

# RICOEUR AND THE DIALECTICS OF INTERPRETATION

JERE PAUL SURBER

Paul Ricoeur has, on a number of occasions, characterized his general philosophical position as a "post-Hegelian Kantianism." Though he confesses, along with Karl Barth, "the fascination" that he feels in the face of Hegel's thought, this is tempered by a "reluctance" that ultimately leads him back to Kant as the dominant figure and inspiration in his recent reflections.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, this movement back to Kant occurs despite the progressively dialectical form which his thought assumed as it moved from a "structural phenomenology" to a full-blown hermeneutic, despite the central position that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* plays in his hermeneutical dialogue with Freud, and despite his own explicit calls to think Kant and Hegel together in dialogue with one another.<sup>2</sup> In a number of writings, Ricoeur has already explained his manner of reading Kant and the various lines of reflection into which Kant has drawn him. And if his published works to date are any indication, Kant promises to continue to play a central role in his projected "Poetics of the Will." By contrast, though Ricoeur often alludes to Hegel and occasionally makes use of certain Hegelian insights (as in *Freud and Philosophy*), one finds no explicit discussion of Ricoeur's general debt to Hegel.

In this essay, I propose to say what can be said from and about the Hegelian side of the dialogue between Kant and Hegel as it appears in Ricoeur's more recent thought. The focus will be upon the work that dates from the emergence of the symbol and the hermeneutic of the symbol as a central theme in his reflections.<sup>3</sup> From beginning with an explication of what Ricoeur intends by the phrase "post-Hegelian Kantianism," I will develop what I believe to be the central issue at stake in the play of the Kant-Hegel dialogue in Ricoeur's thought. Finally, I will briefly indicate certain themes arising from a

---

JERE PAUL SURBER is Associate Professor of Philosophy, the University of Denver.

<sup>1</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics" (BH), *Semeia* 4 (1975), 140-42; "Freedom in the Light of Hope," in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (CI), ed. D. Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 412ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>In addition to the works mentioned in the first footnote, this includes *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); *Freud and Philosophy* (FP), trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); and *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (IT), (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), as well as a number of uncollected essays that have appeared in this period.

"second reading" of Hegel that may pave the way for a hermeneutic move beyond even a "post-Hegelian Kantianism."

## I

First, let us say what Ricoeur's "post-Hegelian Kantianism" is not. By this phrase, he by no means intends yet another form of neo-Kantianism as this is ordinarily understood. Ricoeur seeks neither a revival of the epistemological standpoint of the First Critique nor a re-assertion of a formalist ethic of duty which dominates much of Kant's "practical" writings. Of greatest interest to Ricoeur is Kant's determination of the relation of Reason and understanding through the concept of "limit"<sup>4</sup> and his attempts to raise and address the question, "What can I hope for?"<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Ricoeur's Kantianism implies something more specific than the vague sense in which some of the Romantic poets claimed to be "Kantian." Though he admits that his "second reading of Kant" may be "less historically faithful than the first,"<sup>6</sup> his discussions of Kant and the reflections arising out of them are closely governed by a respect for Kant's own language and his project of a "philosophy of limits." His return to Kant is therefore neither literal nor edificational but — to use the term somewhat loosely — anagogical.

To turn to the question of why Ricoeur qualifies his Kantianism by "post-Hegelian" will move us closer toward seeing the underlying reasons for his return to Kant. In Ricoeur's interpretation, the most important aspect of the post-Hegelian era is the advent of the "hermeneutics of suspicion." Recoiling against the Hegelian claim (or at least certain prevalent interpretations of it) that, in Hegel's Absolute Knowledge, the nature of consciousness could become totally lucid to itself, certain thinkers, particularly Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, confronted Hegel's "extravagance" with the assertion that consciousness is, and finally is necessarily, a "false consciousness." In Ricoeur's phrase, meaning and consciousness fail to coincide for these thinkers; the Hegelian notion of "consciousness become self-consciousness" must therefore give way to a "hermeneutic of suspicion." Henceforth, the task must be to develop a way of interpreting the consciousness of meaning so that the illusions that infect consciousness will appear for what they are: prejudices of a social class, manifestations of a "Will to Power," or disguises of repressed "psychic energy."

