

**Abstract:** Only if one considers in what sense, for Hegel, Logic and Religion have each to be the other in its own register, can one understand how Hegel's idealism is *sui generis*, quite different from Kant's or that of other post-Kantian idealists—a difference which comes strikingly home with the special meaning that myth must have in his case. The satisfaction of reason which the philosopher celebrates in the medium of the pure concept in the Logic is but the speculative counterpart (*not the schema*) of the reconciliation that the religious community celebrates in containing the evil which, since at issue for it is the identity of individuals *as individuals*, is endemic to it. This is a reconciliation which would not be possible without reason—that is, without a language for which there can be a Logic—but is not itself *logical*. Hegel's claim, though problematic, is not mystifying, and it can still speak to us.

### **Religion as the Language of the Community about Itself:**

#### **Kantian versus Hegelian Myth**

##### *The problem*

Why, and how, a paper on Hegel's philosophy of religion should evolve into a reflection on Hegelian Logic, and come to a head with comments on myth, will have to become apparent as the paper itself progresses. At the start, it is important to face up to the problem confronting anyone trying to deal with this aspect of Hegel's idealism. The fact is that, quite apart from Hegel's personal religious faith (he professed to be a Lutheran), religion was for him an essential dimension of the life of Spirit: as such, it had to be a defining factor of his idealism. Hegel's claims to this effect, despite the different nuances that they assumed at different stages of his thought's development, are much too strong and unambiguous to be dismissed as accidental accretions. "God is the Idea." "God is the absolute truth." "Philosophy and religion are one and the same." To be sure, for Hegel identity always entails a moment of difference; but the difference only makes the identity significant. Religion is the matrix of both moral life and the state. The three—religion, moral life and the state—albeit dialectically, constitute one existential unity. And this is a claim

that Hegel also makes for philosophy. Indeed, that religion, like philosophy, is the first product of reason is a fundamental thesis of Hegel's idealism—the thesis that most distinctively sets him apart from the Romantics.

All this is summed up in the other well known claim, namely that philosophy and religion have the same content, but differ only in form—“representation” (*Vorstellung*), rather than philosophy's pure “concept” (*Begriff*), being the typical medium of religion's apprehension of truth. If one takes this claim seriously, since representation is an essentially singularized mode of expression—and religion, indeed, would have no significance if it were not a phenomenon of individual human beings in their experience *as individuals within a community*—it follows that religion is for Hegel philosophy itself, but in the register of the singular voice of the individual. By the same token, philosophy is itself religion—is itself divine service— though in the formal voice of the universal concept.

But here is the problem. Religion's voice can only speak to such who are committed members of the historically *particular* community held together by the beliefs of which that voice is the expression. One may indeed choose to approach Hegel's idealism from its “religious dimension,” as Emil Fackenheim did (it's now over fifty years ago), or “in theological perspective,” as Peter Hodgson has recently done.<sup>1</sup> But one can then sympathize with the reviewer<sup>2</sup> in the *TLS* of a cluster of recent publications on Hegel for lightly passing over Hodgson's, on the ground that it does not speak to the philosophical community at large. One can equally sympathize for wanting to pass over lightly Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* altogether—that is, over Hegel's own approach to his philosophy in

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<sup>1</sup>Peter C. Hodgson, *Shape of Freedom* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>Robert Pippin.

theological perspective—indeed, for abstracting completely from the religious dimension of Hegel’s thought. The problem, however, is that such values that nowadays we hold sacrosanct as freedom of conscience originated in the medium of precisely the religious language which we would thus ignore by abstracting from the religious dimension of Hegel’s thought.<sup>3</sup> With that abstraction, we would also abstract Hegel from his historical context. Even more to the point, that same religious language gave to Hegel the voice that allowed him to address his contemporaries in their historical particularity, and thus made his idealism—not only in his eyes, but in those of his contemporaries as well—socially and politically relevant. It was a voice quite different from that of competing philosophical parties—quite in general, that of the Romantics. One has reason to question, therefore, whether, in abstracting from the factor that made Hegel’s singular voice what it was, one is not thereby also tempering with the essence of his thought.

I am not implying that it is not possible, or not intellectually rewarding, to consider other aspects of Hegel’s idealism on their own, quite apart from the issue of religion. Nor do I believe that it would be desirable, let alone possible, to “update” Hegel’s religious language. My point is actually much stronger. *Only if one considers in what sense, for Hegel, Logic and religion had each to be the other in its own register, can one understand how his idealism is sui generis, quite different from Kant’s or that of other post-Kantian idealists—a difference which comes home with the special meaning that myth must have in his case.* This is the theme that I want to develop. I shall suggest that Hegel himself, in his philosophy of religion (which he conceived still on the model of classical theology), obfuscated the existential implication of his claimed identity of philosophy and religion. He

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<sup>3</sup>As Hodgson rightly reminds the reader.

obfuscated it to himself no less than to his audience. In this, his voice *as philosopher* was deceptive. But it might well be that, in unmasking this deception, we shall find that Hegel, *the philosopher*, paradoxically still speaks to us.

### *The obfuscation*

The possibility of obfuscation lay in the conceptual move that Hegel made as, in the Jena years, he progressively, to some extent perhaps even inadvertently, replaced his original five-part System with the three-part mature System with which we are all acquainted. In historical context, the move was momentous, even revolutionary. From what we know from the announcements of Hegel's courses in 1801/02, the theme of his lectures was to show how, just as the absolute substance "first gives a sketch of itself, as it were, in the idea," then realizes itself in nature by giving itself an articulated body therein, and in spirit finally sums itself up by recognizing itself in this process of externalization, so philosophy must display the idea of the Absolute in cognition, and must then develop it into a philosophy of nature, an ethical system, and finally into a religion that recaptures the simplicity of the original idea.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the System on which Hegel was working, as we know from the extant fragments of unpublished manuscripts, if ever completed as first envisaged, would have fallen into five parts, organized in linear form: logic, metaphysics, philosophy of nature, ethics, and religion.<sup>5</sup> The logic exposed the limitations of ordinary thought by dialectically uncovering the contradictions it incurred by fixating on limited categories, assuming them as ultimate. Its function was to overcome this sclerosis of thought, and, in this way, induce the kind of conceptual

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<sup>4</sup>GW 5, 262-265.

