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THOUGHT AND BELIEF:
THE ATTEMPT AT
SPECULATIVE SEEING IN HEGEL

*Negligentiae mihi esse videtur
si non studemus
quod credimus
intellegere*

—St. Anselm

I.

THE FEELING OF DISSATISFACTION with Hegel's ambition and pretensions to attain the Absolute in a philosophical system was not felt for the first time in the 20th century by Heidegger¹ and Gadamer², but much earlier, closer to Hegel's own time, by Kierkegaard.³ The difficulty does not reside in the Hegelian system, but in that which should be understood in it; and this something cannot be stated in a system. Let us try to simplify this. The goal of the system is the Absolute. The Absolute cannot be stated by a single primal sentence or principle (*Grundsatz*) that affirms its identity ($A = A$), because it would have immediately brought forward its complete opposite ($A = \sim A$).⁴ This

¹ Heidegger argues against Husserl and Hegel that they do not search beyond the system for its meaning, the meaning of Being: "Aber Hegel fragt auch nicht, soweit wie Husserl, soweit wie alle Metaphysik nach dem Sein als Sein, d.h. die Frage, inwiefern es Anwesenheit als solche geben kann." Martin Heidegger, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Ausgabe des Denkens" in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1969), 61-80.

² See Gadamer's critique of Hegel: "Weist nicht die Logik des sich selbst entfaltenden Begriffs ihrerseits notwendig über sich hinaus, nämlich auf die 'natürliche Logik' der Sprache zurück? Das Selbst des Begriffs, in dem sich das reine Denken begreift, ist am Ende selber nichts Sichzeigendes, sondern in allem, was ist, ebenso wirksam wie die Sprache auch. ... Je radikaler sich das vergegenständlichende Denken auf sich selbst bessint und die Erfahrung der Dialektik entfaltet, desto klarer weist es auf das, was es nicht ist. Dialektik muß sich in die Hermeneutik zurücknehmen." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke in 10 Bänden* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]), 1985-1995, Vol. 3, 86.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff Angst* (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 2003).

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der

opposite is, however, an essential integral component of the Absolute, which consists of both identity and difference, and therefore both should be incorporated within it. The Absolute should be attained within a system of interrelated categories or sentences. From this absolute point of view, the categories are not indifferent, nor do they eradicate or subjugate each other, but are instead held together in absolute equilibrium and complete harmony. It is love – but an absolute one, as Van Gogh portrays it in a letter to his brother:

There are three stages:

- (1) Not to love and not to be beloved
- (2) To love and not to be beloved [...]
- (3) To love and to be beloved

Now, I argue that the second stage is better than the first, but the third!

*This is the truth.*⁵

Hegel does not go so far as to reduce rational thought to sensual feeling. He uses the concept of “love” metaphorically. The question is, however, if such a metaphor, namely, absolute symmetry, can be realized in the system, or is doomed to be an unachievable ideal. The meaning of this metaphor is that the Absolute should be understood not only as it is in itself (*An-sich*), identical with itself, but also as non-identical with itself – being reflected absolutely in its opposite, which is to be for-itself (*Für-sich*). Van Gogh’s definition of the three stages of love is useful. If we consider it carefully we see that the first stage, which seems to be composed of two components, is actually composed of no more than one. For instance, the two components Being and Nothing are absolutely undifferentiated. Since we cannot say anything about Being as such, it turns out to be Nothing. We cannot distinguish between them. This is also the case with the second stage, where one component “swallows” the other, cancels it by being exclusively one-sided. Only in the third stage can there be absolute equilibrium, in which the opposite poles are held together in complete harmony. They are neither indifferent nor annulled nor subjugated to one another, but are maintained in their interdependency not by differentiation but by mutual reflection: each is reflected absolutely in the other. The interdependency is, therefore, essential to this relation. But it should be, in its turn, sublated (*aufgehoben*) in its one-sidedness as well. This needs to be further explained.⁶

Philosophie” in *Jenaer Kritische Schriften (I)* edited by Hans Brockard and Hartmut Buchner (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1979), 25 ff.

