus a practical need, it can be called *faith* and even pure *rational faith*, because pure reason alone (by its theoretical as well as practical employment) is the source from which it springs.” *Critique of Practical Reason*, V, 125-126.

⁴⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*, V, 132, first paragraph of Section VI. Kant calls “faith” as he understands it “reflective,” precisely in order to distinguish from the kind of faith that announces itself as a kind of knowledge. *Religion*, VI, 52, note.

⁴⁶ In the first series of his so called “Kantian Letters.” *Der Teutsche Merkur* (Weimar: Carl Rudolf Hofman, 1786). Bd. III, pp. 99-127; 127-141; (1787) Bd. I, pp. 3-39; 117-142; Bd. II, pp. 167-185; Bd. III, pp. 67-88; 142-165; 247-278. These letters helped popularize Kant’s critique of reason in the midst of the Mendelssohn-Jacobi dispute. This first series of eight letters is not to be confused with the much enlarged version of the same letters

Reinhold) he was saying much more than he understood. Mendelssohn had defended reason within the limits of standard Enlightenment assumptions. Jacobi had argued, against him, that these assumptions undermine human individuality, hence ultimately lead to irrationality. Kant was now reasserting, but on a more critical foundation, Mendelssohn's Enlightenment ideal of rationality. But he was also *de facto* conceding to Jacobi (though Kant himself would never have admitted any such thing) that this ideal has irrational results so far as the individual agent is concerned. His system reconciled the two views in the sense that it allowed a way of coping with these results by suggesting the kind of rationally motivated myths that one must entertain in order to keep them psychologically at bay, thereby gaining the freedom to dedicate oneself to the one serious business of promoting the formal rationalization of experience.⁴⁷

Proof explicit that this is Kant's strategy regarding the historical individual is to be found in the already mentioned monograph of 1793, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.⁴⁸ The 1792 essay that was to constitute the first chapter of this monograph, and the monograph itself, were published in the middle of a wide controversy regarding the nature of human freedom. We need not detail it here.⁴⁹ The important point is that everyone engaged in it (Fichte, very likely, the only exception), whether siding with Kant or opposing him, took for granted that, in order to explain the phenomenon of moral evil, Kant had accepted the idea of freedom as a faculty of arbitrary choice (an idea which he later explicitly

published in 1790-1792.

⁴⁷ It might be objected by orthodox Kantians that I am not being fair to Kant, since I am not taking into consideration his anthropology. There, the split in the human being between reason and actual conduct is no longer apparent. My reply is that, so far as content is concerned, Kant's anthropology in no way differs from the common places of the anthropology of *Popularphilosophie*. For this reason, none of the splits that would follow from Kant's critical distinctions are visible on the surface there. But popular anthropology was firmly rooted in Leibnizian metaphysics, duly modified to meet the challenge of empiricism. The critical Kant cut these Leibnizian roots. He deliberately denied the continuity between the senses and reason, the *a posteriori* and the *a priori*, the phenomenal and the noumenal, the heteronomous and the autonomous, which is on the contrary the hallmark of Leibnizian philosophy. The Kantians have no right, therefore, to appeal to Kant's anthropology — granted that it still is the same, so far as content is concerned, as Spalding's — without first explaining how the syntheses assumed there are justifiable on Kant's own principles. Whatever unity is asserted in the one context cannot have the same meaning as when asserted in the other. It would at least have to be said that, in Kant's hands, what for the popular philosophers was true science of human nature becomes rather ideology, a well constructed myth promoted on purely pragmatic grounds and accepted on faith. The vision of humanity expressed in the myth might well stand its own in competition with some other vision as expressed, for instance, in Goethe's *Prometheus*, but would in no way disallow the latter in principle. See also note 51 below. Ian Hunter's ground-breaking book on competing forms of Enlightenment unfortunately became available to me only after this essay had long been completed. The book provides a much needed corrective to what its author describes as the self-serving *a priori* reconstruction of history that Kantians have been promoting from the beginning and still promote today. Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ Cf. note 3 above.

