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Dedicated to the memory of Iris Grider Goggin.

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“En vérité, le problème de Hegel est donné dans l’action du sacrifice.”

-Georges Bataille, “*Hegel, la Mort et le Sacrifice*,” 1955

Introduction

The current study is a systematic reconstruction on the place of “sacrifice” in Hegel’s early thought (1793-1806), and how it figures in the development of his mature, speculative system. In particular, I focus on the place of shifting conceptions of sacrifice for Hegel’s account of the relation between the pictorial or imaginative mode of thought characteristic of religion into the conceptual thought of philosophy. The epigraph above, from Georges Bataille, points to something fundamentally correct about the development of the Hegelian system, in my view. For the young Hegel, the place of sacrificial action as a staging ground for a non-dualistic account of human freedom is a persistent, if at times understated, concern. In other words, Hegel’s philosophy of religion focuses on sacrifice as the core feature of religious life and imagination from its very inception and the status of sacrifice is essential to Hegel’s approach to the controversies of post-Kantian idealism. The transformations of the concept of sacrifice in Hegel’s works are integral to his attempts to re-think the valence of religion in the context of what he takes to be a distinctly modern account of freedom. Finally, I will argue, a retrieval of a kenotic interpretation of sacrifice from dogmatic Christianity antedates and decisively shapes the birth of a distinctively “Hegelian” dialectic.

Though they remain one of the most crucial and decisive sources for the contemporary philosophy of religion, one of the fundamental difficulties in understanding Hegel’s views on religion, as Thomas A. Lewis rightly notes, is our tendency to import predetermined concepts (e.g., “religion,” “religious,” “God,” “secular,” “divine”, etc.) in assessing their meaning and significance. Doing so, Lewis claims, frustrates careful consideration of how Hegel’s philosophical labors are oriented precisely and decisively toward novel re-interpretations of these

terms at a historical moment when their meaning was sharply contested.¹ Lewis' exegetical insight is something that the current study attempts to keep in view with respect to Hegel's grappling with the question of sacrifice. Various commendable studies have drawn attention to the thematic treatments and tropological valences of "sacrifice" [*Opfer, Aufopferung, Entäußerung*], but none has yet provided a systematic reconstruction of Hegel's consideration of the nature of sacrifice as it persists throughout the constellation of his early works, nor has any scholar provided a careful account of how Hegel's shifting views on sacrifice in those texts condition the emergence of his speculative interpretation of Christianity. While a certain model of sacrifice comes to predominate in Hegel's thought during its pivotal and mature phases, there is no single model or interpretation of sacrifice which can be singled out as *the* meaning of sacrifice as it appears in Hegel's early works—sacrifice appears as radically overdetermined in GWF Hegel's texts. *Opfer, Aufopferung*, and especially *Entäußerung*, imaginatively reflect the logico-metaphysical features of a host of dialectical oppositions which the speculative system eventually aims to overcome and synthesize: sensibility and rationality, inclination and duty, passivity and activity, individual and community, object and subject, humanity and God, finite and infinite. To compound this difficulty, the idea of "sacrifice" undergoes several significant developments in Hegel's work which correspond to shifts in his methodological, practical, and theoretical aims in the development of his dialectic. In at least one decisive case—that of Hegel's appropriation of "kenotic" sacrifice from dogmatic Christianity in roughly 1800—changes in his conception of sacrifice seem to directly motivate these broader methodological shifts, or to be nearly indistinguishable from them. In fact, I think, a better understanding of Hegel's system as

¹ Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the development of a speculative interpretation of sacrifice might go some distance in clarifying a crucial question in the study of Hegel's philosophy generally. As James Yerkes has it, "The intellectual alchemy which transformed Hegel's christomorphic of the *Jungendschriften* into the speculative christomythic categories of the later system cannot be *fully* explained."² This may be a fair assessment, though it is my perhaps immodest hope that the current study of sacrifice in Hegel's early works might, for all its flaws, go some distance in bridging this gap. Indeed, unless scholars are able to do so, I think it likely we have failed in our attempts to understand Hegel's strategies for dealing with the "broad ugly ditch" between historically contingent and rationally necessary truths posited by Lessing,³ or the "incalculable gulf" opened by Kant between transcendental freedom and the laws of nature.⁴

To that end, the major exegetical contribution of this dissertation is elucidation of the links between the kenotic model of sacrifice (which serves as the religious anticipation of speculative cognition in the *Phenomenology*) and earlier models of sacrifice (as practical structures of mediation or reconciliation) in the works that precede it. It is well established that the notion of 'Entäußerung' or 'externalization'—Luther's rendering of "kenosis" from Paul's letter to the Philippians—looms large in the *Phenomenology*. But the significance of Hegel's speculative employment of kenotic sacrifice has not been made entirely clear, nor has its relation to earlier models of sacrifice been sufficiently elucidated.

² James Yerkes, *Christology of Hegel* (State University of New York Press, 1983).

³ John W. Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion: The Reasonableness of Christianity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Professor Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

French commentators have approached the sacrificial resonances of Hegelian thought for some time. This tendency of Hegel interpretation has a definite lineage which can be traced against the background of Alexandre Kojève's famous, if tendentious, existentialist-Marxist readings of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the *École pratique des hautes études* (1933-1939). The sacrifice-critical approach to Hegel's work truly begins with the work of Georges Bataille, who attended a number of Kojève's lectures. In his essay "Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice," (1955) Bataille argues that a more radical account of the negativity of death, as it represented in acts of substitutionary sacrifice, ultimately undermines the possibility of the speculative system.⁵ The idea that the system relies on the suppression of irrecoverable, non-dialectical negativity—an idea with which the current study is in decided sympathy—is thus not entirely novel. A direct line of descent can be traced from Bataille's interrogation of sacrificial negativity in Hegel's works to Jacques Derrida's famous "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve" (1978), originally published in 1967. There Derrida describes Bataillean sacrifice as negativity which is not the underside of dialectical recuperation, thus effecting a sort of rupture within Hegelian dialectic which exceeds the dialectical recuperation of the present. Attention to the theme of sacrifice continues in recent decades among Derrida's students. Catherine Malabou's *The Future of Hegel* offers an extended reading of the role of "Entäußerung" or "kenosis" in her account of "divine plasticity" in Hegel's thought. Joseph Cohen, in *Le sacrifice de Hegel*, elaborates a close reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an act of sacrifice.

⁵ Georges Bataille, "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice," in *Oeuvres Complètes: v.12* (Paris: Gallimard-Jeunesse, 1988). Cf. W. Ezekiel Goggin, "Hegel and Bataille on Sacrifice," *Hegel Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (October 2018): 236—59.

According to Cohen, sacrifice expresses an *aporia* of *significance spéculatif*, a radical negativity which both animates and frustrates the self-articulation of the Absolute in thought.⁶

In addition to this French line of sacrifice-critical works, several excellent English language contributions to Hegel scholarship have begun to highlight the role of sacrifice—in particular, kenotic sacrifice—to the Hegelian project. Paolo Diego Bubbio and Molly B. Farneth have drawn deserved attention to the relationship between biblical “kenosis” and the logic of mutual recognition [*Anerkennung*] in Hegel’s critique of the Kantian conception of freedom.⁷ Christopher Lauer has undertaken the task of examining the relationship of kenotic sacrifice and thanksgiving in a selective reading of Hegel’s works. For the most part, however, remarks in English-language literature have been occasional, and have failed to note the systematic relationship of sacrifice to dialectical negativity in Hegel’s works.

German scholars have spent comparatively little time on the subject. When they do address sacrifice in Hegel’s writings, it is not to identify it a gesture whose comprehension constitutes an issue of general systematic importance, but rather to mention its occasional role within the Hegelian architectonic. Dieter Henrich’s lectures at Harvard (1973), for instance, offer a splendidly clear account of the role that love plays in Hegel’s transition from the Frankfurt period to the Jena period, but fail to account for the ways that love correlates to other invocations of *Opfer*, *Aufopferung*, and *Entäußerung* as practical structures of mediation in Hegel’s

⁶ Joseph Cohen, *Le sacrifice de Hegel* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2009)

⁷ Paolo Diego Bubbio, *Sacrifice in the Post-Kantian Tradition: Perspectivism, Intersubjectivity, and Recognition*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014); Molly Farneth, *Hegel’s Social Ethics: Religion, Conflict, and Rituals of Reconciliation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

development.⁸ Walter Jaeschke briefly treats the idea of sacrifice in his *Vernunft in der Religion* (1986), but only as a discrete moment of Hegel's dialectic of religion in Jena and later in Berlin. Despite his excellent and painstaking analyses of subtle architectonic shifts in Hegel's philosophy of religion, Jaeschke does not draw attention to the parallels between previous models of sacrifice and the reflexivity characteristic of Christianity as "having become objective to itself" [*selbst Gegenstand geworden sei*].⁹ In his analysis of the Absolute Spirit in the *Phenomenology*, Adriaan Peperzak correctly identifies the logic of sacrifice exemplified in *Entäußerung* as participation in negative self-concretization of the Absolute in representation [*Vorstellung*], the drama of self-negation which is the *inhabitation* of the Spirit.¹⁰ Still, Peperzak does not connect this to earlier models of sacrifice which appear in the *Phenomenology*, and thus does not consider the problems which arise in attempting to translate sacrifice into a dialectical form—or to state the matter in rather more characteristically Hegelian terms, to discover the concept already at work in sacrifice. In his magisterial *Die 25 Jahre Der Philosophie: Eine Systematische Rekonstruktion*, Eckhart Förster brings us tantalizingly close to the persistent rhetorical presence of sacrifice in Hegel's works. In that volume, Förster notes that religious sacrifice appears as a practical structure of reconciliation of the transcendental opposition of infinite and finite in the 1800 System. However, he does not discuss the role of sacrificial gestures vis-à-vis Hegel's critique of Schelling. At least one German-language work has

⁸ Dieter Henrich, Chapter 12 in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁹ Walter Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in Der Religion: Studien Zur Grundlegung Der Religionsphilosophie Hegels* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag Gunther, 1986) 158; 269; 295; 303.