For Ricoeur, this hermeneutic of suspicion dominating the post-Hegelian epoch presents an uncircumventable obstacle for philosophy

---

<sup>4</sup>CI, 413 ff. and BH, 142-44.

<sup>5</sup>CI, 418 ff. and BH, 144-45.

<sup>6</sup>BH, 142.

in general (since the pretensions of the philosopher to know the truth are subject to the same critique as any other illusion of consciousness), and especially for a philosophy like Ricoeur's that aims at a "hermeneutic-phenomenological" recovery of the "surplus" of meaning in the expressive mediations of human existence. It is Ricoeur's view that no phenomenological, ontological, or religious attitude can secure its integrity without a direct confrontation with this "hermeneutics of suspicion." On the other hand, Ricoeur notes that the result of this encounter need not be viewed as wholly corrosive to maintaining a "superabundance of meaning"; on the contrary, the philosophical and religious encounter with the hermeneutics of suspicion can lead to a chastened view of symbolic meaning, one that is constantly forewarned of succumbing to the subtle transformation of living symbols into dead and deadening idols. As Ricoeur elegantly puts it, "Thus the idols must die - so that symbols may live."<sup>7</sup>

It is in connection with his reading of Freud that Ricoeur makes explicit and extensive use of Hegel's achievement in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ricoeur warns that the threat posed by Freud to reflective philosophy must not be underestimated. The effect of Freud's analytic procedure is a "de-centering" or displacing of the origin of meaning from consciousness to the already constituted unconscious. In the form of an "archeology of the subject," Freud's psychoanalytic theory constitutes a hermeneutic that stands in direct conflict with any reflective attempt to come to grips with the "surplus of meaning" that might be present for consciousness. Pursuing this Freudian hermeneutic, any alleged fullness of meaning that might be asserted on behalf of symbols of the Sacred, for example, would have to be thoroughly and relentlessly subjected to the de-mystification of an analysis tracing this "illusion" of "superabundant meaning" back to its sources in the primal dynamics of the unconscious. Thus, unless reflective philosophy can comprehend and reply to the Freudian critique of consciousness, self-conscious philosophical reflection must relinquish any claim to genuine truth or insight because of its ungroundable infrastructure.

For Ricoeur, the beginning of this reply to Freudian suspicion involves the invocation of a powerful counter-weight to Freudian archeology. Ricoeur proposes that it is none other than in Hegel, the "arch-advocate" of consciousness's becoming self-lucid to itself, where this counter-weight can be found. For "in order to have an *arche* a subject must have a *telos*."<sup>8</sup> Hegel's account of the progressive self-over-

<sup>7</sup>FP, 531.

<sup>8</sup>FP, 459.

coming of the limits of consciousness as it comes to further comprehend itself by moving to ever-richer dimensions of experience and culture is the necessary dialectical complement of Freudian archeology. Whereas Freudian archeology displaced the origin of meaning from consciousness to the unconscious, Hegelian teleology displaces the source of meaning from consciousness to Spirit or *Geist* as the movement through the various figures of culture. However, as Ricoeur emphasizes, archeology and teleology are finally the poles of a single process that leads toward the human reappropriation of meaning that is the terminus of his hermeneutic interest. Whereas Freud ultimately seeks to understand the subject by thematizing unconscious desire, Hegel thematically describes the coming to self-consciousness of Spirit on the foundation of desire.

The "post-Hegelian" aspect of Ricoeur's Kantianism must be understood on the basis of this dialectic. In order to think in the "post-Hegelian" context, it is necessary to take account *both* of the demystifier's denial of the possibility of a philosophy of consciousness *and* of the Hegelian insistence that consciousness can only be understood when it has already superceded itself. However, if meaning can no longer be viewed solely as a function of the intentionality of consciousness, its ground also cannot be located solely in the darkness of the unconscious nor only in the super-radiance of an "Absolute Knowledge." Rather, the dynamism of unconscious and initially opaque desire directs us toward reflective self-awareness as a task, and our reflective movement through the figures of culture makes possible a new revelation of the originally concealed meaning of the archaic and oneiric.