⁴⁹ I have dealt with some aspects of the debate in "Rehberg, Reinhold und C. C. E. Schmid über Kant und die moralische Freiheit," *Vernunftkritik und Aufklärung: Studien zur Philosophie Kants und seines Jahrhunderts*, Michael Oberhausen, ed. (Stuttgart-Bad Caanstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 93-113. See also the very informative study by Angelica Nuzzo, "Metamorphosen der Freiheit in der Jenenser Kant Rezeption (1785-1794), in *Evolution des Geistes: Jena um 1800*, F. Strack, ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 484-519.

repudiated)⁵⁰—all in all, that he was reverting to old style speculative metaphysics. In fact, nothing could have been farther from the truth. Kant was not engaging in an explanatory exercise at all. For on his general premises, the subject matter under discussion—namely, the moral agent in his most empiric, hence most individualized, shape—falls below the level of strict rational comprehension. It can be managed, therefore, only pragmatically.⁵¹ Kant was in fact doing a bit of ordinary language analysis. As a matter of fact, the language of merit, guilt, evil, and individual responsibility is the stock of moral discourse. But such a language cannot be grounded on either of the two opposing ideas of “physical nature” and of “law” (the latter with its concomitant idea of “pure rational will”) that alone would give to it scientific status. Short of science, one can however at least try to use the language coherently by making explicit the imagery that it presupposes about human nature. This imagery is found embodied in the tradition, ultimately in the Bible. And one can hope that—by a skillful use of it, and with the help of the indeterminacy that characterizes the imagination and facilitates otherwise impossible conceptual leaps—one can always be led back to the main moral discourse based exclusively on the idea of the law.

Only if we read Kant’s essay on religion in this way can we understand Kant’s repeated warnings—warnings that would otherwise run directly counter the apparently explanatory constructs he has just put in place—that one should not expend too much effort on such problems as how the first human act originates and how much God’s hand is implicated in it. As he says, it is not just that we do not have sufficient knowledge for resolving such conundrums. They are not resolvable *per se*. Even if something were revealed to us about them from above, we would have to interpret the revelation in our own conceptual means⁵²—in effect, we would fail to understand it. We are dealing here with ultimately unintelligible

⁵⁰ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, VI, 226.

⁵¹ Hinske also recognizes that the problem of “free choice” is to be treated in Kant at an anthropological level, i.e. (I presume) pragmatically. But he is much too sympathetic towards Kant. He argues that Kant’s claim about the unknowability of the “thing in itself” allows the possibility of the anthropological treatment. I am saying, rather, that this claim of unknowability only masks the logical impossibility of reconciling the different conceptions of “freedom” with which Kant operates. Lack of knowledge does not absolve anyone from logical coherence. Cf. Norbert Hinske, “Kants Auflösung der Freiheitsantinomie oder Der unantastbare Kern des Gewissens,” *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift*, 109(2000): 169-190.

⁵² Cf. *Religion*, VI, 52. Also, p. 121, note: “No human being can say with certainty why this human being becomes good, that one evil (both comparatively), for we often seem to find the predisposition that makes for the distinction already at birth, and even contingencies of life over which nobody has any control are at times the decisive factor; and just as little can we say what will become of either. In this matter we must therefore entrust judgement to the All-seeing; and this is so expressed in the text as if he pronounces his decree upon them before they are born, thus prescribing to each the role that he will eventually play. For the world creator, if he is conceived in anthropopathic terms, *provision* in the order of appearance is at the same time also *predestination*. But in the supersensible order of things in accordance with the laws of freedom, where time falls away, there is just one *all-seeing knowledge*, without the possibility of explaining why one human being behaves in this way, another according to opposite principles, and yet, at the same time, of reconciling the why with freedom of the will.” If “in the supersensible order of things in accordance with the laws of freedom, where time falls away, there is just one *all-seeing knowledge*, without the possibility of explaining why one human being behaves in this way, another according