¹⁰ Adriaan Peperzak, *Selbsterkenntnis Des Absoluten: Grundlinien Der Hegelschen Philosophie Des Geistes* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987) 104-108.

identified the persistent centrality of sacrificial language in Hegel's work. In *Der Junge Hegel*, for instance, Georg Lukács describes *Entäußerung* as the central concept of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.¹¹ But no sooner has Lukács opened this avenue to analyze Hegel's mature works in terms of his earlier religious thought, than he closes it. He immediately downplays the religious and theological lineage which would trace the term to Luther's translation of the act of Pauline "kenosis" and the series of dogmatic figures that reflect this same dynamic of self-emptying, withdrawal, or alienation. Quite predictably, given his historical-materialist commitments, Lukács suggests that the links between Hegel's thinking and theology are a sort of obfuscation of what is truly at stake. There is nothing remarkable about the term *Entäußerung*, its cognates, or the related term *Entfremdung*, both of which enjoy a long and fruitful career in the development of the Marxist *oeuvre*. These terms are simply the German translations of the English word "alienation" in Lukács' view, used widely in the context of natural law theories as the relinquishment of rights as the condition of freedom in a social contract or in the alienation of labor in the production and sale of commodities.¹² Thomas A. Lewis' point about the instability of "God" and "religion" and related terms in Hegel's works is, once again, well taken. Lukács' gesture too radically limits the possibilities of an interrogation of the philosophical significance of repeated kenotic themes in the Hegelian approach to the tensions of modernity (e.g., between the individual and society, particularity and universality, labor and capital). It does not allow us to consider in detail how the concept of religion is itself reconceptualized in the process of

¹¹ Georg Lukács, *Der Junge Hegel und die Probleme der Kapitalistischen Gesellschaft*. (Aufbau-Verlag, 1954, 1948) 611.

¹² Ibid.

Hegel's adaptation of such terms. In the same connection, Lukács' dismissive gesture threatens to foreclose potentially fruitful avenues of exploration and analysis by political theologians in the context of a resurgent Marxian Left.

If Lukács' approach is limiting, his error is nonetheless understandable. For while "kenosis" or *Entäußerung* is indeed the central philosophical concept of the *Phenomenology*, explicit reference to kenosis as a practical or theoretical structure in Hegel's early works and correspondence is extremely limited. In a letter from his friend, poet-philosopher Friedrich Hölderlin dated Nov 25, 1795, we find perhaps the earliest evidence of engagement with the works of Paul, whose letter to the Philippians is the theological *locus classicus* of 'kenosis.' "Kenosis" derives from Paul's use of "ἐκένωσεν" in his description of the act of Jesus's self-emptying or self-negation. In the context of Philippian kenosis-hymn, the apostle enjoins the congregants to imitate Christ in this kenotic gesture, specifically in this "pouring-out" or "emptying" of the divine nature. "[Jesus] emptied himself" (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) (Phil 2:7) becomes, in Luther's rendering, "*entäußerte sich selbst*".¹³ In the aforementioned letter, Hölderlin implores Hegel, "Above all, do not put aside your literary occupations. I already thought a paraphrase of the Pauline letters according to your idea would surely be worth the trouble."¹⁴

¹³ This same Greek verb appears five times throughout the New Testament in various forms. Philippians 2:7 has served, historically, as the seminal passage for kenotic theologies which attempt to resolve paradoxes surrounding incarnation by appeal to the idea of a voluntary self-divestment by Jesus of his divinity, and the pursuit of a kenotic theological ethic which mirrors this self-emptying movement. Cf. David R. Law, "Kenotic Christology" in David A. Fergusson, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, (Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel: The Letters*. Ed. by Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Though neither the previous letter from their correspondence, nor the “literary” works to which Hölderlin alludes are available to scholars (I believe it likely that such texts did exist in some form and that they were likely destroyed during the ransacking of Hegel’s apartment by Napoleon’s troops during the 1806 siege of Jena), we can surmise that Hegel was composing or projecting an attempt to rewrite Paul’s epistolary works in terms of his own, then-Kantian, vision of *Volkserziehung* and modern *Volksreligion*. This is further supported by circumstantial evidence. Efforts at a reconstruction of the Pauline letters would have occurred alongside the composition of “The Life of Jesus,” Hegel’s attempt at a Kantian reconstruction of the Gospels composed while working as a tutor in Bern. Presumably these Kantian-Pauline texts would have contained explicit engagement with the idea of kenotic sacrifice. There are oblique indications of this in surviving manuscripts of the period, though they display a Hegel who is hardly sympathetic to, or satisfied by, the kenotic model of sacrifice in the context of a truly modern religion of individual and political freedom. In the pivotal “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (1798/99) for instance, Hegel argues that the kenotic sacrificial imaginary of Christianity is of a piece with the predicament of the peoples of modern Europe—hopelessly at-odds-with-itself, grief-stricken, and self-negating. And yet, as I will argue below, it is precisely this “self-emptying” sacrifice, “*Entäußerung*”, which by 1800 Hegel comes to re-value as the representational anticipation of speculative cognition, a grasping of the fundamental “identity of identity and non-identity”, the “power of Spirit” and the life of the Concept.

My dissertation thus takes up the question of sacrifice in Hegel’s early writing to make three overarching, interrelated points: firstly, that imagining and eventually cognizing negativity are essential to the emergence of Hegel’s system and that this can be tracked through as a long

rumination on the nature of sacrificial action threaded throughout Hegel's early works (1798-1806). Secondly, I argue that Hegel's interpretation of the nature of sacrificial action as *kenosis* [*Entäußerung*] forms the crux of his radical, speculative reinterpretation of the Christian theological tradition, and that this notion of self-negation as conceptually *necessary* essence of divine and human self-manifestation forms the central representational or imaginary anticipation of absolute Spirit as Concept [*Begriff*] and, hence, the Science of the speculative Idea. Finally, I will argue that Hegel fundamentally misunderstands the valence of kenosis in his own thought. Kenosis, I will argue, indexes a site of non-dialectical negativity, an ecstatic temporality which both animates and frustrates Absolute Spirit's aspirations. Hegelian religion is thus not an anticipation of pure reflexivity of the Concept, but rather the phantasmatic representation of its impossibility. Hegel's sacrificial imagination emblemizes the transcendental frustration of the Concept in its attempt to articulate and comprehend its limits. It is at this point, in the interrogation of the nature of temporal finitude as figured in the representation of sacrifice that, following Derrida, the entire Hegelian discourse can be made to "slide."¹⁵ My hope is that this provides a way of thinking *with* Hegel which does not amount to thinking *as* Hegel but rather to find, as Ryan Coyne has suggested of the career of Hegelianism in the works of Paul Ricoeur, "some way of invoking Hegel while refusing to employ the end of history as a law for the construction of its spiritual figures...without espousing the idea of absolute self-knowing."¹⁶

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Reprint edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 263ff.

¹⁶ Ryan Coyne, "The Wound of Hegelianism: Hermeneutics and Eschatology in Paul Ricoeur," *The Journal of Religion* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 53—76.

The analysis proceeds along historical lines, drawing attention to the often oblique remarks on the problem of representing and eventually cognizing sacrificial action as a practical structure of reconciliation in Hegel's works. These issues are first intimated within the context of Hegel's abiding concern with the popularization of Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] through popular religion and the possibility of a new spiritual revolution in Germany (parallel to the contemporaneous "material" revolution occurring in France). Hegel's early attempts to address these issues take the form of a critique of sacrificial "economy." As noted above, each model of sacrifice which Hegel entertains as the basis of a modern *Volksreligion* (broadly: thanksgiving, duty, love) seem ultimately to reproduce the very conditions of opposition they seek to overcome, and reproduce an "economic" form of sacrifice, expressed in submission to some heteronomous source of normative authority. After recasting the project of articulating a modern *Volksreligion* in terms of the major controversies of post-Kantian idealism (Frankfurt, 1797-1800), however, a major development occurs. Hegel comes to understand this *aporia* of sacrifice as indicative of a broader, essentially conceptual problem, namely, how to overcome the limitations of the finite understanding while preserving them in a broader, more comprehensive context without reproducing the initial antithesis between subject and object, thinking and being, activity and passivity.