It is at this juncture that a reflective re-orientation is possible, one that leads us back in the direction of Kant. Ricoeur calls this re-orientation that emerges from the confrontation of Freud and Hegel a "second naïveté." It is not a return to a transcendently reduced phenomenology of consciousness, but a new, reflectively mature sensitivity to that region where *arche* and *telos* simultaneously dwell: the realm of concrete symbols. Genuine artistic and religious symbols are the "always already" present concretion of disguised desires and manifest self-consciousness. However, the "second naïveté" of the hermeneutic that such symbols call forth is no reduction to a "pre-linguistic silence." Since it is only through language that man comes to understand himself and since "the symbolic relation is formed within language,"<sup>9</sup> symbols already contain within their own nature a tendency toward reflective interpretation and articulation. Indeed, symbols

---

<sup>9</sup>FP, 500.

themselves already present a latent interpretation of human existence and move even closer to the realm of articulate reflection by grouping themselves into mythic narratives that present one kind of transition from primary symbols to linguistic exegesis.<sup>10</sup> Even so, there is a limit to the hermeneutic articulation of symbols; although they do contain a "semantic moment" and thus a crucial link with language, they also retain a "non-semantic" dimension by virtue of their rootedness in the power of human existence and their trans-linguistic "superabundance of meaning."<sup>11</sup> It is this non-semantic dimension of symbols that provides the link between the "post-Hegelian" dialectic of interpretations and the return to Kant. Like Kant, Ricoeur is concerned to make a place for discursive reflection without allowing it to consume the inexhaustible possibilities for the appropriation of meaning presented to us by the symbol. Though the symbol gives rise to thought, thought encounters its own limits in its interpretation of symbols and comes to experience its intimate kinship with Kant's "philosophy of limits." Symbols, as Ricoeur seeks to develop them, come to fill the hiatus between Kantian *Erkennen* and *Denken*, between finite discursive knowledge and the thought of the Unconditioned; they stand on the limit between the articulate and determinate and the infinite and inexhaustible, but function not as prohibitions but as affirmations of the bond between finite human existence and what is ultimate.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Thus far, we have witnessed the first level at which Hegel enters into the dialogue of Ricoeur's thought: Hegel's "phenomenological hermeneutic" serves as the counterpart and complement of the Freudian "hermeneutic of suspicion." However, whereas Hegel, in this first circle of encounter, served as an intermediary preparing the way for a renewed reading of Kant and a reflection upon the function of limits in experience, language, and thought, Ricoeur suggests that Hegel must also enter into consideration at another and more fundamental level: as interlocutor in a new dialogue with Kant.<sup>13</sup> At this level, it is not so much Hegel, the phenomenologist of self-consciousness, but Hegel, the speculative philosopher of Absolute Spirit, that must be confronted. If the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* might have led us back to a new appreciation of Kant in the light of hermeneutics, the Hegel of the mature system seems to rise up as a challenge and a threat to the project of a philosophy of limits.

<sup>10</sup>*CI*, 203

<sup>11</sup>*IT*, 68-9. Also *BH*, Section 3.

<sup>12</sup>*BH*, 142-43.

<sup>13</sup>*BH*, 141-43 and *CI*, 412 ff.

What, then, is at stake in this renewed dialogue between Kant and Hegel? Finally, the issue turns on the way in which the relation between symbols, which give rise to thought, and the sort of thought appropriate to those symbols is to be understood and determined. To put the problem in the most general terms, if philosophy is to be henceforth determined as a hermeneutic of symbols possessing a "surplus of meaning," does this not hand reflection over to the scandal of the particular, contingent, and subjective and absolve thinking of the responsibility of conceptual clarity and discursivity? If we are to return to a reaffirmation of the Wholly Other presented to us in the "logic of superabundance" of the symbol, must we not pay the price of renouncing the very ground of rational reflection and rigorous thought that led us to the stance of this "second naïveté"?

These general questions, which Ricoeur's path of reflection raises with a renewed urgency, come to focus upon a particular issue in Hegel's own dialogue with the tradition: the relation between *Vorstellung* and *Denken*, representation and thought. As a way of access to this multi-faceted problem in Hegel's thought, I will initially focus upon the manner in which this issue plays across the field of Hegel's view of the relation between religion and philosophy.