⁵ Vincent Van Gogh, *Als Mensch unter Menschen – Vincent van Gogh in seinen Briefen an den Bruder Theo*, Auswahl, Vorwort und Kommentare von Fritz Erpel, aus dem Holändischen, Französischen und Englischen übertragen von Eva Schumann (Germany: Langen Müller, 1980), 100. Compare with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie – Vorlesungsmanuskripte zur Philosophie der Natur und des Geistes von 1805-1806*, edited by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1967), 201 ff.

⁶ Compare Hegel’s early manuscript (Nohl cannot date it exactly) “Moral, Love, Religion.” Hegel distinguishes between three stages: practice, theory, and love. The practice annuls the object. The theory cancels the subject. Only love is capable of holding them together independent as well as

To be Absolute means to be absolutely seen. It consists *only* in the relation between two opposite poles. One-sidedness hides and conceals the Absolute, preventing it from being seen. The way to the Absolute is, therefore, reached by releasing the thought from one-sided rigid substance. The substance does not cease existing altogether, but only its one-sidedness is eliminated. The Absolute is by definition a substance – the ground of whatever exists. But it is not yet realized as such; it has not yet reached its actuality. For it ought to grasp itself as such: it ought to be a Subject as well.⁷

Now, let us assume that the series or chain of categories in Hegel's *Science of Logic* is complete, and that no category has been left out.⁸ Still, the Absolute cannot be grasped or seen in this chain of categories, but only *beyond* them – in the *transition* (*Übergang*) between them. Just as one cannot point with the finger and say here it begins, one cannot say here it ends – here it grasps itself. Such an effort would have entangled us in what Hegel calls "false infinity." Its falseness consists of its being made up of a potentially infinite line of finite components, as in line numbering. Each finite component points in principle to another *ad infinitum*. But this line of numbers has no actual infinite absolute existence.

The problem is, in other words, to grasp the categories in their independence as in their abolition, in their identity with themselves as well as in their complete opposition to each other. This moment is grasped in a "speculation." Hegel, as we shall see later, uses this concept in a positive medieval sense in contrast to Kant. A wide field of questions opens up: Can philosophy have a beginning or an end? Why do we need this number of categories at all if what we are supposed to understand can be stated with just two members?⁹ The introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* intimates the problem of true criterion. This problem is caused by the abolition of one-sided substance.¹⁰ It is also clear that this moment, the speculation, cannot be included within the system.¹¹ At this

united. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Moralität, Liebe, Religion" in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19075), 376. In another early manuscript called "Love and Religion," Hegel says that religion and love are one and the same. The beloved is not opposite us, but is one with us. We see ourselves in him and vice versa.

⁷ "Die Lebendige Substanz ist ferner das Sein, welches in Wahrheit Subjekt, oder was dasselbe heißt, welches in Wahrheit wirklich ist, nur insofern sie die Bewegung des sich-selbst Setzens, oder die Vermittlung des sich anders Werdens mit sich selbst ist." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988), 14. This is the core of Hegel's and Schelling's critique of western thought. For example, consider Schelling's critique of Spinoza. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Die Weltalter – Fragmente, In den Urauffassen von 1811 und 1813* edited by Manfred Schröter (München: Biederstein Verlag und Leibniz Verlag, 1946), 45 ff.

⁸ See John and Ellis McTaggart, *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1964), 5-6. They see no problem in imagining alternative "routes" of categories.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988), 58-66.