mere phenomena. Note that, with respect to moral evil, Kant is not defending the commonly accepted position at the time (which Reinhold, however, strenuously opposed),⁵³ namely, that moral evil is a sub-species of physical evil, ultimately a localized deficiency which is none the less necessary for the full deployment of all the degrees of perfection of being. On the contrary, Kant accepts the experience of evil, and the language surrounding it, for what they are. Yet he undercuts their objectivity in a much more fundamental way than any naturalist reductionist could do, by treating them as mere phenomena. As he says in a footnote of *Religion*, in a purely intelligible world in which the idea of the law is the sole principle of action, everything necessarily happens exactly as it should, according to a mechanism which is even more inexorable than any found in phenomenal nature.⁵⁴ There is no question there either of choice or of evil. And earlier, in the famous § 76 of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant had already reminded us that, if we could just penetrate to the thing as it is in itself, we would find that everything there *just is*—that there are not distinctions between “the actual” and “the possible.”⁵⁵ But how would moral language have any meaning without precisely such distinctions? More to the point, how can one possibly treat one’s moral life as more than a mere epiphenomenon when, in the back of one’s mind, one is aware that at a higher order of being none of it has any meaning at all? This is, in brief, the burden of Hegel’s criticism.

So we have also the answer to the first part of the larger question we raised at the beginning. Kant’s moral consciousness requires indeed faith. But the faith in question has nothing to do with faith as understood in orthodox Christian tradition (though it might have something to do with the narrower tradition of the *credo quia absurdum*). It is more in the nature of a *Machtspruch*—a resolve to hold on to certain positions, however intrinsically unintelligible, for the sake of coping with an otherwise impossible existential situation. In this context, there is little if any room left for religion—at least if we identify it with such practices as “giving thanks,” “cultic rituals,” “worship.”

to opposite principles, and yet, at the same time, of reconciling the why with freedom of the will,” it follows that all questions of guilt and responsibility, and with them morality itself, lose their meaning. It is not just that we cannot give metaphysical answers to questions about freedom *because of our ignorance*. It is rather that we are dealing here with an ultimately irrational matter. Cf. also, p. 144 (footnote): “Hence in a practical context (whenever duty is at issue), we understand perfectly well what freedom is; for theoretical purposes, however, as regards the causality of freedom (and equally its nature) we cannot even formulate without contradiction the wish to understand it.”

⁵³ See my essay referred to in note 49 above, pp. 109 ff.

⁵⁴ “For if the world proceeded in accordance with the precept of the law, we would say that everything occurred according to the order of nature, and nobody would think even of enquiring after the cause,” *Religion*, VI, 59, note. Cf. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak VI, 218.

⁵⁵ *Critique of Judgement*, § 76, AK V, 401-402; 402-403.

For all such practices have to do with the individual as such. They are a celebration by an individual of his individuality before other individuals and before the God in whom the individual believes.⁵⁶ But in Kant's moral system this individual falls below the level of intelligible comprehension—so too, therefore, must the practices associated with him. In *Religion*, therefore, Kant systematically denigrates such practices, attributing them to a conspiracy of devious priests who take advantage of the ignorance of common people for their private interests. Their effect is to distract the individual from the sole moral practice that counts—and that is the acknowledgment of the supreme value of the law. As he says, religion can act as an opium of conscience.⁵⁷

* * *

We return to Hegel. How does he cope with the apparently endemic tension in experience between its individual subject and the universal predicates that he (the subject) attributes to himself and to others for the sake of understanding? The pieces of his strategy are already at hand. The crucial step is to recognize that the tension is unavoidable; hence, that it won't do to try to remove it. The best policy is rather to explore its inherent constructive possibilities by pressing it to as extreme a limit as possible. This happens in the *Phenomenology* in the final section of Chapter 6, when the historical self finally claims that he (or she, as the case may be, since the peculiarity of gender now becomes important again) has universal significance, absolute value, precisely as individual; that the law that he harbours in his heart, and has validity for him just because it responds to *his particular interests*, has by that same token universal validity. It demands and deserves universal recognition. And he must make this claim in full knowledge that in making the claim he is thereby intruding on the space of others, since the same privilege applies to everyone, and since particular interests necessarily come into conflict when universalized. He is doing the others