The conceptual problem expressed by the aporetic self-subversions in interpretations of sacrifice leads Hegel to rehabilitate a *kenotic* interpretation of Christianity's central mysteries around 1800 (which he previously denigrates as mere "confusion," rather than union, of subject and object), and is identical in Hegel's works with a revaluation of negativity and opposition around the time of his move from Frankfurt to Jena. This kenotic-phenomenological approach

shapes the immanent dialectic of experience which constitutes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Kenotic sacrifice functions, broadly, in two ways within the *Phenomenology*.¹⁷ At the level of specific phenomenological problems, kenotic sacrifice expresses the radicalization of opposition and negation which leads to the re-contextualization of each problematic opposition within a more comprehensive level of conceptual description. At the level of Hegel's phenomenological vision as such, it is nothing less than a giving over of one's self to the *aporia* noted above: self-negation as the essence of self-discovery or actualization. Spirit's reflexivity, Hegel claims, arises where it breaks with its immediacy as "life" and learns "to know how to sacrifice itself" [*sich aufzuopfern wissen*]. This self-sacrificing shape of Spirit is anticipated in a kenotic interpretation of central Christian mysteries, particularly the Eucharist, and the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection. The infinite negates itself and so realizes its activity through the finite. The finite negates itself and so is open to the self-expression of the infinite, finally recognizing that its own self-negation is identical with that of the infinite. Hence, the life of the Absolute can be accurately described, Hegel claims, as "divine love disporting with itself" [*Spielen der Liebe mit sich selbst*]. But this cannot remain at the level of feeling lest it "sink into insipidity."¹⁸ For Hegel, this is directly connected to the demand that the self-relation of the Absolute be grasped in terms higher and more "concrete" than representation [*Vorstellung*], where some non-conceptual remainder as faith or "feeling" is meant to confirm the unity of the infinite and the finite concept. As representations, the self-sacrifice of God and the sacrificial responsiveness of

¹⁷ Paolo Diego Bubbio, *Sacrifice in the Post-Kantian Tradition*, 62.

¹⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 24; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 10.

human beings reproduce opposition through their contingent, external relation, and the concomitant sense that a final, true reconciliation is yet to come. In other words, for Hegel it is essential to pass beyond the interpretative horizon of the representation of “love” in grasping the speculative meaning of Christian dogma.¹⁹ The kenotic relation of God and church established through the self-sacrifice of Jesus and repeated in the gestures of the community cannot merely be understood as expressive of the Absolute in representation, but is the theologico-religious anticipation of what Hegel calls “the tremendous power of the negative” [*die ungeheure Macht des Negativen*] to articulate and *comprehend* identity-in-difference, returning thought to itself from its alienation in the form of imagination. Kenosis offers a model of the relation between the infinite and finite as achieved through an act of self-sacrifice in which infinite and finite are united, but this must pass from contingent representations to the necessity of the Concept, Hegel claims. Thus, self-emptying of one’s essence always falls within the horizon of re-appropriation of essence as presence or identity in the Concept. In other words, the speculative interpretation of kenotic sacrifice is the beating heart of Hegelian metaphysics and the model for Hegel’s mature critiques of “reflective” and “representational” thinking, i.e., complete commitment to conceptual circularity and appropriation of any “non-conceptual” elements outside that economy.

Programmatically, the dissertation follows Hegel’s development from a would-be “educator of the people” [*Volkserzieher*] to speculative philosopher over the course of roughly thirteen years (1793-1806) (with occasional reference to earlier and later texts). Chapter One analyzes Hegel’s early work as a teenager in Stuttgart and a seminarian in Tübingen. There,

¹⁹ This passage is not only a rejection of Hegel’s emphasis on “love” in the Frankfurt period, but also contains an implicit polemic against Paul’s praise of “love” in 1 Corinthians 13 and, by extension, his understanding of the “kenotic” moment. Many thanks to Jean-Luc Marion for drawing my attention to this point.

Hegel understands the rational essence of religion to be the actualization of moral freedom through a transformation of popular imagination. He argues that the institution of sacrificial economies of propitiation arise from humanity's frustrated attempts to master nature and the development of specific imaginative forms to explain and negotiate the finitude reflected by such failures. Predictably failing to achieve mastery over nature, human beings interpret natural misfortune as incurred for some moral offense, Hegel argues, and undertake ill-conceived attempts to "negotiate" with despotic forces which control nature ("gods") through the offering of gifts [*Geschenke*] to navigate this opposition of the human will to nature. This dynamic provides the groundwork for religious "fetishization" of sensual particularity which occludes the rational essence of religion, in Hegel's early account. Attachment to these productions of the imagination, initially developed as a way of overcoming alienation, reproduces that relation of alienation and the attendant forms of propitiatory sacrifices. The genesis of religious sacrifice—in pursuit of concrete human freedom—itself becomes the *impediment* to actualizing that freedom. As Hegel notes in 1793's so-called "Tübingen Fragment," a folk religion [*Volksreligion*] suited to the moral and political imperatives of modernity must overcome this difficulty by minimizing the risk of fetishizing the imaginative content of religion, while still making use of it to communicate its universally rational, moral content. But "sacrifice" does not neatly fit the typology Hegel proposes for distinguishing these. On the one hand, sacrifice is essential to religion. On the other, sacrifice seems to be particularistic and thus accidental, since it seeks to actualize particular human *tele* in particular contexts, and since it is always determined by specific, historically conditioned forms of religious imagination. Why is the position of "sacrifice" so unstable in these texts? It is not the mark of simple confusion. Rather, the

instability of sacrifice in these texts reflects an essential contradiction, the tension between autonomy and heteronomy, the central *aporia* which must be negotiated by Hegel in the articulation of a modern, *aufgeklärte Religion*. How then must the modern religious imagination take up sacrifice without reproducing the very relation of heteronomy and attendant gift-economy it seeks to transcend? Hegel's first solution is to insist on sacrifice as "thanksgiving" [*Dankbarkeit*]. Such sacrifices would reverse the "gift" economy to suspend (but not eliminate) difference by acknowledging human activity as inscribed within an ineliminable passivity vis-à-vis nature, represented here in accordance with historical circumstances, as great leaders or potentates, i.e., as gods.

But a wholesale revival of Greek religion is not quite what Hegel is after. It is, rather the Greek ethos of unity and harmony, and its ability to express the rational in and through the sensual, its overcoming of the opposition of concept and feeling, subject and object. What contemporary philosophical resources could empower the *Volkserzieher* to articulate a critical approach to religious life to such an end? In Chapter Two, I show how Hegel develops a response to this last question through an application of Kantian philosophy in "The Life of Jesus" and "The Positivity of the Christian Religion." Again, the question of sacrifice emerges as a point of contention in Hegel's account. In the second *Critique* Kant claims, in terms of moral psychology, that finite moral agents necessarily grasp conversion to moral law as a sacrifice of their sensuality and particularity. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant claims that fixing the religious imagination on a sacrificial exemplar who negates the entirety of his or her empirical particularity for the sake of the universal moral law provides a qualified hope for the possibility of moral conversion. Hegel draws on these understandings of sacrifice's role in

moral religion to re-describe Jesus as a Kantian sage *avant la lettre*, who taught a “simple doctrine, which required renunciation [*Entsagung*], sacrifice [*Aufopferung*], and a struggle [*Kampf*] against inclinations.”²⁰ opposed to what Hegel argues is a lifeless and mechanistic system of observances enjoined by the Pharisees and the Temple cult. But the apotheosis of Jesus after his death undermines the moral message of his teachings, according to Hegel. Emphasis on rites, failure to meet the high moral standards of Christianity, and subsequent transferal of the source of moral normativity to the putatively transcendent source of Christian teachings all serve in the end to reproduce the same form of sacrificial economy which Jesus resisted. In the course of this analysis, Hegel comes to believe that Kantian moralism exhibits the same failing it diagnoses—both at the level of moral psychology (in the form of moral agency conceived as struggle against sensuality), and at the level of the religious imagination (in the form of the practical postulates, which render putatively moral sacrifices into deferrals of personal satisfaction and imagine the coordination of moral freedom and natural necessity to be thinkable only in terms of an abstract, transcendent “law-giver”).

Chapter Three describes Hegel’s pursuit of a new conception of sacrifice which, *mutatis mutandis*, would avoid the self-subversion of “moral” sacrifices in their failure to maintain an integral form of life and consciousness. I show how Hölderlin’s critique of Fichtean foundationalism shaped this new approach as it is expressed in Hegel’s writings from his time in Frankfurt. Decisive in this phase of Hegel’s development is a new conception of “positivity” and hence of a new approach to interpreting the use of religious concepts in modern thought,

²⁰ George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften: Nach Den Handschriften* edited by Herman Nohl (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1907).

especially in the case of Christianity. Chapter Four describes Hegel's deployment of this new framework. In the famous "Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" (1798/99), Hegel argues that Kantian moral sacrifice, "submission" to duty and the negation of particularity, must be overcome by a conception of sacrifice which *unifies* duty and inclination, rather than suppressing the latter for the sake of expressing the former. Such would amount to a *pleroma* of moral law through sacrificial love—the supererogatory fulfillment of the law and, by the same token, the negation of its alien or merely objective character *as* law. But this model of sacrifice also leads to a reversal of fate, which Hegel tracks in the historical development of the Christian religion. Sacrificial love, as the *pleroma* of moral law, must come to grasp itself reflexively, must know itself. Otherwise religious life becomes a matter of perpetual withdrawal into subjectivity and flight from concrete ethical entailments where there is potential to sully the "feeling" of unity evinced in love. Mere affectivity at the level of individual subjects must be supplemented by a robust, shared religious imagination which fosters sacrificial love as the ideal form of social relation, a call to continually restore and renew the shared life of the community. Where the explanation of such acts of love depends on the finite, reflective categories of the understanding, sacrificial love will inevitably reproduce the same aporetic self-defeat seen in each previous form of sacrifice. Sacrificial love must become reflexive without relying on the finitizing procedures of the understanding which ultimately serve to reproduce opposition. Jesus intuitively grasped this problem, on Hegel's reading, and attempted to seed the religious imaginations of his followers with durable expressions of sacrificial love to sustain his movement without leading to an ethos of withdrawal and reinstated opposition to the world. In this, Jesus's religious genius falters, Hegel claims. Instead of providing the religious imagination with forms capable of

renewing the unity subject and object in a lasting synthesis, Hegel claims in 1798's "The Spirit of Christianity" that the Jesus-movement and attendant religious developments merely "confuse" the two. This is especially clear, Hegel claims, in the Eucharistic presentation of Jesus's self-sacrifice, and the kenotic interpretation of Jesus's incarnation and death. The sacrificial imagination of Christianity thus understands love in terms which oscillate between mourning and expectation, subject and object, divine and human. This results only in a religion of infinite dissatisfaction and grief, according to Hegel—never a lasting synthesis. How then is sacrificial love to become reflexive, to support a modern political order?