¹¹ See Dieter Henrich, *Selbstverhältnisse – Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 160.

point myth should come to aid. This is not only the necessary outcome, a last resort needed in order to explain something that cannot be solved by logical means, but is grounded in the texts as well. Myth in this context is Christian myth and the Trinitarian principle. The Trinitarian principle reflects the Absolute as identified with itself not only in its identity but also in its being other than itself.¹²

This gives us a clue to the other questions mentioned above concerning the beginning and the end of philosophy. The revelation of God in Christ and his return to God is the beginning and the end of philosophy. We should understand it logically and not chronologically. Revelation, though it took place as a singular occurrence in time, is a *timeless* principle that regulates the course of Western history and philosophy.¹³

The relation of philosophy and religion has become plain: the goal of philosophy, the Absolute, cannot be achieved in the system alone, but needs the help of Christian myth. This does not exempt us from asking about this relation. On the contrary, it pushes us towards making the most crucial decision concerning the meaning of philosophy. This decision should be neither to turn philosophy into poetry or mystic speculation, nor to keep it in the pure rational systematic frame. It holds rather that philosophy is a rational way of thinking, but shows, at the same time, its limits.

II.

Religious myth comes to the fore with that which cannot be rationally stated. The decision, upon which we stand, is very complicated. One can choose to concentrate on the systematic aspect by paraphrasing Hegel. In this way, a light is shed on Hegel's huge meticulous systematic work. But the essential, which cannot be said in the rational system, remains unconsidered. Or one can choose rather to focus on that which cannot be said. This is the case with Nancy, who calls this an (unsayable) "passage."¹⁴ His project is interesting and highly

¹² "Gott ist ... [der denkenden Vernunft] daher nicht das Leere, sondern Geist, und diese Bestimmung des Geistes bleibt ihr nicht nur ein Wort oder eine oberflächliche Bestimmung, sondern die Natur des Geistes entwickelt sich für sie, indem sie Gott wesentlich als *Dreieinigen* erkennt. ... Ohne diese Bestimmung der *Dreieinigkeit* wäre Gott nicht Geist und Geist ein leeres Wort." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion – Teil I*, edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), 41, my emphasis.

¹³ Ibid., 92. "Die christliche Religion erscheint, als die Zeit gekommen war. Das ist nicht eine zufällige Zeit, ein Bleiben, Einfall, sondern im wesentlichen ewigen Ratschluss Gottes gegründet, d.h. es ist eine in der ewigen Vernunft, Weisheit Gottes bestimmte Zeit, und nicht auf zufällige Weise bestimmt, sondern es ist Begriff der Sache, göttlicher Begriff, Begriff Gottes selbst."

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel – The Restlessness of the Negative*, translated by Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

inspired. But it does not seem to be fruitful to put everything on that which cannot be said. In addition, it does not do justice to Hegel's peculiar merit – his system. Another interesting effort is Wohlfart's, who entitles his book *The Speculative Sentence*.¹⁵ Hegel himself uses this problematic term in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁶ It is curious that Hegel applies the term "sentence" to that absolute equilibrium which destroys the grammatical distinction between subject and predicate.¹⁷ Wohlfart analyzes the different structures of sentences in Hegel's system. (They have of course nothing to do with the *speculative* sentence.) When he arrives at the "speculative" one, he finds himself in serious trouble. The speculative should be understood from the sentence, but, being unsayable, it cannot be formulated in a sentence.¹⁸ So how is one supposed to distinguish between normal and speculative sentences? Wohlfart's attempt to describe the indescribable entangles him in a paradox, and brings forward unsatisfying explanations. At the end of this twisted journey he uses the term "aesthetic moment" (*ästhetisches Moment*) to describe that in which the speculative is grasped.¹⁹ Theunissen reduces Hegel's philosophy to the meaning of Christ's revelation, which is the Trinity. History *ante Christum natum* is an attempt to approach this event. On the other hand, history *post Christum natum* is a further realization and development of the Trinitarian principle.²⁰ Theunissen divides Hegel's *Science of Logic*²¹ in a way similar to Van Gogh's: The first stage, *The Doctrine of Being* (*Die Lehre vom Sein*), is indifference, the second, *The Doctrine of Essence* (*Die Lehre vom Wesen*), is subjugation²², and the third, *The Doctrine of Concept* (*Die Lehre vom Begriff*), is true love, an absolute symmetrical balance, which is the divine Christian love of God for man.²³ Lauer argues that Hegel's philosophy is Christian philosophy, because it is a reflection on this religion.²⁴

¹⁵ Günter Wohlfart, *Der Spekulative Satz – Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Spekulation bei Hegel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981)

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988), 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 47 ff.