Hegel's initially formulaic answer may be put in this way: "Religion and philosophy are identical in content but different in form."<sup>14</sup> Both philosophy and religion concern themselves immediately with the Absolute and are thus contrasted to other "lower" forms of experience that are involved with more limited content. However, whereas religion seeks to determine man's finitude in relation to the infinite through a *representation* of the Divine Being as Father, Judge, Redeemer, etc., philosophy aims at the speculative comprehension of God as Absolute Spirit in the only form that is finally adequate to the infinite intention of religion — the Concept. On the basis of this initial formula, then, we can say that both faith and knowledge share the same "object" — the Absolute — but relate to it in different ways. The God that is *represented* through the symbols of religion is *thought* through the concepts of speculative philosophy.

So far, there might be little to disagree with on the part of either Kant or Ricoeur. However, Hegel's formula intends something more, and it is this that is the crucial point in dispute. For Hegel also seems to want to pass judgment on the relative adequacy of these ways of presenting the Absolute. To say that philosophy and religion share

<sup>14</sup>Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. E. Speirs and J. Sanderson (3 vols.; New York: The Humanities Press, 1962) I, 18 ff.; *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. Wm. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 299; *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949) 789.

the same absolute content but differ in the form in which the Absolute manifests itself requires that we account for this difference of form. Hegel does this by arguing that if the Absolute is ultimate Truth and Universality (which religion would also affirm), then only that which has the *form* of truth and universality is adequate for its full manifestation. Whereas religion involves the *representation* of the Absolute, thus retaining a dimension of the sensuous — the spatial and temporal — philosophy expresses the Absolute in the true and universal medium of the *Concept*. Therefore, it is only in the medium of speculative philosophy that the “truth” of religion becomes manifest; that which is merely represented and felt by the religious consciousness is known and articulated by the speculative philosopher. Philosophy, so Hegel’s formula might suggest to us, must ultimately dispense with the representations of religion in favor of the conceptualization of philosophy.

It is to this point that both Kant and Ricoeur would respond, though I believe that their responses would somewhat diverge. An “orthodox” Kantian response would insist upon the persistent role which representations play in the texture of human knowledge. Though, on my own reading of Kant, I do not believe that he would be inclined generally to defend the claims of religion against philosophy, he would defend philosophy as a finite human enterprise against the pretensions of a philosophy which claims to articulate the Absolute “in its truth.” A central part of his argument would be a reinvocation of the strictures that our sensuous nature places upon our knowledge; if every object of consciousness is a representation, and if representations “stand before us” (*vor-stellen*) under the temporal form of “inner intuition,” then even the “empty thought” of the Absolute itself must give up its “absolute form” in order to become an “object” for our consciousness. Ricoeur, on the other hand, would begin from this statement of a philosophy of limits and add that symbols, even though they appear under the form of representation, are not exhausted either by their representational dimension or by a further conceptual articulation. On his view, the “surplus of meaning” inherent in religious symbols in particular cannot be adequately accounted for either as representational contents or as conceptual articulations; nor can some combination of representation and concept do it justice. Though the symbol stands at the interface of representation and concept, of *Vor-stellung* and *Denken*, it is exhausted by neither alone nor both together. It opens up a realm of “super-abundance of meaning” by both appealing to the sensuous and concrete and giving rise to thought, without being reducible to either function. It addresses us about the

possibility for wholeness of human existence that cuts across any attempt to "divide" the being of man.