<sup>5</sup>For details, dates, and texts, see the ISL xvi.

fluidity that would make the concept of a self-contained Absolute intuitively evident. Metaphysics was the first exposition of this substance. The philosophy of nature further expounded it as reflected in the inorganic and organic shapes of nature. Ethics did the same in the forms of social existence, and religion, finally, expressed the whole in the medium of a people's (*Volk*) myths and beliefs.

The image with which Hegel expressed in his course announcement the metaphysical assumption that underlay his projected System—namely, that the Absolute “first [gives] a sketch of itself, as it were, in the idea” (“in der Idee sein Bild gleichsam entwirft”)—was no doubt mystifying, despite the “as it were” (*gleichsam*) with which Hegel qualified it. It nonetheless clearly conveyed a Schellingian position with which Hegel's auditors would have well been acquainted. The System was supposed to conceptually reconstruct the content of experience as the Absolute's own external exposition of itself in it. The truth of experience, and of the System built on it, consisted in their conformity to precisely this Absolute's idea of itself. It was a truth, however, which had to originate, and equally had to be consummated, in an intuition which itself transcended reflective conceptualization, and, as such, defied discursive justification. The required conformity, therefore, had to occur at a distance, across an unbridgeable ontic gap that separated experience, and its systematic reconstruction, from the intended object. This gap qualified both, experience and System, as a surd which resisted rationalization.

It was not by accident, therefore, that Hegel's System assumed its original linear structure, or, for that matter, that it culminated in religion. With respect to the Absolute, of which it was the intended external exposition, experience was a surface event, with no direct anchoring to its presumed ontic basis. In this it was not unlike the stream of Spinoza's modes, as these stood with respect to their underlying

substance. And, of course, Schelling, Hegel's mentor at the time, was explicit about his Spinozism. Experience had no internal principle of closure—and neither could the System that reflected its content conceptually. Its linear structure was more than just an architectonic vagary. It expressed precisely this lack of internal closure. Nor could the System's truth—its conceptual adequacy with the intuition that motivated experience existentially—be expressed conceptually. Hence the position that religion assumed in the System. Truth found final expression only in the medium of religious myth—such myth as a divinely inspired poet gives birth to *in illo tempore*, thereby animating a whole people (Hegel's *Volk*) with the felt presence of the Absolute.

For us who, at a distance of two hundred years, have a better view of the conceptual panorama of the day than was possible to any who was part of it, the most incisive analysis of the internal logic of this original Hegel's System can be gathered from Fichte—one who was indeed very much part of that panorama, though at a geographical distance from Hegel, and under quite different conceptual constraints. At the same time as Hegel was sketching his System in Jena under Schelling's influence, Fichte, in Berlin, was revising the presentation of his already notorious *Wissenschaftslehre*. It is well known that, at least as of 1804, Fichte had abandoned his Science's previous standpoint of the "I," and had reformulated it, rather, on the assumption of a One who is the source of all reality and truth. He had thus replaced the language of "subject" and "subjectivity" with that of the "Absolute." In this, despite his running controversy with Schelling, he had in fact adopted his Spinozism. He had adopted it, however (this is the significant point), with a crucial difference. Schelling gave his exposition of the Absolute (its *Auslegung*) positively, in cataphatic mode, as if, to quote Heinrich Heine, God had

appeared and spoken to him.<sup>6</sup> In the early Jena years, Hegel was to all appearances poised to do the same. Fichte was unique because, with his usual philosophical acumen, explicitly faced up to the problem of a science, the intended object of which (the One) escapes rational grasp *ex professo*, and, therefore, can represent that object only across what I have called an ontic gap. In Fichte's language, the intended representation had to occur *per hiatus irrationalem*, a hiatus for which Fichte also used the figure of *der Lage des Todes*, for it is there that reason has indeed its origin, but where, by the same token, it also falls away from the source of its truth.

Fichte's newly reformulated Science thus acquired all the markings of an apophatic theology. It too, like Schelling's, was intended as an *Auslegung* of the Absolute, but in negative mode, by systematically producing conceptual constructs, each intended as a schematic representation of the truth of things, and just as systematically deconstructing them even as they were constructed. They had to be deconstructed, for if reason had actually succeeded in conceptually expressing through them the intended truth, it would have succeeded in crossing the *hiatus irrationalis* which *de facto* separated it from it, while at the same time maintaining itself as discursive reason. But that was impossible. Fichte's constructs, unlike Schelling's, attained truth only by deliberately demonstrating (just as in traditional negative theology) their inherent untruth. They explicitly intended their object across an untraversable distance which they themselves created and could not avoid creating. That's where Fichte's difference from Schelling crucially lay. Nonetheless, the fact remained that, in assuming in the new formulation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

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<sup>6</sup>In Heinrich Heine's words, "'In the year 1804, the God of Schelling appeared at last in His completed form in a work entitled 'Philosophy and Religion.'" And Heine added, "Here philosophy ceases with Schelling, and poetry—I may say folly—commences." *Religion Philosophy and in Germany* (1833), tr. John Snodgrass (Boston, 1959), 151, 152.

the standpoint of the One, Fichte was philosophically colluding with Schelling. Despite the contrasting rhetoric, and the negative way that he trod, his Science, no less than Schelling's, rejoined actual experience, and its immediately lived truth, only in the medium of religion. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* naturally issued into religion. The *Anweisung zum seligen Leben* of 1806 was there to prove the point. For both, Fichte as well as Schelling, religion was the medium for coping existentially with the irrationality which reason itself created, and, in creating it, demonstrated its own epiphenomenality: it demonstrated its non-reality and that of the universe it conceptually constructed.