Chapter Five is the most decisive of the dissertation, and tracks a dramatic and essential about-face on the value of *kenotic* sacrifice. This development in Hegel's understanding of sacrifice as expressive of the immanent negativity of the Absolute in divine and human action, is the religious *sine qua non* of the emergence of Hegel's speculative system. In the so-called "Fragment of a System" (1800) Hegel suggests that a modern *Volksreligion* will only be capable of sustaining genuine moral freedom where the religious imagination is configured by the kenotic dynamic of Christianity which he had previously criticized as a "confusion" [*Vermischung*]. The issue then, is to "live" sacrifice in a way which does not reproduce the *aporia* of sacrifice as opposition and economy. Paradoxically, this can only be achieved by a sort of acquiescence to the economic interrelation of all conceptual relationships (subject and object, universal and particular, etc.). This is achieved, for Hegel, through a rehabilitation of kenotic sacrifice which *radicalizes* opposition even to the point of "death." This radicalization of opposition, acquiescence to the kenotic loss of one's essence as an *expression* of that essence, allows Hegel to imagine a way of both preserving and transcending the finitizing standpoint of

the understanding [*Verstand*]. This dictates that Hegel now afford a special historical and metaphysical status to the “grief” of Christianity, and turns him toward the theoretical philosophy of Schelling and the search for a speculative unity achieved via a dialectic of interconnected oppositions. This new model of cognition, which would not “shrink” in the face of negativity and death, constitutes a kenotic interpretation of the central Christian mystery of God’s incarnation as a form of self-sacrifice for Hegel. The logic of kenotic sacrifice, a becoming-other-while-remaining-the-same, thus forms the *point de capiton* of the entire Hegelian discourse.²¹ It regulates dialectical slippage, pressing the unruly dissemination of the negative into a recognizable shape [*Gestalt*]. Hegel’s sacrificial imagination serves to repeat a fundamental gesture of the Christian interpretation of historical time by reading various “determinate” representations of sacrificial negativity in *figural* terms. Retrospectively, these appear in Hegel’s mature system as expressions of the Absolute’s self-relating negativity in the concept. Prospectively, they appear as striving toward this conceptual comprehension in a new dispensation of figural temporality, the *exitus-reditus* of the Absolute realized in thought.²²

²¹ Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses*, trans. Jacques-Alain Miller and Russell Grigg, Reprint edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

²² Historically speaking, the implicit connection between Hegelian mediation and Christian *figural* interpretation can be detected in literary studies, particularly in the works of philologist Erich Auerbach. Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). In Hegel studies as such, however, this remains a relatively under-theorized feature of Hegel’s thought. The only authors to have drawn explicit attention to this feature—to my knowledge—are Angelica Nuzzo and Paolo Diego Bubbio. Nuzzo notes the direct parallel in the Hegelian use of spiritual “*Gestalt*” and Martin Luther’s translation of Tertullian’s “*figura*” in his polemic *Adversus Marcionem*. Cf. *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel* by Nuzzo, Angelica (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 25; Bubbio develops Nuzzo’s claim in the context of philosophy of religion in describing the *figura* as schema which facilitates a reconstruction of Hegelian theology. Cf. Paolo Diego Bubbio, *God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017) 73-74. My own interpretation of kenotic sacrifice—following Georges Bataille and Derrida—will be to mount a fundamental challenge to the Hegelian interpretation of mediation which suggests a non-figural reading of Hegel’s thought (quite contrary to his own intentions) remains possible, if not necessary.

Hegel's specific comments about his interpretation of the death of Jesus as continuous with previous forms of sacrifice makes the metaphysical significance of this supersessionist move clear. The shift from finite, reflective philosophy into speculative philosophy will require, Hegel insists in 1802's *Faith and Knowledge*, a philosophical explication of the death of God, the elevation of "Good Friday" into pure thought. To interpret the mutual self-negation of infinite and finite as essential, conceptual features of the Absolute is thus, for Hegel, to develop the truth of Absolute philosophical comprehension from out of the representational form of cognition evinced in Christianity. Kenotic sacrifice thus becomes the beating heart of Hegel's system, what Hyppolite terms a "'heroic effort to reduce 'vertical transcendence' to a 'horizontal transcendence.'"²³

In the conclusion, I set Hegel's retrieval of kenosis into a broader historical context and suggest the need to "retemporalize" Hegelian kenosis. This retemporalization, I argue, reverses the Hegelian interpretation of the relation of Concept and representation as they figure in kenotic sacrifice. The image of Jesus's kenotic sacrifice, as the attempt to both negate and preserve the finite subject in the imagination, represents the instant of death, the disappearance of the I, which can only be represented in its unthinkability. The insight that this "speculative" meaning of sacrifice requires an original or irreducible representation demands a reversal of the Hegelian system by a reconfiguration of the relation of representational and conceptual consciousness. Hegelian "religion" would not be the anticipation of the philosophical reflexivity of Absolute Spirit, but the emblem of its non-closure, a scene of phantasmatic objects which arise within the

²³ Jean Hyppolite, *Génèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel* (Aubier éditions Montaigne, 1978), 525 (1).

hiatus of the Concept. Hegel's sacrificial imagination, in other words, marks the Concept's inability to constitute its own limit, rather than its closure. Careful attention to kenotic sacrifice as it appears in the Hegelian system thus suggests a reappraisal of the entire system itself.

Additionally, this retemporalization of kenosis sets into motion a series of reversals with effects which reach well beyond the Hegelian system. Hegel's (mis)retrieval of "kenosis" or *Entäußerung* is situated within a broader pattern of conceptual-historical transformation of this peculiar term of Pauline theology into modern political, economic, and philosophical contexts. Challenging Hegel's fundamental conceptual interpretation of the kenotic gesture is thus nothing less than a critical reappraisal of the theological model of historicity and the political-theological basis of post-Hegelian radicalisms which, in their turn, took up this gesture as a model of psychologistic or materialistic deflation and disenchantment. For both Feuerbach and Marx, *Entäußerung* forms the horizon of religious consciousness, and a proper critical assessment of it is the crux of their philosophies of religion. I do not understand the reappraisal of kenosis I offer in this reading of Hegel's development to constitute a Heideggerian rejoinder which seeks, in this non-closure of the Concept, the in-breaking of transcendence. I do not want to suggest that kenosis (or various *relata* in mystical literature, e.g., Eckhart's *Abgeschiedenheit*, or Tauler's *Gelassenheit*, for example) should be deployed to clear away *what* is given, ontically speaking, in order to grasp *that* what is given as given, ontologically speaking. I do not aim replace the model of conceptual mediation represented in kenosis by an appeal to the "gift," but to suggest, rather, a non-Hegelian interpretation of mediation.

CHAPTER ONE

Hegel's explorations of the question of sacrifice in some of his earliest works press directly on his assessment of the possibility of moral religion. They thus provide an essential point of reference in assessing his later critiques of Kantian moralism as well as *Aufklärung* more generally. The argument of this chapter will focus specifically on the unstable position of sacrifice within Hegel's *Volksreligion* fragment of 1793,¹ with reference to an even earlier text "On Greek and Roman Religion,"² which would have served as a touchstone for Hegel during the composition of the former.

In the fragment on *Volksreligion*, Hegel's interest in rationally reforming religion leads him to explore the question of how to effectively configure the particularistic exigencies of popularization vis-à-vis the universalistic demand for a purely moral religion. As Hegel would later write to Schelling (April 16, 1796), philosophers had demonstrated the rational freedom and dignity of humanity—now what was left was to turn this into a program for social, political, and spiritual change. What philosophers *knew*, Hegel wrote, the everyday person must now learn to *feel*, namely "the enlivening power of ideas...fatherland, constitution, and so forth." The enlivening power of these ideas "will lift hearts," Hegel writes, "which will learn to sacrifice for

¹ English-language literature on Hegel has conventionally referred to this fragment as the "Tübingen Essay". Not only is this title misleading since it is likely that Hegel completed the fragment while at home in Stuttgart, but it gives no sense of the essay's content. With these thematic and biographical points in mind I have elected to refer to this text as the "*Volksreligion* fragment," in closer keeping to the German title selected by Moldenhaur and Michel. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. "Fragmente über Volksreligion und Christentum." *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Band 1. Edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. (Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969); "The Tübingen Essay." In *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*. Edited by Jon Stewart. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. "Text 4: Ueber die Religion der Griechen und Römer." In *Gesammelte Werke*. Edited by Friedhelm Nicolini and Gisele Schüller. Vol. 1. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. "Essay on Greek and Roman Religion." In *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*. Edited by Jon Stewart. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

such ideas.” In other words, Hegel understands the meaning and function of religion as the *concretization* of that practical reason through a process of subjectivation in the context of a community. Religion would thus be essential to the real application of *Aufklärung* in Europe and sustainable political reform. But in his own experience of contemporary Christianity, Hegel saw religion as reflecting and reproducing alienation and submission to standards of conduct other than universal moral reason. The question for Hegel, at this juncture, is how and why this is the case, and how to concretize the commands of moral reason in a way which “enlivens” human sensibility, unifies human subjects, fires the imagination, and unifies human communities. Hegel’s career thus begins with a question as to the limits and extent of the concretization of practical reason. This requires a way to understand and configure the relationship between the rational and universal with the sensual and particular that will obviate what Hegel sees as a historical tendency within religions to obviate the moral spirit of religion by over-valuing the historical “letter” of religion. Concretization must avoid “fetishization,” in other words. In attempting to offer a typology of the elements of religion organized in such a way as to facilitate this aim, however, Hegel stumbles on where to situate “sacrifice” [*Opfer*].