However, even though Ricoeur has made an advance beyond the Kant that Hegel originally criticized through his introduction of a positive function for symbols operating at the limits of discursivity, the essential force and direction of the Hegelian critique remains unchanged, though his specific arguments would require some extension. For Hegel, any determination of limits (as in Kant) or of symbols as operating at a limit (as in Ricoeur) is subject to the "dialectic of limits" that he analyzes in its structural form in the section entitled "Determinate Being" in the "Greater Logic." Briefly, the concept of limit is the "vanishing point" between two determined spheres of being. The very meaning of limit requires the mutual and reciprocal determination of two opposed moments by one another, and consists entirely in this reciprocal determination. To speak of a limit to human knowledge or experience is already to invoke that from which it is to be delimited, since the concept of limit is that dialectical relation of the "here" determining the Beyond by determining itself and the Beyond marking out its region in relation to the initial "here." In regard to the crucial case in which the concept of limit functions, Hegel writes:

Finitude is only as a transcending of itself; it therefore contains infinity, the other of itself. Similarly, infinity is only as a transcending of the finite; it therefore essentially contains its other and is, consequently, in its own self the other of itself. The finite is not sublated by the infinite as by a power existing outside it; on the contrary, its infinite consists in sublating its own self.<sup>15</sup>

For Hegel, the notion of a symbol as bringing into relation a literal and discursive meaning with a transcendent "surplus of meaning" at the limits of finite experience would represent another case of the failure to see that the very distinction already presupposes the discursive violation and sublation of the limit itself. The "surplus of meaning" of which Ricoeur speaks is only a virtual term until it has been articulated in philosophical discourse; and rather than an occasion for faith or hope, it represents a task that reflection has posed for itself and that only continued reflection can satisfy. Though symbols may serve as reminders that the nature of philosophical reflection cannot be too narrowly conceived, the attempt to restore to symbols a fullness of meaning that Ricoeur undertakes would be, for Hegel, only a pro-

---

<sup>15</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 143.



legomena to a renewed effort of reflection, comprehension, and re-appropriation.

### III

Thus far, the dialogue between Kant and Ricoeur on the one hand and Hegel on the other would seem to have reached a genuine stalemate. Even with Ricoeur's rich conception of the symbol as a positive supplement to a Kantian philosophy of limits, the Hegelian claim that representations find their completion in conceptual articulation remains opposed but unrefuted. For if we can apprehend symbols as pointing beyond their finite representational appearance to a "surplus of meaning" that lies beyond, we can (and indeed already have) comprehended that excess of meaning as the truth of the symbol. Of course, we can always refuse to take the step toward discursive articulation, but such a reluctance, for Hegel, would not deserve the name of philosophy.

This is not the end, however. For the impasse which we seemed to have reached has resulted from a reading of Hegel based upon an "abstract" formula. In the remainder of this essay, I would like to develop three other themes in Hegel that would temper the total ascendancy that Hegel seems to give to the concept at the expense of symbolic representation. I do not mean to claim that Hegel would finally give up his initial formula; only that a "second reading" of Hegel (like Ricoeur's "second reading" of Kant) might open up lines of inquiry that may prove fruitful to the determination of the hermeneutic task. In particular, I believe that these aspects arising from a "second reading" of Hegel have already begun to resound in Ricoeur's recent reflections (especially his work on language) and might serve as a basis for the "thinking beyond Kant and Hegel" that he himself has suggested.

(1) An initial, more or less structural, consideration involves the nature of dialectic in relation to Hegel's articulation of the system. A first reading of Hegel's system cannot help but have the effect of emphasizing its developmental and progressive character. Beginning with the most "abstract" and least rich forms of experience or thought, we are carried along a path of reflection that leads to ever more "concrete" and richer moments, to the *telos* in which the entire course of reflection completes and fulfills itself at the level of "Absolute Spirit." It is a fundamental tenet of Hegel's philosophy, of course, that a "scientific system" can only be the result of the articulation of thought's own self-development. The Hegelian conception of system thus demands the participation in its genesis in order that its "truth" be comprehended.