Fichte's and Schelling's exposition (*Auslegung*) of the Absolute, whether presented in the negative mode of the one, or the more explicitly Romantic positive mode of the other, remained external to it. And so was Hegel's exposition also poised to be, as we have seen, in the early Jena years. But things happened. Because of circumstances that need not concern us here (though Hegel acknowledged at one point *Fichtes Verdienst*), already *de facto* in 1804/05, but certainly explicitly with the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's System assumed a different shape. It now fell into three parts—Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit—which, together, formed a self-enclosing circle. And this new circular shape, no less than the linear one of the System earlier envisaged, was more than just an architectonic vagary. It had metaphysical significance. For the Logic now came at both the conclusion and the beginning of the System—at the place where Spirit exhaustively retrieves in the medium of the concept its past as nature, but also, at the same time, restarts the process by which it incarnates itself in it. On the face of it, with this new configuration of his System, Hegel claimed to have succeeded in crossing—not just intuitively, but discursively, in the medium of reason—precisely

the *hiatus irrationalis* which, according to both Schelling and Fichte, irreducibly separated the Absolute from experience, and constituted (to use Kant's expression) the *Abgrund der Vernunft*. In other words, Hegel now claimed to have conceptually reenacted from the side of the Absolute itself—not *per impossibile*, but *de facto*—the process by which the Absolute “in der Idee sein Bild . . . entwirft.” His exposition of the Absolute was internal to it. The System supposedly contained within itself, and somehow neutralized, the surd—the moment of irrationality—which would have otherwise qualified it from outside it, as it did for the systems of Schelling and Fichte.

Indeed, that was Hegel's claim. His system had achieved internal, discursive, closure. This was the move to which I have earlier referred as “momentous.” It set him apart equally from Schelling as from Fichte. But how is the move to be understood? If one assumes that Hegel, in making his move, still held on to Schelling's and Fichte's Spinozistic position that the Absolute is a transcendent, simple One, then, of course, the Logic would have to be read as the first outline of a Cosmogony—in Hegel's own imagery, as “*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit.*”<sup>7</sup> It is this assumption of Hegel's perhaps never openly declared, as it might be argued (though I certainly disagree), but nonetheless clearly maintained Spinozism, which is the source of the long standing belief that his System is a form of panlogism. It is the assumption behind the Scottish tradition of Hegelianism. For Stirling, but even more explicitly for McTaggart, the categories of the Logic constituted the most universal determinations of Being, on the basis of which the principles of the more particular

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<sup>7</sup>Logic, 29.

sciences were to be derived *a priori*, and so, too, down the scale of particularization, was every event that occurs in actual experience—in *principle* at least, if not *de facto*. Charles Taylor repeated this reading of the Logic in 1975. Frederick Beiser, citing McTaggart, in 2005. Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion, if we ignore those which are dedicated to the interpretation of historical religions and which, as such, must be judged on their historical merit, would indeed support the same reading. These lectures are but an iteration of the procession in the Logic of the categories, overlaid, however, with religious imagery.

But this, I want to claim, is an obfuscation of the meaning of the Logic. Quite apart from the fact that it brings Hegel's Logic, past Kant, back to the tradition of classic metaphysics, it also reduces the difference between *Begriff* (the medium of philosophy) and *Vorstellung* (that of religion) to one of greater or lesser degree of objective clarity, exactly what it was for the Enlightenment. The claimed identity of philosophy and religion loses, therefore, the moment of dialectical differentiation that one should expect from Hegel. Religion, as a system of beliefs enshrined in myths and of cultic practices, becomes just a proxy for philosophy: it is philosophy for the feeble of mind and the faint of heart, such as disappears when the light of reason shines upon it. Lost is what Kant, as well as Fichte and Schelling, each in his own way, had recognized, and the recognition had set them apart from the Enlightenment—namely, that religion has a function to play in experience typically its own. One need not, however, press Hegel back past Kant. Here is where the interpretation of Hegel's concept of religion brings into play the meaning of his logical categories.

*The Logic's speculative Sunday*

The whole of Hegel's Logic is indeed an exposition of the Absolute—one carried out as if by the Absolute itself. But the point is that this Absolute no longer is that of dogmatic metaphysics, it is Spirit; and only if one fails to understand the conceptual revolution this change implies, can one be tempted to interpret Hegel as if he were a Spinoza *redivivus*. In fact, the Absolute of dogmatic metaphysics is reintroduced in Hegel's System only in the form of Nature, as this stands opposed to Spirit, yet must be refashioned by it after its image. And this is a change that occurs in Hegel's Logic at the conclusion of the logic of essence, precisely where the classical categories of the Absolute come under analysis, and Hegel prepares the way for his move to Subjective Logic, the logic of the language of Spirit.

Let me expand. We must recall that the categories of the logic of essence govern the language of "thick objects," such objects as ordinary language, and classical metaphysics, are primarily about. These are objects which ("substance" being the most obvious case) would be assumed in any discourse as carrying within them the ground of their determinations. This is not the case in the preceding logic of being, where, on the contrary, the subject matter (*Gegenstand*), already abstractly intended simply as "being" in general, is specified (and thereby significantly made present) by means of qualitative and quantitative determinations which, although *de facto* (i.e., in themselves and for the logician) each entails the other, do not contain this entailment as part of their formal definition. The entailment is not "for them." Their mutual connections remain *immediate*, or just factual; the logical discourse that holds them together consequently falls outside them, anonymously supported (as one can presume) by the logician. And this is a flaw which the logic of essence is expected to remedy, because, as intended at its level of conceptual reflection, "being" is posited as containing within it the distinction between the "essential" and the "non-

essential”—as in possession, in other words, of a norm by which to distinguish between which determination is a true presentation of it, and which is not, and why. The objects now introduced are (or are at least expected to be) self-justifying—exactly how they are assumed in ordinary discourse, and were assumed in classical metaphysics.