¹⁸ Günter Wohlfart, *Der Spekulative Satz – Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Spekulation bei Hegel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 212 ff

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 230 ff.

²⁰ Michael Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politischer Traktat* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1970), 94. Compare to Kuno Fischer *Hegels Leben, Werke und Lehre* (Heidelberg: Karl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1901), 780 ff.

²¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I-II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999)

²² In this sense he criticizes Kant's imperative judgment. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Das Grundkonzept zum Geist des Christentums" in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19072), 388.

²³ Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 25 ff; And compare: ... "Dieser Religion [= Christentum] ist vielmehr das explizierte Bewusstsein, dass Gott Geist ist, eigentlichlich, dass er eben, wie er an und für sich ist sich als zum Anderen seiner (der der Sohn heißt), zu sich selbst, dass er sich in ihm selbst als Liebe verhält, wesentlich als diese Vermittlung mit sich ist. Gott ist wohl Schöpfer der Welt so hinreichend bestimmt, aber Gott ist mehr als dies; der wahre Gott ist, dass er Vermittlung seiner mit sich selbst, diese Liebe ist." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes*, edited by Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1930), 28.

²⁴ Quentin S.J. Lauer, *Essays in Hegelian Dialectic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), 116.

This argument appears to be unconvincing, because Hegel reflects on Judaism and Zoroastrianism and Buddhism as well. The most plausible explanation seems to me that of Wiehl. Although its theme is not the relation between religion and philosophy, it is a great contribution to the understanding of this relation. He argues that the acceptance of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* among 20th century philosophers who resent the system is due to the fact that the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, though it is a systematic work, can be also understood as a non-rigid system.²⁵ In other words, his explanation keeps the strict systematics of Hegel on the one hand and leaves space for the unsayable on the other.

This brings us again to the problematic relation between religion and philosophy and to the decision we have to make. The relation between philosophy and religion should be understood from the point at which the truth cannot be said in the system, and we need an irrational explanation, a religious myth. Our decision can be neither purely systematic nor purely mystical. We cannot, on the one hand, reject strict systematic argumentation as our philosophical means. But we should, on the other hand, be aware of its limits. Let us examine the relation between religion and philosophy, in order to see where exactly one "ends" and the other "begins."

III.

Let us start with speculation. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in order to liberate reason from the problems, namely the antinomy²⁶, in which it is prone to become entrapped, distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate uses of reason. Broadly put, the illegitimate is the *speculative* use. It ceases being legitimate in that reason creates judgment about "objects" which cannot be given in any possible experience.²⁷ This encroachment by reason occurs, however, unavoidably, because the conditioned is given necessarily within the *a priori* horizon of the unconditioned, which lies out of any possible experience.²⁸ The speculative encroachment of reason can be no more than a springboard for Hegel's discussion of the speculative. It is merely a springboard because there can be no continuity between the false and the true mode of the infinite – there

²⁵ Reiner Wiehl, *Subjektivität und System* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 73 ff.

²⁶ Kant never uses this word in the plural!

²⁷ "So wird demnach die Antinomie der reinen Vernunft bei ihren kosmologischen Ideen gehoben, dadurch, dass gezeigt wird, [...] dass man die Idee der absoluten Totalität, welche nur als Bedingung der Dinge an sich selbst gilt, auf Erscheinungen angewandt hat, die nur in der Vorstellung, und, wenn sie eine Reihe ausmachen, im sukzessiven Regressus, sonst aber gar nicht existieren." Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft – Nach der ersten und zweiten Originalausgabe*, edited by Jens Timmermann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998), 600.