Nevertheless, the progressive and developmental aspect of Hegel's mode of philosophizing cannot be separated from a necessarily retrospective dimension, even if the former tends to draw any first reading of Hegel toward itself. It is only recently that sufficient attention has begun being paid to this aspect of Hegel's thought,<sup>16</sup> even though indications of its importance can be found throughout Hegel's own writings. Here I will mention several of the most important. In the "Greater Logic," Hegel calls attention to what he calls "one of the most important notions in philosophy."<sup>17</sup> This is the German expression *aufheben*, "to sublate." Besides the most common meaning of this term, "to raise or lift up," Hegel notes that two other, apparently contradictory, meanings are present in the term: "to cancel" and "to preserve." Thus, when Hegel says that one moment of the dialectic *ist aufgehoben*, "has been sublated," in another, he means to suggest that the "higher" moment has *raised up* the lower into a new form by *negating* its self-subsistent autonomy while *preserving* its significance at the "higher" level. The result, put in the language of Hegelian logic, is "the identity of identity and difference," a dialectical unity into which the initially autonomous starting-point of the cycle of reflection and its negation are lifted up. However, though it is a natural tendency of an initial reading of Hegel to attend to the development implied in the negating and raising up at the expense of the preservation, it should not be overlooked that the initial autonomy of the starting-point and its preservation within the development must equally be attended to at some point. Though to account for this raises some difficult and highly complex issues in Hegel interpretation, a reflection upon the manner of this preservation, upon what might be called the implicit difference between the dialectically constituted identity and the opposition of the original identity and difference, is not only open but necessary for a balanced view of one of Hegel's primary insights. This can occur, perhaps, only upon a "second reading" that has freed itself from the sometimes hypnotic progression of the dialectic and come to see that a new level of "re-appropriation" of that which has been initially transcended is necessary.

In order to see that, for Hegel, a task of "retrospective appropriation" is still necessary even at the apex of systematic development, three texts stand out as worthy of special attention. I will merely mention them here. At the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, beginning with the section entitled "Religion," Hegel engages in an ex-

<sup>16</sup>For example, see the recent work by Andries Sarlemijn, *Hegel's Dialectic*, (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel, 1975), where the author develops the notion of "Intro-Reflection" to elucidate the nature of Hegel's dialectic.

<sup>17</sup>Hegel, *Logic*, 106-7.

tended "retro-reflection" upon the moments that have been previously traversed. Indeed, the last hundred pages of the *Phenomenology* might be read not so much as a description of Absolute Knowledge but as a reconstitution and reappropriation of the forms of Spirit in a new light. Second, at the end of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel describes the Absolute Idea as a return to the beginning and again attempts to counter-balance the progressive aspect of dialectical logic with a meditation upon its equally retrospective dimension. Here Hegel explicitly states:

It is in this manner that each step of the *advance* in the process of further determination, while getting further away from the indeterminate beginning is also *getting back nearer* to it, and that therefore, what at first sight may appear to be different, the retrogressive grounding of the beginning, and the *progressive further determining* of it, coincide and are the same.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most striking, there are the final pages of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, where Hegel turns back upon the system itself as a philosophical articulation and suggests three different schemas, only one explicitly developmental, on the basis of which the system may be approached.

(2) This first point is especially important for the current project of hermeneutics when applied to the spheres of Absolute Spirit itself — the interrelations among art, religion, and philosophy. For if, on the first reading of Hegel, thinking always seems to overcome representation and the philosophical mode of discourse seems to displace metaphorical and symbolic expression, a second reading should be expected to supplement the initial emphasis on development in the direction of conceptualization with a renewed reflection upon and reappropriation of those modes of human expression that originally gave rise to speculative thought. If, in Hegel's systematic exposition, art, religion, and philosophy seem to constitute a developmental sequence of increasing "adequacy" of form to content, it is also true that Hegel places all three within the realm of Absolute Spirit. Of course, on the philosophical criterion of this adequacy of form to content, philosophy necessarily appears in Hegel as the "highest" and privileged moment of Absolute Spirit. However, as Hegel has already taught us in the *Phenomenology*, each form of human experience and expression contains within itself its own distinctive criterion for judgment, and thus provides its own ground for setting itself into relation with other spheres from its own point of view.

---

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 841.