The problem, however, is that here, too, immediacy makes itself present. And its presence is no longer external to the objects. For these—all of them now structured according to reflectively ever more complex variations of the original “essential/unessential” distinction—are expected to be the ground of their determinations. They are expected to carry the burden of supporting the logical discourse that holds object with determination, determination with determination, and object with object. And inasmuch as, upon being introduced, objects and determinations retain a content of their own which is not totally absorbed in their relations to the others—that is to say, to the extent that they remain more or less irreducible assumptions—this discourse gets disrupted. Immediacy reasserts itself. In the logic of essence, however, this happens not simply as a matter of fact (as indeed it does), but as explicitly a problem. It is a source of opaqueness where, on the contrary, total logical transparency was expected. It is this irruption of immediacy (*Fakticität*, as Fichte would call it) that precipitates the move from one logical objective *Gestalt* to another, just as, historically, it precipitated the shifts in metaphysical paradigms. Removing this immediacy is the theme governing the unfolding of the whole logic of essence.

One can understand, therefore, why this logic would come to a head with the introduction of the category of the Absolute, and the language of attribution relating

to it.<sup>8</sup> This language expresses in as explicit a form as possible the dominating belief of Western metaphysics that Being is *a se* and *per se*, that is, “absolute.” The Absolute is the presumed proto-fact (*die Sache selbst*)—a *presence* which has absorbed within itself, or simply dissipated, all external conditions qualifying it. The language about it should thus have attained the perfect fluidity of determinations which is the goal of the logic of essence, as indeed it does in the subsequent dialectic of the modal categories. Here is the problem, however. Since the presence of the Absolute is *ex hypothesi* absolutely self-contained, it transcends the issue of justification altogether. It is *a se*, and, therefore, resists objectification. But discourse, *as discourse*, is by nature explicatory, hence explanatory. By positing the Absolute (as it finally must by virtue of its at present still inner dogmatic logic), it is therefore settled with the contradiction of *subjectively* needing to explain, yet at the same time recognizing the objective *superfluity* of explanation. *Discourse is thrown back upon itself: it becomes itself the theme of discourse, and the language of the Absolute conveys this turn explicitly.* Whatever is said of the Absolute must only be *attributed* to it: *said* of it, not because of it, but because of the language about it. From the Absolute’s own standpoint, whatever is thus being attributed to it is only a *mode*, a merely relative, accidental determination. Moreover, from the same Absolute’s standpoint, the notion of a “standpoint” is itself problematic.

The net result is that the immediacy which in the logic of being affected the object externally, and in that of essence hitherto irrupted from within the intended object, now irrupts on the side of the language itself, in what it *says* about its

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<sup>8</sup>Must enter a historical note here. The language of the Absolute was unfortunately introduced by Fichte and Schelling. Kant spoke rather of the “unconditional”; Spinoza of *causa sui*, or “substance.”

intended object. And this new form of immediacy finds its first expression in the modal categories. Hegel is here using the language of the Absolute common to Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. But it is clear that, behind this Absolute, there lies Spinoza's *causa sui*; and, indeed, Hegel comments on Spinoza and Spinozism in this context, even though, as we shall see momentarily, his truly significant comment only comes in the revised part of the 1832 edition of the Logic. Be that as it may, the point now is that the idea of *causa sui* makes sense only as an effort at containing the otherwise ever shifting determinations of the modal categories. More specifically, the issue is how to reconcile the two meanings of the judgement, "it is because it is," according as the stress is on the "*is*," in which case "actuality" is taken to be at the origin of "possibility"; or on the "*because*," in which case "actuality" calls for "possibility" as its explanation. In ordinary discourse, of course, the two senses shift into one another, alternating in primacy depending on context. The more possible a thing is, the more likely to become actual; and, the more actual, the more is its possibility manifested. And there is no problem—again, in ordinary discourse—assuming an actual thing, or an event, as the starting point of a process of explanation, yet subjecting that same thing or event, as need be, to a wider explanatory system.<sup>9</sup>

The problem occurs, as it did for classical metaphysics, the moment one tries to bring this explanatory system to completion, or—it amounts to the same—the moment one tries to overcome the contingency (i.e., the new form under which immediacy now makes itself present) which affects the language of the "actual" and the "possible." *Causa sui* is the formula of classical metaphysics's strategy for resolving precisely this problem. At the level of particular determination, the

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<sup>9</sup>GW 11, 384.(lines 31-34).

“possible” and the “actual” yield either “necessity” or “contingency” to the extent that each *is* (whence “necessity”) or *is not* (whence “contingency”) by virtue of the other. The strategy consists in thinking of a self-contained entity in which “possibility” and “actuality” coincide; consequently, as Hegel puts it, the “contingent” is just as well the “necessary,” and the “necessary” the “contingent.” What results, as classical metaphysics would have it; is a new order of modality—namely, the “absolute necessity” for which *causa sui* is only another expression. This is, of course, the conclusion to which the logic of classical metaphysics naturally leads, as also do the categories of Hegel’s logic of being and essence in the objective part of his Logic. It is significant, however, that Hegel calls this “absolute necessity” blind. It “shuns the light,”<sup>10</sup> he says, using the trope of “light” which, incidentally, Fichte also was using at the same time. These are just metaphors. They vividly convey nonetheless the decisive conceptual point. To wit: the idea of “absolute necessity” completely undermines the objectivity of the modal categories as these apply in ordinary discourse to real things, the same things which classical metaphysics also wanted to explain. The same point is being driven home, in other words, that already emerged in the language of attribution. *The source of immediacy is to be sought on the side of the language about being, not in “being in itself.”* Or again, to restate the matter in a way that connects it with the critical problem Fichte was at the time facing in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, with the positing of the Absolute, the ontic gap is created between it and phenomenal reality that empties any talk about the latter of any ultimate objective validity.