For Hegel, I will argue, “sacrifice” is matter of relating one’s self to God’s infinity. Sacrifice is always sacrifice *of* something particular, *by* someone particular. In cases where it is a form of “investment” rather than a “gift,” it is also *for* something particular—the pursuit or avoidance of some *telos*. At the same time, Hegel argues, it is a part of the very structure [*Gebäude*] of religion—it is an essential component to religion being the sort of thing that it is. Assuming, as Hegel does, that the rational essence of religion is universally valid morality, it would seem that sacrifice is, paradoxically, both particular and universal, both accidental and essential. In the religious imagination, utterly essential to the success of religion in achieving

social cohesion and moral motivation, sacrifice occupies an unstable position. Thus, I will argue over the course of this chapter, sacrifice does not fit neatly into the category of the “universal” or the “particular” for Hegel precisely in that it is gestures of sacrifice which mark the site of transaction, negotiation, or translation between these two abstractions from the concrete. It is emblematic of the question of concretization. At the same time, if sacrifice is the site of such “transaction” between universal and particular, it would seem to imply the idea of an underlying, antecedent unity which makes such transaction thinkable. In other words, what is anticipated in the unstable position of religious sacrifice within this fragment is an issue which will concern Hegel for more than a decade and through various iterations in a variety of theoretical contexts: the reconciliation of what has been put asunder through the negative or exclusionary acts of *Verstand*. The instability of sacrifice appears as the phantasm of an infinite, speculative unity, achieved through what Hegel will later describe as the “tremendous power of the negative” [*die ungeheure Macht des Negativen*].

Locating Sacrifice

It is commonplace, in reconstructing the trajectory of Hegel’s early works, to gloss over the fragment on *Volksreligion* (which Hegel began in Tübingen and likely completed in Stuttgart) as “pre-philosophical.” The themes therein are represented as a sort of confused, romantic groping which does not crystallize into genuinely philosophical concerns until the respective interventions of Hölderlin and Schelling. To a certain extent, such a characterization is accurate; at this phase Hegel has not yet called his fundamental presumptions into question. However, Hegel’s relative indifference to Kant during this period has perhaps been slightly

overstated.³ Silence on the technical problems of transcendental idealism does not imply indifference or ignorance to Kant generally. In fact, it is quite possible that Hegel did write on Kant during this period and that the papers were lost—many of Hegel’s belongings were scattered during the siege of Jena. Still, given Hegel’s concern with rational or moral religion, Kant’s *Religion* (the first edition appeared a few months prior to the composition of the *Volksreligion* Fragment in 1793) seems like a more natural place for Hegel to take up a conversation with Kant than through a deep dive into his theoretical philosophy. The *Volksreligion* Fragment of course contains explicit references to Lessing, and its opposition of subjective and objective religion certainly smacks of Rousseau’s conception of natural virtues striving to express themselves despite putatively stifling, corrupt institutions. However, the overall critical aim of the essay also has some remarkable (though admittedly limited) Kantian tendencies: the concern with expressing universal morality via the religious imagination makes up an essential part of Kant’s theory of moral religion (especially parts 3 and 4 of Kant’s *Religion*). Indeed, Hegel’s concern with *Fetischglaube* as an attachment to sensory signs which obscures their role as conveyors of universal practical reason maps very neatly onto Kant’s critique of *Afterdienst* (Kant’s *Religion*, part 4). In addition, Hegel’s insistence on the need for a shared form of life as the medium of religious consciousness and spur to moral development also corresponds to Kant’s claims as to the need for religion to be instantiated in a worldly church which “draws near” to the *Reiches Gottes*. I do not wish to overstate the Kantian resonances

³ Pace H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Towards the Sunlight* (Oxford University Press, 1972); Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). A notable exception to this trend is Karl Ameriks. Cf. Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

within this very early text, however. The general thrust of claims as to Hegel's indifference to Kant is well taken: Hegel is concerned here with socio-cultural issues, so-called *Volkserziehung*, and religious reform—less so conceptual issues as such.

Hegel does not directly confront those issues in post-Kantian idealism which occupy him so thoroughly in during the Jena period. Indeed, in the face of difficulties which seem to invite a characteristically Hegelian, dialectical solution, none are yet in the offing. However, Hegel's early fragment on *Volksreligion* has several remarkable features which directly anticipate his developing critique of transcendental philosophy. The way in which Hegel sketches the opposition of universality and particularity as they pertain to his vision of religious reform is of special interest here. In the process of thinking through that opposition, Hegel returns to the theme of sacrifice [*Opfer*], likely with reference to an essay composed prior to his enrollment at the *Stift* (which I will analyze below). As noted, the question to which Hegel is eventually led is already implicit in these reflections: how is a concrete unity between form and content, infinite and finite, universal and particular *thinkable*? In the Tübingen period, these questions are anticipated by Hegel's concern with the possibility of fostering *Aufklärung* through reform efforts in the realm of popular religion. This raises certain questions for Hegel which frame this text. Namely, how far can a universal principle "organize" or re-shape the "content" of popular religion before the shared media of religious imagination and ritual lose their communicative and affective efficacy? Conversely, if human beings are always *particular*, concrete individuals with a personal and shared history, with a particular language, culture, ethico-political life, how can *a priori* principles be applied without betraying their distinctively rational *universality*? Won't such principles, in some way, be determined in light of the exigencies of the particular situation in

which they appear? Are certain ways of configuring this relationship *better* for fostering *Aufklärung*?

As is indicated by such questions, Hegel understands religion during this phase as a site of compromise, translation, or negotiation. Religious institutions are the site of where a series of "exchanges" between universal and particular occur whereby a proper balance can be struck in order to assuage the divisions of modern life (individual/community, nature/freedom, human/God, etc.). Some concessions must be made on the part of reason to communicate its putatively universal message. Some concessions must be made of the particular in order to be preserved in the universal. The question then, is this: what form should these concessions take? How far can they go before a robustness of particular form subverts the universality of the content? What form of religion is best suited to promote the values of "*Aufklärung*" and to assuage the modern sense of self-alienation, alienation from God, and alienation from nature?

Such questions were doubtless the effect of, on the one hand, personal frustration with his education, as well as a sense that the scene of world history was on the verge of a tremendous and unprecedented rupture. When he enrolled at the Tübingen *Stift*, Hegel was ranked first among the entering class, but he quickly became disillusioned by his prospects there and began to neglect his studies. Not only had the quality of a formerly celebrated professorate been driven down by rampant nepotism, but as a side-effect of this decline in quality, the instruction imparted there was unimaginative, uncritical, and to Hegel's mind, quite backward.⁴ The instructors at the school seemed to understand their roles as educators to be more or less reducible to the

⁴ Pinkard, *Hegel*, 19.

transmission of orthodoxy and were resistant to *Aufklärung* thinking.⁵ To say the least, this was discouraging to the young Hegel, who seems to have fostered hopes of being a *Volkserzieher*—a public intellectual of sorts—much like his hero Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.⁶ From his readings of the latter, as from the wider intellectual culture of *Aufklärung*, Hegel imbibed the sense that the Holy Roman Empire could be revolutionized through a more or less incremental correction of public institutions through the application of Reason. But by the end of 1788, Hegel came to see his prospects for such a life as quite dim indeed, stifled as he was by the anti-*Aufklärung* atmosphere of the *Stift*.⁷ It was not until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 that Hegel's intellectual vigor seems to return with real force. Like many German thinkers, Hegel saw the French Revolution as a new, radical instantiation of the same anti-authoritarian spirit of the Reformation, and thus part and parcel of the intellectual heritage of German peoples—a heritage which it now fell to a new generation of thinkers to claim.⁸ In 1790, the same year in which Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was to appear, Hegel formed two of his most intellectually decisive friendships: first with Hölderlin and later the precocious young Schelling,

⁵ Ibid., 19-21.

⁶ Cf. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 107. Hegel's conception of his own project at this point likely corresponds to one of his "favorite" works at the time. Cf. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften* (G.J. Göschen, 1900) ; Lessing Gotthold Ephraim 1729-1781, *The Education of the Human Race*. Translated by Fred. W. Robertson (HardPress Publishing, 2013).

⁷ Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Christmas Eve 1794" in *Hegel: The Letters*, ed. Clark Butler and Christiane Sellar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 29. Reflecting on his time at the *Stift*, Hegel notes that no intellectual progress will be possible there until suitable faculty—such as "Reinhold or Fichte"—can be brought in to modernize the curriculum. "In truth, nowhere is the old system taught more faithfully than there." Hegel had travelled little save for journeys between Stuttgart, Tübingen, and Bern at this point—ostensibly then, this claim is an expression of youthful frustration rather than a genuine acquaintance with a wide range of similar institutions.