It is precisely the completion of the teleological process of "cancelling/raising up" that allows the question of "preserving" to come into central focus. The first reading of Hegel performs a necessary function for the emergence of philosophical hermeneutics by establishing an integral connection between the various spheres of culture and experience; by locating art, religion, and philosophy within Absolute Spirit as those special manifestations of meaning and expression that both inhabit and transcend all historical periods; and by bringing to completion the natural teleology of thought as it confronts and systematically orders the various dimensions of human expression. However, the telos of the first reading, the liberation of the philosophical Concept from the latent *Schwärmerei* of representation, sets a new task for the second reading that is distinctly hermeneutic rather than speculative. Freed from the necessity to vindicate the wholeness of human experience in a self-developing system, the second reading must take up the task of questioning the manner in which the previously "sublated" moments are likewise preserved when speculation has run its course. Human experience and thought as a concrete totality must "return into its own ground" and reappropriate the fullness present—and now understood as present—in the entire range of the modes of human expression. It is hermeneutics that must continue the task which is only begun in speculative philosophy. Indeed, hermeneutics is itself the "supercession" of speculative philosophy, since it is by way of the re-implanting of the totality within its diverse moments, which is the work of interpretation, that the richness of meaning toward which the system aims is made living and actual.

Again, this second reading can receive guidance from Hegel himself. Especially in his lectures on art, religion, and the history of philosophy, Hegel complements the schematic and developmental analysis of the system with a plunge into the internal richness of the moments of Absolute Spirit themselves. To indicate something of Hegel's attitude in these works, I will cite only one statement, which is taken from *The Philosophy of Fine Art*:

The thinking spirit is discovered *not merely* in its ability to grasp *itself* in its most native form as pure thinking, but also, and as completely (!), to recognize itself in its self-divestment in the medium of emotion and the sensuous.<sup>19</sup>

3. The key to the second reading of Hegel and, as Ricoeur points out, to the entire task of hermeneutics must be sought in the problem

---

<sup>19</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. Osmaston (4 vols.; London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), 1, 16.

of language. Three points should especially be noted in this regard. First, in Hegel's explicit systematic treatment of language in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, language is approached as the mediation between representation and thought.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, language arises out of the representational activity of the creative imagination as it generates signs from images and symbols, and it retains the stamp of temporality and spatiality as birthmarks of its origin in representation. On the other hand, language is animated by the "soul" of thought, which attains its objective being only through its linguistic articulation.

Words thus attain an existence animated by thought. This existence is absolutely necessary to our thoughts. We only know our thoughts, only have definite, actual thoughts, when we give them the form of objectivity, of a being distinct from our inwardness, and therefore, the shape of externality, and of an externality, too, that at the same time bears the stamp of the highest inwardness. The articulated sound, the word, is alone such an inward externality.<sup>21</sup>

Second, as a result of this mediating position of language, language provides a crucial link and point of intersection between such realms of Spirit as art, religion, and philosophy. The dimensions of language that are cancelled in the conceptual discursivity of philosophy are preserved in the poetic metaphor and the religious symbol; and if speculative philosophy can make the attempt at establishing the concrete totality of logical meaning that is the horizon of discursive articulation, the hermeneutical stance of the second reading of Hegel must explore the intensive fullness of language that emerges within this semantic horizon. Finally, however, a reading of Hegel that would attend to the problem of language must be conveyed along a path that leads beyond Hegel — toward Nietzsche, Heidegger, and perhaps Ricoeur's own "Poetics of the Will." For Hegel's bringing to closure the tradition of Western discursivity in the speculative system is likewise the moment of its subversion. The demand that Hegelian articulation makes upon language, to express in a determinate and structured medium the dynamic fluidity and movement of thought, exceeds any account of language that Hegel was able to provide within the systematic development itself. The closure of conceptual thinking thus opens the possibility for a new openness to the fullness of language, to an "overcoming of the overcoming" of representation by concept.

<sup>20</sup>Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 210 ff.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 221.

But it also warns us that even such “supercharged” representations as the religious symbol and the figurative metaphor have meaning only within the linguistic horizon of their interpretations.

Ricoeur’s “post-Hegelian Kantianism” is an important phase of the hermeneutic task of raising the problem of language in a radical manner. But the path from Freudian demystification to a Kantian philosophy of limits may prove to bend back on itself, move through the emergence of language as a radical problem in Hegel, and lead to a post-Nietzschean hermeneutics of affirmation rather than a pre-Hegelian hope in the face of finitude. In any event, Ricoeur very accurately plotted the region where any thinking beyond Kant and Hegel must occur when he wrote:

It seems to me there is an area today where all philosophical investigations cut across one another — the area of language.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>*FP*, 3.

#### Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

#### About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.