One need not follow, however, the logic of classical metaphysics to its internal

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<sup>10</sup>GW 11, 391 (line 38)-392 (line 3).

conclusion. Here the just mentioned Hegel's comment in the revised part of the 1832 edition of the *Logic* becomes relevant. Significant about the comment is that it couples Spinoza and Kant, blaming both for having not given objective validity to the modal categories. Indeed, such categories have for Kant only subjective meaning, even more subjective than the rest of the categories, for they say nothing objective about experience, even if "objectivity" is understood in purely phenomenal terms. They seal, so to speak, the mere epiphenomenality of the objects of experience when these are measured against the supposed "thing in itself," thus reducing them to mere surface events, just as was the case for Spinoza's "modes." Jacobi—it must be remembered—had recognized the implicit Spinozism of Kant's transcendental idealism from the beginning. So far as Hegel is concerned, however, what could it possibly mean, at the conclusion of the logic of essence, to recognize the objective validity of the modal categories? It can mean nothing else but to accept, yet give positive interpretation to, the conclusion already *de facto* achieved with the language of attribution, namely, that the source of meaning lies in discourse; that truth is to be measured, therefore, not according to the conformity of discourse to things, but according to their conformity to what discourse requires for its closure as discourse. Immediacy emerges indeed on the part of discourse; but this is to be considered an achievement rather than a failure, for it is the reflective capacity of discourse to introduce in experience the "might have been" which dissolves the otherwise ontic solidity of "being" and renders it pliable to its recreation in the medium of Spirit. The problem with the Absolute of classical metaphysics is that it resists this "might have been," and, for this reason, it must be relegated to the past of Spirit.

Spirit is the key word here. This is the great inversion—the final *Umkehrung*—that occurs at the transition from objective to subjective logic. It

conceptually marks the distance that Hegel historically traversed in Jena between 1801 and the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807. It is Hegel's move away from classical metaphysics—away from the language of the Absolute—to that of *Spirit*. As Hegel says, the light will shine.<sup>11</sup> “The unveiling of substance” in the concept “is the one and only true refutation of Spinozism.”<sup>12</sup> For if one wants to avoid the opaqueness of the language of “absolute necessity,” yet hold on to the completeness of discourse that the logic of essence tries to achieve, there is no choice left but to look for this completeness on the side of the discourse itself: in the universe of meaning that the latter generates, where absolute necessity is transformed into Spirit's freedom. Discourse progresses by stating itself. It thereby particularizes its original theme and hence establishes the need to re-state itself over and over again: in this sense, it generates immediacy. The sense of the ineluctable experiences of facts—their immediacy—is due precisely to the freedom that the language of the “might have been” introduces.<sup>13</sup> It is the freedom of ever continuing a conversation about such facts in which the “is” and the “because” alternate in setting its leading motif. But it is language itself, by virtue of its original theme, that governs this process of particularization, thereby retaining its unity and the capacity to declare normatively when it has become an achieved discourse—a thematic totality.

If we look back at the imagery with which Hegel expounded in the early Jena years his project for a philosophical system—the Absolute “in der Idee sein Bild . .

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<sup>11</sup>GW 11, 392 (lines 3-4).

<sup>12</sup>GW 12, 15 (lines 20-23). The whole page 15 is relevant.

<sup>13</sup>Fichte had, of course, seen that. It is noteworthy that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* starts all its major sections with a reflection on the “I is I.”

. entwirft.”— one can see how it would have to be reformed to fit this *Umkehrung*. It’s the Idea, the reflection achieved in the “concept of the concept”—such concept as is given complete expression in the Logic, itself a work of conceptual art—which provides the intelligible space within which the Absolute appears. One could say, therefore, that the System has finally contained within itself the ontic gap that otherwise separated discursive reason and its intended object; that the discourse is now internal to this object—an exposition of the Absolute by the Absolute. But to put the matter in this way is still mystifying; still stating the case in terms of the assumptions that made the original mystification possible. The fact is that the Absolute has been relegated to the status of Nature (*die blinde Macht*). The exposition is that of Spirit discoursing about itself and, in the process, recognizing this Nature as its past—by that token affecting it with the freedom of its “might have been”; introducing possibilities, in other words, before which any natural configuration assumes the character of the “merely given”; and the task is set for Spirit to recreate it after its image in the medium of its works (language first of all). Again, it is not the case that the ontic gap which made for the facticity of experience on the classical model has been traversed by Hegel’s system, or absorbed by it. The point is rather that the very figure of a gap no longer does conceptual work. For it is the reflective power of reason that generates immediacy; and the more complete such a reflection, the more obvious the immediacy, but also, as at the end of the Logic, the greater the freedom that Spirit enjoys with respect to it. The *Onhmacht der Natur* is in direct proportion to the power of reason. This is the point which McTaggart missed in the nineteenth century, and Beiser, among others, more recently.

In the system of 1801, religion was where the reconciliation between the finite

and the infinite was consummated, in intuition. Inasmuch as in the subsequent system it is Logic which performs this reconciling deed, though discursively; inasmuch, moreover, that reconciliation is the work of religion, philosophy for Hegel *is* religion. But the reconciliation in question amounts to no more than the recognition that, although there will inevitably be the repeated irruption of the irrational in experience, any such irruption will just as inevitably be contained—for it is reason itself which is responsible for it, as it realizes itself by transforming nature. This recognition might make indeed for the philosopher's speculative Sunday. But for the historical individual, the irrational is more than just a matter of immediacy unexpectedly re-asserting itself. It is a matter, rather, of being confronted with the presence of evil. And, for that confrontation, logical reconciliation is of little comfort. Needed, rather, is the kind of reconciliation which only the labour of the work-day week can deliver. And, for that, religion—in its more ordinary sense of myth-making and celebratory ritual—is required.