²⁸ "Diese Vernunftseinheit setzt jederzeit eine Idee voraus, nämlich die von der Form eines Ganzen der Erkenntnis, welches vor der bestimmten Erkenntnis der Teile vorhergeht und die Bedingungen erhält, jedem Teile seine Stelle und Verhältnis zu den übrigen a priori zu bestimmen." Ibid, 710-711.

should be a leap. This is, as we shall see later, where philosophy must end, and religion must begin.

The Kantian speculative is still in the mode of the false infinite. In this mode, each member points to the next or to the prior one *ad infinitum* as in line numbering. This infinite is, however, empty – the “hereafter” has no meaning; it is swallowed in the darkness of the false infinite. The Absolute in the mode of the true infinite should be, on the other hand, completely seen and totally actual, and this seeing is true speculation. In applying the term “speculation,” Hegel presumably alludes to “speculum” (mirror) in the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (“*videmus nunc per speculum*”).²⁹ That means that the Absolute does not lose its true meaning by being stretched out *ad infinitum*, but it should return to itself – to be reflected in itself as it were in a mirror.

We can return now to our aim, which is to inspect the relation between philosophy and religion. As said above, this relation should be understood from the point where the rational procedure cannot complete its task, that is, to conceive the Absolute, and needs the aid of religious myth.

We know that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Encyclopædia*³⁰, religion is inferior to philosophy with respect to its ability to grasp the Absolute. Religion grasps it in the way of presentation or myth, while philosophy conceives it in the way of thought, which is the only one proper to the Idea, the Absolute. Throwing a swift glance at Hegel’s early writings, we find that philosophy is inferior to religion, because it cannot conceive of the Absolute, while religion manages to grasp it.

In the “System-Fragment from 1800,”³¹ Hegel describes the relation between philosophy and religion in the following manner. Our experience in this world is of innumerable finite things. We find ourselves standing *against* this countless manifold. Reason, which creates dichotomy by reflection, feels dissatisfied with these two one-sided poles, with this discrepancy between the unity and the manifold, and extracts from it an infinite unity, which in the Hegelian idiom means the Absolute or God. This elevation of man from the finite to the infinite life, not, of course, in the sense of infinite manifold, but of true eternal life, is *religion*.³² The reflection, in which philosophy is included, necessarily creates separation that can be overcome only with the aid of religion:

²⁹ See Hans-Friedrich Fulda, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2003), 64 ff.

³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991)

³¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Systemfragment von 1800,” in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19076), 343-351

³² “Diese erhebung des Menschen, nicht vom Endlichen zum Unendlichen, denn dieses sind nur Produkte der blossen Reflexion, und als solcher ist ihre Trennung absolut – sondern vom endlichen Leben zum unenlichen Leben – ist Religion.” Ibid, 347.

Philosophy, exactly for the following reason, must come to an end where religion begins, because philosophy is thinking, that is to say, it holds partly the opposite of non-thinking, and partly that between the thinking-agent and the being-thought; it has to reveal in each finite the finiteness, and to demand through reason its completeness, and especially to recognize the deception of its own infinity, and so to set the true infinite outside of its scope.³³

Reason creates this manifold, the false infinite, with its reflection, and points to the true infinite, to the Absolute that can be reached only by religion. The unlimited is always given with the limited. This is due to reason. The border of the limited is always crossed by reason, but reason can never return home, and it must continue *ad infinitum*. The Absolute in a mode of the true infinite can be achieved only by religion.