⁵⁶ Hegel thought of religion as a celebratory activity from very early on. See this text from his Wastebook: "Joy at [the feast of] *St. John's Fire* only needs integrating [organisiert zu werden]. On all the mountains a multitude of fires are lit. It is joy at the first fire, and what is the joy for such a living element but something religious? For it is joy for it as an element. This joy must honour itself, find a place in consciousness, give itself a law [i.e. "organisiert zu werden"]. It only needs to be taken in earnest in order to become divine worship. But it is not taken thus. In the religion of suffering, the human being holds his joy in contempt, rejects consciousness of it. — Otherwise with the Greeks, who turned even eating into a divine worship, i.e. into something savoured with consciousness and will. With us, boredom is the house fare. A society is ashamed of eating. There are no more earnest human beings than the Greeks, and none more joyful." (My, somewhat loose, translation.) *Jenaer Notizenbuch (1803-1806)*, Fragment # 89, in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. V, *Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)*, M. Baum, K. R. Meist, eds. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), p. 505. See also Fragment #88 on the same page.

⁵⁷ *Religion*, VI, 117, note.

violence; therefore stands guilty before them.⁵⁸

The factor of guilt was of course already present in the world of moral consciousness, and, before that, in the society based on the identification of the individual with the general will of the community. But the problem there, as we have seen, was that, in the one case (i.e. that of moral consciousness), there was neither clearly identifiable judge nor clearly identifiable culprit for the judgement proclaiming the guilt. In the other, the culprit was guilty accidentally, simply by virtue of having a natural body; hence he fell under the anonymous judgement of the guillotine dispatching that body as a matter of routine. Now the situation is different, for we have a clearly identifiable individual subject who stands guilty before other equally identifiable such subjects. It is as individuals truly speaking in first person that these pass their judgement of guilt upon the other; and that, in the same manner, the latter accepts the judgement by acknowledging his guilt. But since this confession is uttered in truly personal language, it is also capable of eliciting from the accusers the equally personal reaction of forgiveness. What we now have is a community of individuals who claim to have each, *as individuals*, universal value. They cannot therefore but sin against one another in advancing their claims (they are in a “fallen state” from the beginning), but, since they have finally taken personal control of judgement, are equally capable of confessing their guilt as well as forgiving it in others. Theirs is a community capable of containing its own evil, since it has gained the power of judgement. It now has the power to bind as well as loosen sin.⁵⁹

This is how far the historical individual has gone since Antigone put an end to the beautiful but dreadful world of honour—where the individual proved his worth *as spiritual individual* only in combat. The then battle of prestige has given place to a conflict of vying value judgements, all of them in principle worthy of respect.⁶⁰ Nature is still there to keep spirit honest, so to speak, by testing his power through its limitations. But whereas it then made itself felt as the dread of death and the fury of the erinnyes, now, though its accidentalities still give the edge to any conflict, it has also

⁵⁸ The text where the internal conflict Hegel is describing begins to resolve itself is at *Phä.* 359.3-24 (§666). But the whole last section of Chapter VI, “Conscience,” is important. In this section Hegel repeats the whole dialectic of self-consciousness from its inception in the battle of prestige, but under the form now of a dialogue between fully developed individuals who would, and finally do, express themselves in a language that respects their individuality.