*Religion's work-day week*

“Evil” is now the key word. It must be, for both conceptual and hermeneutical reasons. Conceptually, the problem that discursive reason confronts, and acts out in the Logic in the form of a conceptual artifact, is to contain the singularity of determination which its own universalizing function renders irreducible, yet must contain for the sake of discursive unity. But the existential counterpart of impervious singularity is evil, and the existential counterpart of the speculative reconciliation of universal and singular is the reconciliation which a community must achieve in the face of the evil that necessarily internally disrupts it—necessarily, because its

members are rational, and, as we know from Scripture, it is in knowledge that sin originates. On Hegel conceptual premises, this reconciliation is the domain of religion's work-day week, and it must be absolved under conditions typical to the latter—that is, without simply seeking consolation in the abstract ether of the speculative Sunday.

Hermeneutically, however, this is not an easy point to make. Hegel clearly distinguishes between institutionalized religion and religion itself, and, whatever his attitude towards the former (which need not concern us here), he clearly maintains that the latter is indispensable to the life of the state. At the same time, he also clearly distinguishes between this life and religion. These constants apart, however, how Hegel saw religion in relation to the ethos of a community and to philosophy is not altogether clear. His position evolved over time; as we learn from Walter Jaeschke, it did so even in the course of his Berlin lectures on religion, very likely in reaction to shifting political situations. Overall, the texts convey ambiguous messages. For one thing, one cannot avoid the impression that for Hegel the reconciliation to be achieved in religion is not with the human situation, but with the philosophers's speculative Sunday—as if the burden of religion's work-day week were to surpass the limitations of *Vorstellung*, and the reflections of *Verstand*, in order to gain the philosophers's vision *ab aeterno*. But, as we have already said, the implication of this surpassing of *Vorstellung* is that religion is philosophy for the masses. This is an Enlightenment position which still lingers on in Hegel—the only difference being that, whereas an *Aufklärer* like Reinhold believed in the power of reason to enlighten everyone, Hegel's own estimate of the speculative capacity of common folk was rather pessimistic. True religion (i.e. philosophy) is for the elite—its temples, the

Universities; and its priests, a band of philosophical ascetics who have fled the city. This, at least according to a text of 1824. In 1827, according to a more optimistic text, Hegel seems to believe that a people held together by the Lutheran profession of faith—because of the sense of subjective freedom that animates the latter—constitutes the most apt ethical material with which to build a modern state.

As for Hegel's polemic against reflection and reflectivity, if his at times apparent belief that religion is philosophy for the masses is a throw-back to the Enlightenment, this polemic is a throw back to his early, still Romantic, Jena years. Reflection assumes pejorative meaning only when contrasted with, and subordinated to, intuition. It cannot have any such meaning in the context of discursive reason. It should have already lost it in Jena as Logic and Metaphysics ran into one another, and Hegel's System absolved itself of the need of intellectual intuition. The Logic is reflective work at its most extreme. But the Hegel who is still held hostage to Enlightenment assumptions, or in the grips of his current Romantic culture; or, for that matter, Hegel the theologian, no longer speaks to us in the way he still does as metaphysician. When it comes to religion, therefore, it behooves us to force his hand, so to speak; or, less metaphorically, to hold him to the logic of his own metaphysics. And, for this, we must turn to the *Phenomenology*, at the place where Hegel brings the figure of the "beautiful soul" on his phenomenological stage.

Implicit at this juncture is a criticism of the Romantic irony in vogue at the time. More to the point for us, however, is how this figure makes its appearance. The *Phenomenology* can be read as a treatise on language. This is true of the work as a whole, but especially true of the section on "culture," where Hegel defines each stage in the development of this historical phenomenon by the type of language peculiar

to it—be this the language of “fealty,” “obedience,” “service,” “flattery,” or what have you. Each language is a progressively ever more self-conscious expression of the social arrangement achieved at a given stage of cultural development—the degree of reflective consciousness being itself a measure of that development. In Hegel’s account, culture attains its most reflective stage of self-enlightenment in the language of the *philosophes*; at the same time, however, because of the fluidity of that language which is capable of undermining the validity of any norm of conduct even as it sets it up, it also exhausts the spirit that animated it from the beginning. Culture is ready, therefore, to yield to a completely new shape of social existence.

The destructive fluidity of the *philosophes*’s language is, of course, the social counterpart of the logical fluidity of the modal categories. It was indeed at the time of the Enlightenment that culture, critical of any historically inherited institution, or historically derived particular norm of conduct, put its trust in a transcendent Absolute—the absoluteness of which, however, also meant the destruction of its historically particularized social content. In the *Phenomenology*, the sound of the guillotine (hardly a language) takes stage precisely where, in the *Logic*, the idea of the Absolute proves to be the *Abgrund der Vernunft*. In the *Logic*, the threat thereby posed to reason marks the beginning of the *Umkehrung* from Absolute to Spirit. In the *Phenomenology*, the social counterpart of the same *Umkehrung* occurs as culture, reduced to bloodied tatters by its experience with the guillotine, takes refuge in the interiorized ether of Kantian subjectivity.

Hegel’s reflections on what he calls “the moral order” are well known, even famous. I restrict myself to one comment, which Hegel perhaps makes only incidentally but which brings us, nonetheless, directly to the “beautiful soul.” Hegel

describes the “self” of the moral order as “dumb”—“dumb” because, as a supposed abstract “I,” this self has no language of its own. It cannot speak, for any idiom in which it would speak, since it is historical, must be particular, and, to that extent, disproportionate to the “I” which it is supposed to voice. This does not mean that in the *Phenomenology* Kant’s “I” is left mute. The point of its “dumbness” is rather that, because of that disproportion, the language in which it actually speaks must be self-destructive, that is, inherently deceptive. It devolves into a play of assertions of pure moral intentions which in fact mask the singularity of the interests that motivate historical action, and of surreptitious appeals to the efficacy of historical motivation which in fact only mask the impotence of pure intentions—a play of dissemblance which is always on the verge of breaking into outright hypocrisy.