Having identified religion and love³⁴ in "Love and Religion," Hegel goes on and says in "Love" that true unity, namely the Absolute, is achieved neither by reason nor by the understanding, but only by love. With "love" he does not mean the sensual particular feeling in which everything is dispersed, but a "sense" which grasps the whole. In love, the opposites do exist, but not separately.³⁵ Also in the early "Belief and Being,"³⁶ Hegel ascribes to belief the capacity to solve the antinomy and to achieve unity, the whole. The two contradictory poles of the antinomy could not have been given without their unity. But their unity cannot be proved, only believed, because to prove it is to demonstrate its independence, but the two limited poles are rather dependent.³⁷ The transition from dependency to independency is illegal. In other words, Hegel gives ontological as well as epistemological priority to something which cannot be demonstrated, but *must* be believed: the opposites can neither exist nor be apprehended without this believed unity. In this sense, he denies the right of the ontological proof: it is a contradiction to say, that in order to believe that God exists, one should first be convinced that He exists.³⁸

Hegel's task is to achieve the Absolute, speculative seeing. In the above examples taken from Hegel's early writings, we have seen that this task cannot be accomplished by rational thinking, by philosophy, though it is revealed and

³³ "Die Philosophie muss eben darum mit der Religion aufhören, weil jene ein Denken ist, also einen Gegensatz teils des Nichtdenkens hat, teils des Denkenden und des Gedachten; sie hat in allem Endlichen die Endlichkeit aufzuzeigen, und durch Vernunft die Vervollständigung desselben 'zu' fordern, besonders die Täuschung durch ihr eigenes Unendliche 'zu' erkennen, und so das wahre Unendliche ausserhalb ihrer Umkreises 'zu' setzen." Ibid. 348.

³⁴ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Liebe und Religion" in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19074), 377.

³⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Die Liebe" in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19073), 379.

³⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Glauben und Sein" in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 19071)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 383.

outlined by it, and needs the help of Christian religion, of Christian religious love, of Christian belief in the Trinity. A little later, in 1801, in Hegel's first philosophical writing called "The Difference of Fichte's and Schelling's Philosophical System" and known as the "Writing of Difference,"³⁹ this task is entrusted to philosophy alone.⁴⁰ The Absolute is not an isolated principle, but an organized whole of contradictory components of knowledge. Each one is opposed but also related to the other. The understanding (*Verstand*) cannot grasp them in their unity. Belief can merely believe in it. Only reason (*Vernunft*), *speculation*, can grasp them united and bring them into consciousness.⁴¹ The speculation unites the opposites in overcoming their limitedness, their one-sidedness; it does not annul them, however, but brings them into a *system*.⁴² That which produces the opposites is the reflection. There can be, of course, no philosophy without reflection. But, à la Hegel, there can also be no philosophy without a system that unites the contradictory opposites. And philosophy has now the means, namely, speculation, to unite the opposites and organize them into a system. If philosophy should be *one* organized system, and the opposites can be united only through the speculation, or, as Hegel also names it, "transcendental intuition" (*transzendentale Anschauung*), he is right in basing philosophy on it.⁴³

Yet, this intuition cannot be a part of the system. It can be believed or revealed, but can neither be included nor demonstrated in the system. In contrast to the early writings cited above, the "Writing of Difference" degrades the role of belief and puts the philosophical system in its place. Only in this system can the Absolute be revealed. Due to the fact, however, that the transcendental intuition can neither be included nor demonstrated in the system, Hegel cannot abandon religion, and it should continue to play an essential role in Hegel's systematic phase as well.

IV.

³⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie" in *Jenear Kritische Schriften (I)* edited by Hans Brockard and Hartmut Buchner (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1979)

⁴⁰ Ibid, 14 ff.

⁴¹ Ibid, 22.

⁴² Ibid, 22-23.

⁴³ "Es ist von der tiefsten Bedeutung, dass mit so vielem Ernst behauptet worden ist, ohne transzendentale Anschauung könne nicht philosophiert werden. Was hieße denn, ohne Anschauung philosophieren? In absoluten Endlichkeiten sich endlos zerstreuen; diese Endlichkeiten seien subjektive oder objektive, Begriffe oder Dinge, oder es werde auch von einer Art zu der anderen übergegangen, so geht das Philosophieren ohne Anschauung an einer endlosen Reihe von Endlichkeiten fort, und der Übergang vom Sein zum Begriffe, oder vom Begriff zum Sein ist ein ungerechtfertigter Sprung.".. Ibid, 31.