⁵⁹ See the last two paragraphs of Chapter VI, 361-362 (§§670-671). See on this subject also my essay, “Hegel, Jacobi, and Crypto-Catholicism, or, Hegel in Dialogue with the Enlightenment,” *Hegel on the Modern World*, Ardis Collins, ed. (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 53-72

⁶⁰ Cf. *Phä.* 344.30-345.36 (§§ 640-641).

acquired healing power. Nature has a way of running its course, and spirit—if he just wants—can forget as well as forgive. “The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind.”⁶¹

It is significant that at the culminating point of this episode of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel cites a passage from Jacobi’s *Woldemar* almost word for word.⁶² This is proof of how much, as I suggested earlier, Hegel was in line with the aspirations of a Jacobi, and of the whole Protestant, popular, tradition of philosophy. The beginning of all rationality lies in the original transaction between an “I” and a “Thou.” The whole of human history is a series of variations on that theme. It is equally significant that the language becomes conspicuously religious, and the theme of evil comes to the fore again. The Mediaeval theologians were capable of dealing with this reality at least to the extent that in the more historical side of their *Summæ*—and unlike their rationalistic successors—they treated it as a flaw that breaks out in the relations between individual persons but is contained (i.e. redeemed) within these same relations by means of justice and love. Hegel is following a similar strategy. Unlike the typical Enlightenment philosopher, he does not reduce moral evil to a mere imperfection required for the greater good of the whole. Nor, unlike Kant, does he treat it as a surd—an unexplainable quantity that cannot be reduced to simpler terms. For Hegel, on the contrary, evil is both irreducible and explainable. It is the necessary consequence of being rational. For one cannot make universal claims about oneself, yet not dissolve one’s individuality into those claims, without thereby also intruding, so to speak, in the space of others—thereby doing violence to them. Its presence can be limited and even redeemed, however, provided that it is recognized and accepted for what it is, and one is willing to make amends for it. The foundation of any truly human society lies, therefore, in its capacity to pass judgement over one’s own evil and that of others. One can almost hear the voice of Martin Luther. Sin bravely.⁶³ For salvation comes in the recognition that one is always already fallen.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Phä.* 360.34-35 (§ 669).

⁶² “‘Dear Henriette,’ [Woldemar] said, ‘no word can say how I feel! Loudly could I—and would I—confess before the whole world that I am the guiltiest among all men....’” (p. 461) “‘I will learn humility,’ he said. ‘You bring me back to myself! What in me now [lies] so dead against my own self....That too is pride! Always the same hard, unbending, pride....I was not good, Henriette! But I shall become it—I will learn humility; I will be yours....Oh, do accept me!’” (p. 476). *Woldemar, Jacobi’s Werke*, F. Roth, F. Köppen, eds. (Leipzig, 1812-1825). (My translation) Compare this passage with the concluding lines of Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*, 360-61 (§ 669).

⁶³ Letter no. 99 (to Melancton), 1 August 1521. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, Johannes Georg Walch, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia House, N.D.), Vol. 15, column 2590 (final paragraph).

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt once wrote of “the banality of evil,” thereby scandalizing many. But in fact, she was not far from what Hegel is saying. Only the formula that she chose for her insight was misleading. She should have said “the banality of the evil ones.” There is nothing banal about evil. Its effects (its horrors and obscenities) are real in

* * *

We finally have the answer also to the second part of the question raised at the beginning. Why is there religion in Hegel but no longer any faith, whether moral or religious? We have just observed that the language of the protagonists of the final episode of Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology* is conspicuously religious. This is so because the subject of experience whose consciousness has been under observation from the beginning of the *Phenomenology* has finally retrieved conceptually (i.e. *für ihn*) the self that constitutes the existential matrix of all his prior more abstract shapes of consciousness. Not that this subject has not been acting all along motivated by his interests as a “self.” But he has done it implicitly, *an sich*. Now he finally knows that this is the case *explicitly*. He also understands, therefore, why all his experiences have always brought religious language into play. For this language feeds on his experience precisely as *an individual*—hence, *de facto* though not always *de iure*, has always constituted for him his most fundamental mode of expression. Religion is the celebration of the universal value of the individual as such—a position that a Kant would have found difficult to appreciate, let alone understand. Together with the phenomenologist, therefore, the subject is now in a position to go over the whole series of his past experiences once more, in order to retrieve explicitly their religious underlying theme.