The figure of the “beautiful soul” takes stage in order to cut through with one single move (violently, as it were) this of play of dissembling claims. Its voice is that of conscience (*Gewiß*)—a voice which, though coming to an individual from far beyond, and with a force which is universalizing, is nonetheless heard by the individual as binding to a very particular action. It has a content. Antigone had already heard that voice, and had recognized that it was of “nicht etwa jetzt und gestern, sondern immerdar // lebt es, und keiner weiß, von wannen es erchien.” In Antigone’s case, its effect was to raise to universal obligation what would have otherwise been only a familial duty to bury her brother—indeed, to bury him in deliberate disregard of her other naturally appointed duty to obey the King forbidding the burial. That marked, of course, the end of Antigone’s prior naturally innocent acceptance of what she was as individual. This cannot be the case, however, of the modern individual, for whom that same voice has the force of Kant’s law, and who

arrived at this law through the discipline of the fear of the Absolute. For this individual, the only alternative to the dissemblance caused by it is to fall back upon its own inner subjective resources, investing its individuality with universal value despite its particularity. It is a world unto itself; as such it assumes as norm for right action precisely its self-assured subjective belief in what is right. The voice of this individual's conscience no longer comes from where no one knows; it's the individual's own voice. This individual is Hegel's beautiful soul, one who, when it acts, acts on the strength of its particularized conscience alone. In this sense, it takes itself to be a moral genius, for, like an artistic genius, it is the creator of norms.

Here, however, is the problem. In posing as a genius, the beautiful soul invests its singular determination as individual with universal value: holds out its private conscience as the norm for a universally binding judgement. But it could not consistently do as much without at the same time allowing for everybody else to do the same. The net result is a potential conflict of universal claims, for each claim would be based on a determination of conscience which is *ex hypothesi* unique. One way of coping with the situation is for the beautiful soul to restrict itself to mere posturing, absorbed in what it takes to be its inner transcendent beauty, and careful not to be defiled by external challenge. This type of beautiful souls, however, can have no historical significance. They simply pine away. More to the point is the beautiful soul who takes up the challenge of communicating with others on the basis of its own and the others's conscience. This soul understands that for its claims to be effective, they need the validation that comes only from the recognition of "others," despite the fact that, since the claims are exclusively based on the testimony of its eminently individual conscience, they necessarily put it at odds with these "others."

Hegel deploys the best of his dialectical skills on this point. The first thing that transpires is that to invest one's singularity with universal value is pride. It is to want to be like God, and this is the devil's proto-sin. The beautiful soul is satanic. But the devil is the father of all lies, as we know from the Bible; and this, too, transpires from Hegel's phenomenological enactment of beautiful souls in conversation. As one soul engages another seeking approval, it presents itself to this other on the basis of its singular natural determination, the only one which is visible to the other. But what it promises on this basis is a vaunted wisdom which far transcends that determination, and is inherently ineffable because indeterminate. The soul presents itself in one visible place, with all apparent honesty, while in fact making its stand somewhere else which is not visible. As for the other soul whose recognition is being sought, it has indeed a reasonable right to reject the testimony being offered to it. But the problem is that it, too, is a beautiful soul, and, as such, its rejection is based on the testimony of its conscience. And this testimony, because of its singularity, could objectively just as well come down in favour of the claim being rejected. The judgement condemning the claim, while advanced as having universal validity, is in fact just as much a contingent claim as the one it condemns. Again, this is a matter of presenting oneself in one visible place, while making one's stand in another which is invisible.

All this could be taken as another case of dissemblance, of scrambled communication. There is a comic side to the beautiful soul. But the point is that the beautiful soul *believes* in its testimony—believes in its moral genius. The dissemblance it plays before the other it plays, first of all, before itself. This is not a case of straightforward deception, which can always be externally unmasked, but a

case of self-deception. The lie is to oneself. To use Jacobi's imagery, the beautiful soul behaves before the other as if carrying a secret within it which is as much a secret to it as to the other. It does not *mislead* the other (where "to lead" in Latin is *ducere*). It asks the other, rather, to collude with it in a grand ineffable project—at the same time, however, entangling it in its own singularity. For this reason, Kierkegaard, who borrowed more than one page from both Jacobi and Hegel, portrayed his beautiful soul as essentially seductive. It lures the other into its personal sway while distracting it with the intimation of infinite possibilities that mask, because of their indefiniteness, the otherwise humdrum character of its visible body. But the best characterization of a beautiful soul is still Hegel's. Its speech, its testimony, is, Hegel says, like a sound which never turns back upon itself: it dissipates as it sounds, and what remains of it is but an echo.

Hegel would not be Hegel, however, if the lie were not unmasked—*internally* unmasked, as only it could be. The power of Spirit, which lies in language, *will* triumph. By the very fact of confronting the other in speech, the beautiful soul becomes aware of what it is doing: it recognizes that it is lying. In giving testimony, therefore, it acknowledges its evil before the other: it confesses. And, while condemning the other in judgement, it also forgives it. This might appear indeed a surprising move on Hegel's part (a sort of *deus ex machina*), unless we recognize that with the move Hegel has removed the figure from its immediate moral context which has so far shaped it, and has retrieved it, rather, as a moment by which spirit becomes explicitly aware of itself which is the theme of the *Phenomenology*. The beautiful soul's conversion is not moral, but, to speak loosely, metaphysical. There is a sense in which the beautiful soul illustrates the human situation in general. For the human

being is bound to the singularity of nature; yet its vocation is to creatively invest this singularity with infinite value. This is pride: the beautiful soul's sin is everybody's sin. We are all born in sin. But the sin's consequences are reaped at the level of nature. Nature has a way all its own to exact revenge when it is made to act out moral visions that trespass its limits. Just as the battle of prestige, which in Hegel's *Phenomenology* figuratively sets human history in motion, is fought in dread of physical death, so, too, the battle of conflicting moral visions that figuratively concludes that history is fought in dread of spiritual death. Nature, in both cases, is the speechless source of singularity that in both cases precipitates the battle.