The *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion*⁴⁴ and *Lectures on the Proofs of God's Existence*⁴⁵ were held in Hegel's last years and belong, of course, to his systematic phase. In the *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion*, it is said that the task of philosophy is to develop what already exists in religion, namely, the notion of the Absolute, and to bring it to absolute knowledge. Religion is, therefore, inferior to philosophy. Its means of grasping the Absolute is sensual or pictorial (*Vorstellung*). It means that the elements are grasped in a linear order, standing one next to the other, as it is done in the stories of the Holy Scripture. This is the mode of the false infinite. This infinite is defined by the finite: they are based upon each other, and, therefore, both are finite. So long as these two one-sided elements are not sublated, we cannot reach the Absolute in a mode of the true infinite. This means, of course, overcoming our own isolated one-sided subjectivity as well, in opposition to which there stands an isolated one-sided objectivity.⁴⁶ The Absolute in the mode of the true infinite emerges from the destruction of this one-sidedness in which two substantive poles, finite and infinite, stand upon each other. The true infinite mode is by no means a new static substantive component against the finite and the false (finite-) infinite, but it is the movement (*Bewegung*), the process (*Prozess*) in which every one-sided substantive element reaches its destruction.⁴⁷

The transition from the false to the true infinite mode should mark the transition from religion to philosophy, from pictorial consciousness to conceptual knowledge. The pictorial consciousness is sensual and can grasp nothing but specific finite one-sided elements standing in a linear order one next to the other. The infinite is always *beyond*, and it can only be believed. Schleiermacher, Hegel's opponent, claims in his lectures that each attempt to cross this border amounts to nothing but "empty mythology."⁴⁸ Hegel, on the other hand, thinks that this

⁴⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion – Teil I*, edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993)

⁴⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes*, edited by Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1930)

⁴⁶ Ibid, 43; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I-II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 212-214, 243, 246-247.

⁴⁷ "Das Endliche ist nicht das Seiende, ist nicht ein Bestehendes; ebenso ist das Unendliche nicht fest; diese Bestimmungen drücken die Natur des Geistes nicht aus, sondern sie müssen nur aufgefasst werden als Momente des Prozesses." Ibid., 213. And compare the footnote: "Auch Prädikate reichen zur Bestimmung nicht aus, am wenigsten einseitige und nur vorübergehende. Sondern was wahr und die Idee ist, ist durchaus nur als die Bewegung." Ibid.

⁴⁸ ... "und so alles Einzelne als einen Teil des Ganzen, alles Beschränkte als eine Darstellung des Unendlichen hinnehmen, das ist Religion; was aber darüber hinauswill und tiefer hineindringen in die Natur und Substanz des Ganzen, ist nicht mehr Religion und wird, wenn es doch noch dafür angesehen sein will, unvermeidlich zurücksinken in leere Mythologie." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion – Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 2003), 39.

Jacobi tries to draw this line. In order to support his argument, he cites Newton as representative of modern systematic science. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Über die Lehre des Spinoza, in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn" in Scholz Heinrich (editor), *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichardt, 1916), 198 ff. He draws the line where philosophy should stop and religion should begin. It is, however, not the Christian religion, but a certainty which cannot be demonstrated but

border is inevitably crossed; the Absolute stops being a matter of religion, and becomes a matter of philosophical system. In this system the one-sided finitude of each category should be demonstrated in relation to the other, and the Absolute in mode of true infinite should be conceived. This is why Hegel calls his *Logic* "metaphysical theology."⁴⁹ But relating one category to another is not enough. Furthermore, in this involving of one category with the other we are still in the domain of false infinity. To see them in the light of the Absolute means to catch them in the process in which the finite and the (finite) infinite lose their one-sidedness, their stability, and are reflected in each other. Hegel can argue against Schleiermacher, that he is still entangled in the substantial one-sidedness, and, therefore, must stay in the low stage of belief. Schleiermacher, in turn, can argue against Hegel, that it is exactly the ambition to dissolve the one-sidedness substantive finitude that cannot take place in a system, in rational thought, and must lead to mythology. It is of course Christian mythology: The Trinity is the finite and infinite in their unity.