⁸ For an extended discussion of this dimension of Hegel's thought and late German intellectual culture more broadly, Cf. Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

presumably over their shared enthusiasm for events unfolding in France. There are various, possibly apocryphal, tales relating how the three friends celebrated their enthusiasm for the Revolution, which I will not recount. However, it is known for certain that they did participate in a reading club which discussed revolutionary tracts and kept abreast of events across the Rhine.

While his antipathy to the *Stift* had not lessened, Hegel's interest in pursuing the work of a *Volkserzieher* seems to have been rekindled by the flames of the Revolution. In the summer of 1793, he received dispensation to return home to Stuttgart for an illness and during that time completed the *Volksreligion* Fragment, in which Hegel seems to reflect on the task of the *Volkserzieher* as he conceived it, i.e., the vocation of popularizing *Aufklärung*. This task, in Hegel's mind, was nothing short of a Copernican revolution in popular religion, a spiritual revolution to mirror the material revolution in France.⁹ Kant's *Religion* appeared Easter of that year, about three months prior to the composition of these fragments. It is doubtful that Hegel would have undertaken such a project without Kant's newly published philosophy of religion in mind. Not only does he display a concern with the communicative function of religion with respect to practical reason, the thematic core of Kant's collection of essays, but he also focuses special attention, in his own way, on the Kantian concern with religion's constitutive tendency toward the betrayal of its own content, and the fetishization of the "letter," which undoes the potential for religion to convey distinctively rational content. Genuine religion is always threatened by a dilution or perversion into "*Afterdienst*," in Kant's words. This implies not only a sort of "counterfeit service," but, in the more evocative and provocative inflection of this phrase, the gestures of someone whom we might in contemporary parlance call an "asshole."

⁹ Rüdiger Safranski, *Romantik. Eine Deutsche Affäre*, (München: Hanser, Carl GmbH & Co., 2007) 31-32.

After signifies, on the one hand, a paltry imitation or something secondary to the “genuine article.” In that same connection, it signifies the “anus” or anality, the excretory functions of which are, of course, secondary to the orality in the processes of consumption and digestion. That is to say, adherents of empirical, sensuous religions are duped and self-defeating in their attempts to placate some heteronymous agency or authority, when genuine moral rectitude is achieved only through the renunciation or suppression of all such appeals to external, determining contents of the will.¹⁰ In what way must religion be reformed if the threat of superstitious and servile “*Afterdienst*” is to be avoided and the possibility of humane and rational religion to be actualized? What form should the intellectual, spiritual, and political revolution in Germany look like? How should it, and how can it, be conducted?¹¹ As I’ve indicated, such a question could not but be understood in connection to the French Revolution, in some part as reflecting a sense of young German intellectuals claiming their rightful place in the modernization of Europe. Connected to this question was the status of popular religion of the Holy Roman Empire—and this not only because of the aforementioned affinity between the spiritual revolution of Protestantism and the political revolution in France. Still, Hegel was concerned to understand how this ethos of renunciation—essential to the possibility of moral religion—could be rendered a concrete practical and historical reality. How could religion cultivate a sensitivity to “universal truths” in the human conscience via the *Seelenkraft* of sense and imagination?¹²

¹⁰ Cf. Immanuel Kant, “Part four: Concerning service [*Dienst*] and counterfeit-service [*Afterdienst*] under the dominion of the good principles or, Of religion and priestcraft.” Religion *within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Pinkard, *Hegel*, 43.

¹² This can be both compared and contrasted with Reinhold’s understanding of the post-Kantian situation with respect to religion and morality. Reinhold argues in the “Third Letter” of his hugely influential *Letters on the*

The major supposition of the *Volksreligion* essay directly echoes Lessing's critique of historical religion,¹³ as well as Kant's firm stance on the ultimate dispensability of miracles with respect to moral religion.¹⁴ "Even if [a religion's] authority rests on a divine revelation the doctrines must necessarily be so constituted that they are authorized really by the universal reason of mankind [*allgemeine Vernunft der Menschen autorisirt wird*], so that every man sees and feels their obligatory force when it is drawn to his attention..."¹⁵

Like his eminent intellectual forebears, Hegel at this time does not believe historical revelation as the real ground of religious faith—it is still understood as the "trappings" of a transcendent, though rational, reality. Said otherwise, there is an important distinction between the historical genesis of sensuous religion and the possible rational justification of sensuous religion's tenets and practices. The former is historical, but it's the justification of their doctrines

Kantian Philosophy that the historical task of rationality is rather the reverse of what Hegel conceives it to be in these fragments. Reinhold argues that where Christianity sought to lead religion toward its ground in a lost, higher moral consciousness, post-Kantian thought is tasked with leading rationality *back* to a new, rationally clarified religion (and avoiding the false dichotomy of rational indifference towards or irrational enthusiasm for religion). The historical path of universal moral reason is thus conceived by Reinhold in roughly these terms: moral consciousness expresses itself in sensuous forms via religion, but the sensuous forms overtake the moral content and degrade it. Jesus's teachings served to lead back away from the sensuous, particularistic religion of Judaism and toward moral universality. But Christianity again is degraded into sensual particularity and superstition in medieval and contemporary religion, leading to the rise of indifference or atheism on one hand and enthusiasm or fideism on the other. The task of post-Kantian thought is to re-direct universal moral rationality to the proper expression of religion which avoids the Scylla and Charybdis of pre-critical attitudes toward religion. The text in which Reinhold offers these arguments was, as noted, massively influential and its form of exposition served to popularize the Kantian philosophy in a second wave of receptions. Hegel was doubtless familiar with Reinhold and his role in the popularization of Kantian thought (he mentions him approvingly in letters), and this understanding very likely informs his reception of Kant. Cf. KL Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. by Karl Ameriks (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³ Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in Lessing's Theological Writings. Trans. by Henry Chadwick. (Stanford University Press: Stanford CA, 1967), 51-56.

¹⁴ Kant, *Religion Within The Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6:84.

¹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Frühe Schriften I. Gesammelte Werke. Band I.* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989) 103.; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Jon Stewart, *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 61.

must accord with non-historical, universal reason.¹⁶ Religion requires sensuality, historicity, concretization—but it ought to take a certain form while avoiding others. Clearly, Hegel claims, efforts at steering religion in this direction cannot be a matter of reforming the content of theology, or what Hegel calls at this phase “objective” religion. Objective religion can offer up a systematic treatment of dogma by tracing the logical relationships between the propositions which constitute the doxic content of a religion. In other words, objective religion serves only “to purify the principles [*die Grundsätze läutern*], to represent them in their purity [*in ihre Reinigkeit darzustellen*].”¹⁷ But this approach to religion and *Aufklärung* engages only the “understanding.”¹⁸ It remains too intellectualistic and inaccessible for common adherents of the religion to enact the carefully reasoned reforms that might be proposed therein. “It is never through the understanding,” Hegel writes, “that the principles [of a religion] are rendered practical.”¹⁹ Hegel shares Kant’s concern, articulated in the fourth section of the *Religion*, that religions are constitutionally disposed to the betrayal of their own rational content, but also acknowledges, like Kant in the *Religion*, that some historical or ecclesiastical faith is necessary in order to render the concept of moral duty comprehensible.²⁰ Most individuals remain too mired in sensuality to adhere to purely rational religion, and rational assent to the propositions of

¹⁶ Where this view reflects the positive influence of Lessing, it also evinces a negative influence from one of Hegel’s theological instructors at the *Stift*, Gottlob Storr. Storr understood his own intellectual task as the direct refutation of such rational reforms in the name of biblical religion. Cf. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 35.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* bd 1, 94; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden und ein Registerband*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) 21; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 53. Cf. Hegel and Nohl, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, 48-49; “The Bern Plan” in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 75.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 53. Hegel, *Werke* 1, 21.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 53. Hegel, *Werke* 1, 21.

²⁰ Kant, *Religion*, 6:109

objective religion is, for most, not sufficient to enjoin religious belief and by extension moral conduct. Hegel suggests that there is, opposed to “objective” religion, also “subjective” religion, a “matter of the heart.”²¹ Subjective religion is not a matter of the theoretical understanding, Hegel tells us, but of “different psychological faculties” [*daß verschiedene Seelenkräfte*]²² which would engage human beings at an affective and imaginative level and thus move conscience—of which “understanding” alone is incapable, in Hegel’s view. While Hegel asserts that we have no *a priori* grounds to rule against the possibility that subjective religion could give rise to moral religion (and in some cases, Hegel seems to think that indeed it does; he cites the tolerant religiosity evinced in Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* in this regard), we can assume that in the missing pages of the manuscript he dismisses the practicability of an appeal to purely subjective religion for concrete reform efforts such as those Hegel had in mind, since the remainder of the text deals specifically with the question of how to mediate between the objective demands placed on religion by the understanding, and the subjective demands placed on it by “different psychological faculties.”

In order to effectively disseminate “reason” to a people, Hegel thus claims, religion must engage the individual’s “heart”—her inner, emotional life. To do this, however, it must elicit a response from the conscience of particular human beings in particular communities through sensible symbols and gestures. “Since it is impossible to constitute a religion for the general populace out of universal truths, which only outstanding men in every age have arrived at and have grasped with whole heart...additional elements always have to be mixed in which have to

²¹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 51; Hegel, *Werke* 1, 17.

²² Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 50; Hegel, *Werke*, 1, 17.

be taken on trust as matters of faith of the pure principles must be made coarser, embedded in a sensible shell [*sinnlichere Hülle gesteckt*] if they are to be understood and made amenable to the senses...”²³

In order for universal reason to assert itself among a people, to inform the entirety of their lives and to foster morality, a religion must instantiate universal reason within particular, sensuous forms drawn from the shared history and institutions of that people. Each of the three “canons” of an effective *Volksreligion*,²⁴ are thus united in the implicit question of uniting the particular and the universal in concrete, historical institutions.

“Every religion which is to count as a *Volksreligion*, must necessarily be constituted as to keep the heart [*Herz*] and fancy [*Phantasie*] engaged.”²⁵ Thus, the universal must be represented by gestures and images—such as are found in rituals or ceremonies—which sensually activate an affective response by drawing on a store of shared cultural touchstones which gesture toward an integrated spiritual life, “so constituted that all the needs of life —the public affairs of the state, are tied in with it.”²⁶ However, there is a potent danger lurking in the (necessary) attempt of the *Volkserzieher* to communicate some universal, rational content through particular, historically contingent, sensuous media.

It is not really possible that a public religion should be established which removed every possibility of reviving a fetish faith from it; the question then arises as to how a folk religion has to be set up in order (a) negatively, to give us as little occasion as possible

²³ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 55 (Translation modified); Hegel, *Werke* 1, 24.

²⁴ Hegel, *Werke*, 32-33; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 61. Cf. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, 145ff.

²⁵ Hegel, *Werke* 1, 37; Cf. Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 64.

²⁶ Hegel *Werke*, 33; Hegel; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 61.

for cleaving to the letter and the ceremonial observance and (b) positively—that the people may be led to rational religion, and be receptive to it.²⁷

In grasping the role of religion vis-à-vis reason, Hegel sketches out the basic form which the speculative system will take: a negation of immediacy, feeling, nature, or imagination which is nonetheless supposed to produce, ultimately, a positive result. But here, these moments are not grasped as an immanent unity in and as thought. They appear, rather, as externally related elements which must be brought together in a sensually representable synthesis which is religion. Given the externality of the terms to be united here, there is thus a sense of something being “lost” in translation or exchange between them, which appears here as threat of fetishism [*Fetischglauben*]. This concretization of reason in the sensible sign, whereby reason divests itself of some degree of universality by taking on a particular form, threatens to betray the rational content of the message by reverting back to some form of superstitious attachment through the attachment to the accidental, particular features of religion.²⁸ “As far as ceremonies are concerned, on the one hand, a *Volksreligion* is quite unthinkable without them, and on the other hand, nothing is more difficult than to prevent them from being taken as the essence of religion by the general populace.”²⁹ The essential questions for Hegel, in other words, are these: how can a “balance” be struck between the communicative exigencies of shared history and sensuality vis-à-vis the putatively universal, rational content which the *Volkserzieher* aims to express in the interpretation and reform of religion? What can universal reason reasonably concede to sense without thereby betraying itself? What can particularity of sense concede short of being

²⁷ Hegel, *Werke*, 29 Hegel; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 58.

²⁸ Hegel, *Werke* 1, 25.

²⁹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 64. Cf. 58.

“swallowed” up by the universal, thus losing its appeal to those “psychological faculties” of which Hegel speaks?

The elements Hegel remarks upon are organized hierarchically, according to the extent to which they instantiate or deviate from rational universality: “Religion consists of three elements, (a) concepts, (b) essential practices, (c) ceremonies.”³⁰ Where particular religious gestures fall within this typology is to some extent dependent upon the interpretation given to it by the adherent, Hegel suggests. “If we regard baptism and the Lord’s Supper as rites, to which certain extraordinary benefits and pardons are attached, the practice of which is laid down as duty in itself, and which make us more fully [*vollkommener*] Christians, and more moral, then they belong to the second class,” namely, “essential practices.” However, Hegel claims, “if we regard them merely as a means [*Mittel*], the purpose and effect of which is only the arousing of pious feelings, then they belong in the third class.”³¹ Essential practices are thus the elements in which the universal, rational features of religious concepts are expressed with the smallest potentially compromising remainder in the form of a non-essential, sensible, and particular aspect. “Ceremonies” are the merely-particular trappings of a given religion. Each element is understood with respect to its relative capacity to instantiate the universal—to be minimally sensuous and maximally rational, thus abating the risk (which Hegel takes to be inherent to reason’s divestment in a particular, empirically determined form) of becoming a *Fetischglaube*. Again, it seems to me, the risk of fetishism can be understood as a function of the gap which opens between ideality and reality, universality and particularity, temporality and eternity, when these

³⁰ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Works*, 64 (Translation modified); Hegel, *Werke* 1, 38-39.

³¹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Works*, 64; Hegel, *Werke* 1, 38.

are conceived at the level of reflective understanding [*Verstand*], rather than from the later standpoint of speculation.

After establishing these canons to regulate the cleavage between rational principles and their sensible presentation in the narratives and personalities of community's shared religious imaginary, Hegel poses the following question to himself: where does sacrifice [*Opfer*] fall, when judged according to these canons? Though the question of sacrifice might seem to appear quite suddenly within this text, Hegel's interest in sacrifice, in fact, antedates his explicit concern with the normative canons of a modern *Volksreligion*. As demonstrated by the handful of texts preserved from Hegel's days at the Stuttgart *Gymnasium*, Hegel been interested in sacrifice since his early as his days. Among those fragments, we find Hegel's earliest statement on the nature of sacrifice, "On Greek and Roman Religion," dated August 10, 1787. There, Hegel lays out a tentative theory of the origin of sacrifice as a gift-economy which arises to negotiate the vicissitudes of human fragility. Tracing the development of Hegel's theory of the origin of sacrifice as an exchange of "gifts" [*Geschenke*] in the Stuttgart writings to the development of a normative view of sacrifice as "thanksgiving" [*Dankbarkeit*] during the Tübingen period sheds yet more light on the role of sacrifice in his early conceptions of religion and Enlightenment. Doing so demonstrates why Hegel takes sacrifice to be essential to the "structure" of religion, and how its instability continues to complicate his approach to concrete, moral religion from 1793 forward.

The Origin of Sacrifice

Though the title of the 1787 essay suggests that Hegel will focus on two specific religious traditions, his central task here is not a careful study of Greek and Roman religious texts or practices so much as a series of interconnected hypotheses on the origins and ethico-political

valences of religion as such. The broad questions which frame this youthful essay, roughly speaking, are these: what is religion, how does it come to be, and what is it good for? In the context of these questions Hegel lays out a theory of the origin of sacrifice [*der Ursprung der Opfer*] as a response to human fragility which results in the production of an imaginary economy—a circulation of “gifts” [*Geschenke*] to negotiate the disparity between the divine will and human will.³²

Hegel describes the origin of religion as a sort of mis-relation of human beings to their own finitude. Human existence, Hegel’s analysis suggests, is primarily constituted as a sort of pre-reflective concern for itself which manifests in religious practices —such as prophecy, divination, and sacrifice—as a “desire to look into the fate of the future.”³³ The human experience of fragility and finitude—thwarted fortunes, foreclosed desires, calamity and travail—gives rise to a sort of anti-thetic relation to non-human nature. Nature is conceived as an “other” within which human beings appear, but which at times stands against human beings and their interests.

³² The themes of this essay are anticipated by certain texts, and echoed in later anthropological works. Hegel’s text is antedated by similar ideas on Greek and Roman religion presented by Louis de Jaucourt in the Encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alambert. While both Hegel and Jaucourt identify the practice of sacrifice of material commodities as the central feature of Greek and Roman religion, Jaucourt has a less favorable view of Greek religion, which he characterizes as both intellectually and morally deficient, prone to superstition and to human sacrifice (on the basis of the testimony of tragedians). The translation of Greek deities and practices into Roman culture proceeds according to principles of moral and civic rationality. To that extent, Jaucourt’s account of the Roman reform of Greek religion maps roughly onto Hegel’s own desire in 1793 to articulate the necessary conditions for the emergence of a rational *Volksreligion*. Cf. Louis de Jaucourt “Religion des Grecs et des Romans” in *Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisoné Des Sciences Des Arts Et Des Métiers, Volume 14, Part 1* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alambert (Nabu Press, 2011), 83-88. The idea of sacrifice as a “gift-economy” which projects mundane economic and political patronage as a means of negotiating a divine-human hierarchy is, famously, developed in the tradition of English anthropology by Edward Burnett Tylor. For Tylor, sacrifice and prayer arise as the animistic elaboration of basic features of the economic and political situation of human beings. Hegel’s thesis, while similar, does not make the more radically reductive anthropological move. Cf. Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture, Volume II* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2016), 799.

³³ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 43; Hegel *Miscellaneous Works*, 11.