The "Yea of reconciliation" (a figure which Hegel takes from Jacobi) with which the battle of conflicting moral visions concludes binds the re-born souls in a religious community that has nothing to do with pining after God, or aiming at some transcendent state of purity. The strength of this community is that it acknowledges its inherent evil, but also knows how to contain it in a bond of confession and forgiveness. **One must learn to forgive the other for its inevitable singularity which is the source of evil, while at the same time, however, asking forgiveness for one's own.** This reconciliation, such as is given voice in the religious language of celebration and myth, is the existential counterpart of the philosophers's speculative Sunday. It is itself a kind of Sunday, but one which is consummated in the course of the work-day week itself; and, although it would not be possible without reason—that is, without a language for which there can be a Logic—is not itself *logical*. No speculative Sunday can replace it. And if a band of ascetic philosophers (as Hegel surmised at one point) would make their speculations serve as their existential reconciliation with their world, this is not because *Vorstellung* has

thereby given place to the speculative concept, but, on the contrary, because such philosophers, by virtue of a very particularized decision that defines them as human beings, have made their speculation do the existential work of myth. Myth will remain. Indeed, to the extent that logical reflection ever more penetrates the work-week, and undermines the still nature-imbued myths and celebrations of Antigone's religion, and the more problematic, therefore, religious language in general becomes, the more compelling the need for it makes itself felt.

*Religious myth*

Reconciliation is for Hegel what motivates both philosophy and religion. In that, each is the other, as we said at the beginning, albeit each in its own register. Reconciliation is a task that reason generates, inasmuch as, because of its universalizing power, it itself renders the singularity of nature impervious—invests it with a significance it would not otherwise have—and the task is thus posed for Spirit to contain it nonetheless. And if philosophy resolves this task speculatively, in a Logic which, in the medium of an untensed language which is the work of conceptual art, defines the internal norms by which discourse in general retains reflective unity while at the same time generating immediacy, religion, for its part, resolves the task existentially in the medium of the language of a community which has learned how to contain the evil of its members without in any way dissipating it. (In this, incidentally, Hegelian wisdom is quite the opposite of the Enlightenment wisdom of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*.)

Reason is a totalizing power, as Kant well knew. Again, if in Hegel's Logic completeness of discourse is attained in what Hegel calls *das Logische*, which is (to

use Hegel's own imagery) the rhythm of discourse as measured by method, religion, for its part, figures the community it animates within the kind of universe within which alone its language would have sense. Here is where myth has its place. Religion would not be the product of reason which it is, if it did not have its theoretical moment. But there are myths and myths—such as Hegel parades before us in both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in his Lectures on Religion. I need not dwell on them, except for one point. Hegel was aware of the great gulf separating what he calls in the *Phenomenology* “manifest religion”—in fact, Christianity—and all that came before it. The difference is that the narrative in the mythology of this manifest religion is of an event—namely, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God's Son—which, however historically indemonstrable it might be, nonetheless commands belief as having occurred in real time, at a chronologically determinate moment. This is in stark contrast to pagan cosmogonic myths, the narration of which is of an event that occurred *in illo tempore*, before the beginning of real time. The latter is only a fall from it, and it retains existence only to the extent that it succeeds, ritually, to return to it. In this, there is something rationalistic, something abstractive, about these myths. Mircea Eliade was right when he pointed out, in 1957, that classical metaphysics, down to Leibniz and Spinoza, obsessed as it is with the One and the Absolute, is still held hostage to this kind of mythology. One should add Romantic metaphysics in general, Fichte's in particular, or any metaphysics that posits an ontic gap between the “in itself” and its phenomenal appearance. The transition from cosmogonic to historical myth dovetails the transition in Hegel's Logic from the language of the Absolute to that of Spirit.

Hegel's philosophical merit is that he saw this transition and gave due

importance to it. How Christianity and Greek metaphysics compenetrated, producing the intellectual form of theological dogmatics characteristic of Christianity, while at the same time promoting the assimilation by philosophy of genuinely Christian ideas, so that Hegel would believe that he could read his metaphysics off the pages of Christian myth, or, for that matter, Christian myth off the pages of his metaphysics, is a complicated story. But this Hegel, the theologian, no longer speaks to us. — Or doesn't he? In 2005, Jürgen Habermas, in conversation with the then Cardinal Ratzinger, and speculating on what might be the source of a new ethos that would undergird the political system of our liberal society, speaks with reference to the German people of “the political and ethical discussions about the Holocaust [. . .] that have made the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany conscious of the fact that their constitution [is a historical] positive gain.”<sup>14</sup> Habermas is here voicing (however unconsciously) the lesson about what might constitute religious myth in contemporary society which we can gather from Hegel. This myth, I suggest, is founded on an event which, unlike any before, is historically indubitable, yet is so decisive in making manifest the power of reason, be this demonic or redemptive, that it acquires, as it were, cosmic significance. It calls on the individual to make a decision as to what one's humanity is supposed to be, and it is on this decision that a community can be created. The Holocaust is a clear case in point, and its significance extends far wider than the confines of Germany. But there are other such myths rooted on actual catastrophic historical events. We might not recognize them, precisely because, like all effective myths, we simply live them. But that they are *there* is clear from the new iconography which they have spawned, and which we

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<sup>14</sup>*The Dialectic of Secularization*, p. 33.

find mostly of in the modern media, imaginatively confronting us with the world within which we seek meaning. I am thinking of the figure of the starving child, the refugee, the dispossessed, the psychopathic tycoon. What these figures all have in common is that they call for reconciliation. This call is the substance of religion, and, inasmuch as Hegel helps us to recognize the fact, he still speaks to us.

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