As it happens, the protagonists who represent this historical subject in the *Phenomenology* speak, not just religious language in general, but specifically Christian language. Their final revelatory experience has been nurtured all along, and is now clearly inspired, by Christian mythology. By the end of the Chapter, however, they should be able to understand that the secret of their Christian faith has been the structure of their social life all along, or, more graphically, that the Spirit that they sought in a world-beyond is actually to be found—even *as transcendent*—within the ambit of their community. At that point, therefore, they have comprehended conceptually the content of the faith they had hitherto represented only by means of myth. By the same token, they have

the suffering of those who are its victims and witnesses. But these last must be such as are still capable of recognizing it for what it is; who still possess the power of judgement, in other words. Take someone, however, who has totally lost this power—if there is such a one. (Eichmann, whom Arendt had in mind, might well have been a case in point.) Take someone, therefore, who has cut himself loose from the society of those who can both confess and forgive. Such a person (if one can still call him such) has become totally void of spirit—a flat, banal entity of no human interest once judgment has been passed over him. He is *evil for us*, in our representation of him, but not *an sich*, for he is no longer capable even of that. One still needs to protect oneself from him, of course. But even in that, the one important consideration is not what one does to him, but what one does to oneself in whatever one does to him. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 54-55, 252. It is interesting that, according to Arendt’s portrayal, Eichmann could only speak in clichés.

already been projected (so to speak) to Chapter 8. They have become philosophers, in other words. And it is in that capacity that they can begin to retrieve in Chapter 7 all their past religious experiences in the medium of pure thought.⁶⁵

I am saying that, by the end of Chapter 6, religious faith (Christian or otherwise) is at an end. Insight has finally won the battle it has been waging against it in the course of the Enlightenment. But then, faith had lost that battle even as it began, for it harboured insight in its certainty to possess all truth. And that had to be the seed of its own destruction.⁶⁶ By the same token, just because religion no longer has to carry the explanatory burden that it bore before, it is let free to fulfill its function of expressing and nurturing spirit in its most individual forms. Religion has been liberated, so to speak, just as art was once liberated when it no longer had to fulfill a religious function. And morality is now liberated as well, for, since it no longer has to pose as the ultimate shape of spirit, it can drop its language of deception and direct its attention instead to the more restricted, but for that all the more important, task of regulating limited aspects of human existence. There is room for faith as well, provided it is clear that it no longer sets itself up in opposition to the concept but assumes more particularized forms. It is faith in the sense of the trust we place in individuals close to us, or in the time and place in which we happen to live.

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⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the final section of this Chapter carries in the Miller translation (as well in Baillie's earlier one) the title of "Revealed Religion." This is at best a misleading translation of the German *die offenbare Religion*, if not an outright mistranslation (because for "revealed" one would have expected *geoffenbarte* in the German). For the sense conveyed by the translation is that of a religion *which is the object of a revelation*, whereas the issue here is religion as "manifest," or "patent," or "transparent"—i.e. religion which, albeit in the medium of the imagination, already shows its content to be the life of the spiritual community. Miller, p. 433. *G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J. B. Baillie, revised edition (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 750. Of course, the English "revealed" can also mean "made manifest" or "patent." The problem is that the use of the same English word for both "*offenbare*" and *geoffenbarte*" hides the difference clearly conveyed in German by the use of the two words. In his excellent Italian translation, Enrico De Negri uses the adjective "*disvelata*," i.e. "unveiled," as contrasted with "*rivelata*," i.e. "revealed." *Hegel, Fenomenologia dello spirito* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1960), vol. 2, p. 253.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Phä.* 306.6-17 (§§ 563-564, p. 344); cf. *Phä.* 267.2-5 (§487, p. 297).