The proofs of God's existence cannot be considered as the conception of the true Absolute, because they are still in the domain of the false infinite. However, Hegel finds them worth philosophical discussion, treating them as an effort to elevate thought towards the true Absolute.⁵⁰ Hegel says of the lectures dedicated to the proofs, that they complete his *Logic*.⁵¹ Following Kant, Hegel deals with three proofs: two of them, starting from the contingent entities, he calls "contingent." They are, as Kant names them, the "cosmological" and the "physical-theological" proofs. The third starts from a concept and is called "ontological"⁵². Anticipating, we can say that each proof consists of two one-sided poles: a contingent or dependent pole versus an independent pole in the contingent proofs, and a conceptual pole versus an existent pole in the ontological proof. This one-sidedness prevents them from achieving the Absolute. The infinite or the Absolute which is achieved in these proofs, is therefore empty and abstract, it is the false infinite of line numbering.

Hegel starts with the cosmological proof. The fallacy of this proof consists in posing the contingent as an independent isolated one-sided substance. This position prevents the proof from reaching the Absolute in the mode of true infinite, namely, God. The contingent should have been demonstrated in its full determinateness as positive and negative as well. And so it would appear in the result as disappearing (*verschwindend*).⁵³ Only in this way, in which the

only believed. *Ibid*, 178 ff.

⁴⁹ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion – Teil I*, edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), 85-86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵² See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft – Nach der ersten und zweiten Originalausgabe*, edited by Jens Timmermann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998), 662 ff.

⁵³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes*, edited by Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1930), 103.

contingent is in the process of disappearing, can the true Absolute appear. Otherwise the outcome is an Absolute in a mode of false infinite, namely, finite. Though one cannot, in principle, have two "is" at one's disposal, one takes this "is" as completely split into two contradictory poles, and tries to move from the isolated one-sided "is" of the contingent existence to the isolated one-sided "is" of independent supreme existence. This separation cannot let the true Absolute, God, be seen. For this purpose one should have conceived, i.e. speculated, the "is" in its process of expressing both identity and other from itself. This process is the transition (*Übergang*) of the finite into the infinite and vice versa, it is their mutual definition, their reflection of one in the other, their true love.

At the end of the last lecture, Hegel defines the relation of philosophy and religion. Both are related to the Absolute; religion by means of pictorial seeing (*Vorstellen, Anschauung*), and philosophy by means of thought. Thought is, however, superior to the pictorial seeing, because it is the only free way of conceiving the truth.⁵⁴ This means that only philosophy can altogether overcome the one-sidedness, whose consequences are indifference and subjugation, and conceive an absolute mediation.

V.

The superiority that Hegel assigns to philosophy is based on the assumption that truth, absolute mediation, is rational, and can therefore be demonstrated only in a philosophical rational system, and not merely felt or believed. Hegel's systematic project is amazing in the way he manages to connect and relate the different categories. Their being in a process, in which their one-sidedness is sublated in the true Absolute, is something that one can vaguely feel or surmise, but it can by no means be demonstrated in a system. At this point, philosophy should stop, and religion should begin. Being equipped with the story of the Trinity, it can succeed where philosophy must have fallen short. Explaining the relation between philosophy and religion, it is, therefore, not enough to point to the Trinitarian structure of Hegel's system. The line should be drawn exactly where philosophy can no longer achieve its purpose with rational means, and needs the help of mythology. The decision made is neither to poetry or mythology, nor to the purely systematic. It is rather a decision to see philosophy as a systematic rational way of thinking, which has, however, its irrational limits.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 177.

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