The essay begins with a description of the religions of the ancient Greeks and Romans as paradigmatic of religion as such. Initially, Hegel seems to be suggesting something like a theory of natural religion. The idea of divinity [*Gotttheit*], Hegel insists, occurs to all people as a matter of course according to observations made with ordinary human faculties. In all nations of the world, Hegel argues, religions have developed along the same “path,” [*Weg*] and according to the same logic, which I sketched briefly above. But if Hegel clearly argues that the idea of God is a “natural” one, this should not be taken to mean that initial conceptions of *Gotttheit* are immediately or innately known on his account. The “path” traversed by religion generally, and Greek and Roman religion specifically, is structured by human alienation from, and eventual reconciliation to, the often harsh, even hostile forces of the natural world. “In their primitive state of nature,” Hegel writes, “they imagined God as an almighty being who ruled them and everything merely by caprice [*Willkür regiere*].”³⁴ The most proximate representation of such a power was found in human authority figures. “They formed their concept of god after the rulers they knew, after the fathers and princes of families who held entirely at their pleasure a power over the life and death of their subordinates.”³⁵ Because humans represent the divine as though it were in fact a superlative version of terrestrial power, a human sovereign writ large, they take God to have an accordingly changeable will. Gods, affected by passions such as anger, could act rashly and even be filled with repentance or regret [*etwas bereuen konnten*].³⁶ By extension, peoples in the “state of nature” presumed that the designs of the gods could be affected by

³⁴ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 42; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 42; 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

human activities. Human beings were capable of interacting with these deities in such a way as to influence their wills.

The next element which Hegel identifies as a necessary stage in the development of religion is the misinterpretation of moral and physical misfortune [*Unglück*] as forms of divine punishment. Such misfortune or “unhappiness” was taken to be an indication of some debt incurred by the human being with respect to God. In undertaking some action unfavorable to the deity, the human being would be faced with the punishment that their transgression deserved or earned [*verdient*]. Adherents of these religions offer “gifts” [*Geschenke*] as a way to balance accounts between humans and gods and to propitiate or “soften” [*besänftigen*] the divine will. But given the supposed division between terrestrial and celestial, divine and mortal beings, a practical encumbrance arises. How can such gifts be effectively given? How can their receipt by the appropriate deities best be ensured? The empirical totality of any such gift would have to be appropriately transformed such that it can be transmitted to the deity or deities, who lived in the “clouds” [*Wolken*]. Thus, Hegel claims, Greeks and Romans began the practice of burnt offerings. An act of literal dis-integration through consignment to flames, a holocaust, made possible the transmission of these goods. The gifts offered were thus transported to the supernal realm in the form of smoke rising into the skies. “This is the origin of sacrifice [*der Ursprung der Opfer*] which constituted a major part of religious worship among the Greeks and Romans as well as among the Israelites.”³⁷

I should remark here on the conditions of the origin of sacrifice, as the young Hegel reckons. First, the deity is conceived in terms borrowed from the nearest examples of analogous

³⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 42; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 10.

powers, namely human sovereigns. Representing deities as human sovereigns writ large thus implies that the deity has a finite and tractable will. Second, moral and physical misfortune or unhappiness [*Unglück*] are interpreted by these early religions as a sort of just punishment for offense to the deity. On the one hand, the deity transcends the natural order by deciding on instances that will deviate from any normal course of things, and meting out punishment or rewards. But the fact that divine will, which transcends nature in this way, must also respond to the events within nature (trespasses, sins, propitiatory offerings of natural goods), demands that at the same time the deity's will be finite, just as the human sovereign on which it is modeled, and that it thus be located immanent to nature. It is in light of these contradictory demands that an economic relationship of sacrificial gift-giving emerges in which humans attempt to propitiate divine wrath. The representation of God as superlative but finite sovereign leads to the institution of an economic relationship. This is a God which can change its mind, which can misstep, and, as Hegel notes, repent. The basis of propitiatory sacrifices—sacrifices that attest to a wrongdoing and seek to make amends, that repent—are only comprehensible in terms of a God that itself repents. In other words, the idea of sacrifice as an economy relies on negative mediation of a whole complex of differentiated elements—God, nature, offerant, offering. The economy emblemizes a unity constituted in and through a complex of mutual self-negations in giving and counter-giving. The path of human self-consciousness that leads to the development of sacrificial religion is identified by Hegel as the core feature of religious life. Not only does it apply to Greek and Roman religious imaginaries (which locate the deity within nature), but also to those (such as that of the “Israelites”) which locate the divine in a transcendent realm, beyond nature.

Though it is quite “natural,” Hegel sees this economy as a fundamental misunderstanding of the human-divine relationship. On the one hand, it erroneously and naively attributes some sort of religio-moral significance to natural events. “These human beings,” writes Hegel, “did not yet see that those evils were no actual evils, that fortune and misfortune [*daß Glück und Unglück*] depended on themselves.”³⁸ Secondly, Hegel maintains that conceiving of the deity in terms appropriate to the service of human interests is a gross anthropomorphization. The will of God is interpreted, much like any human will, as being open to influence—hence *der Ursprung der Opfer* as an attempt to “soften” the divine will. “They likewise failed to reflect that the supreme being cannot be won over by the gifts of human beings, that men can neither increase nor decrease its wealth [*Reichtum*], power [*Macht*], and honor [*Ehre*].”³⁹ Hegel’s critique of economic sacrifice is reminiscent of Luther’s critique of idolatry pursuant to the doctrine of justification *sola fide*.⁴⁰ “The self-righteous” individual, Luther claims, implicitly comports herself toward God in terms of her own needs and projects. Her attempts to propitiate the divine will are a matter of self-assertion where the work of salvation has already been accomplished through Christ. Lutheran critiques of works-righteousness thus appear to undergird Hegel’s critique of an economic conception of sacrifice. “The self-righteous say, ‘I can do it because I set up my work, and that ought to please Him.’ Better leave it alone. Better leave our Lord God unmolded!”⁴¹ God commands trust in the promise of salvation, and this is only possible through

³⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 42; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 10.

³⁹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 42; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 10.

⁴⁰ Cf. Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works* vol 17, *Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*. Edited by Hilton C. Oswald. Translated by Herbert J.A. Bouman. (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub., 1972), 18-24, 98-100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Cf. Isaiah 40:13.

a clinging to the promises of God and the gift of faith which God imparts to the sinner in confrontation with the Word. Anything else, Luther believes, makes the only genuinely satisfying sacrifice, that of Christ on the cross, a complete and utter redundancy. For if God could merely impart to human beings the capacity to render satisfaction for their sins, what would be the purpose of God's self-sacrifice in Christ? "If [the self-righteous] themselves discharge their debt by their own works, Christ makes satisfaction by His hand in vain. This, then, is the Christian religion: One has sinned, Another has made satisfaction. The sinner does not make satisfaction; the Satisfier does not sin. This is an astounding doctrine."⁴² Any other relation to God is self-assertion, rather than self-sacrifice—an expression of what Luther understood as a congenital desire to assume divine power and sovereignty for one's self, "to want to be God and to want God not to be God" [*velle se esse deum, et deum non esse deum*].⁴³ This desire animates a process of anthropomorphization—a "whittling down" of God to fit the needs of human understanding and projects. A similar critique of sinful self-assertion is present in Lessing's "On the Education of the Human Race" and in Hegel's text on *Volksreligion*, though reinterpreted as a matter of finitizing the infinite. Lessing writes,

Even if the first human being was immediately equipped with a concept of the one and only God, this concept, being imparted and not independently acquired, could not possibly retain its purity for long. As soon as human reason, left to its own devices, began to work on it, it divided the one immeasurable being into several more measurable parts, giving each of these a separate designation. Thus polytheism and idolatry arose by a natural process.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 99.

⁴³ Martin Luther, "Disputation against Scholastics" (1517) in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957).

⁴⁴ Lessing, 1780, 2013, § 6-7.

Hegel, similarly, thinks that the rational conception of the divine must be genuinely infinite, and that particularistic, anthropomorphizing tendencies shape historical religion. Clearly the propitiatory economy of debt and repayment functions only within the context of such a finite, particular representation of the divine, not the infinite divine as such. Along these lines, Hegel remarks on three divine attributes which remain untouched by any economic sense of debt and repayment. This may be a reference to Luther's German translation of 1 Chronicles 29:12, which adduces the very same attributes of God in light of the meaning of sacrifice with respect to the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem and the institution of the sacrificial cult.

In that passage, King David has just announced plans for a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, to be built upon the ascension of Solomon. He calls upon leaders of the tribes Israel to offer gifts to adorn the Temple. Upon receiving a generous outpouring, David rejoices and praises God, saying "Wealth [*Reichtum*] and honor [*Ehre*] come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power [*Macht*] to exalt and give strength to all." But David's praise is tempered by a realization of the paradoxical character of these gestures. There is at least the suspicion on David's part that such offerings are merely redundant, or even distortive of an authentic recognition of divine authority over the created order. "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers [*Fremdlinge und Gäste*] in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple."⁴⁵ What then is the meaning of such a gesture? According to Luther, as we have seen, it ought not be done in order to propitiate God

⁴⁵ Chronicles I (29:12-16) in Stephan Füßel, *The Luther Bible of 1534*, Bilingual, Facsimile edition (Cologne, Germany: TASCHEN, 2016).

(exiting the economy of sin and propitiation would be entirely in God's power—not David's or anyone else's, according to Luther). "All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. Lord, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people." The capability to offer sacrifice, and goods which are so offered, are originally given by the God to which they are now offered. David's understanding of the way in which improperly conceived gestures of sacrifice militate against the truth to which they aim to attest, anticipates the critiques of economic sacrifice offered by Luther, Lessing, and Hegel. The proper attitude of sacrifice, it would seem, is not an attempt to "soften" the will of God, but to offer God thanks, to hold in view that God gives by returning a portion of what God has already provided.

After remarks on the propensity of humans to fashion images of their gods or to locate them in a particular, sacred location (e.g., a temple or a grove), Hegel notes the extent to which the same experience of human finitude which seems to have provoked the development of the idea of God as sovereign authority leads to the development of cults and priestly religion. A special role emerges for individuals who are able to foster in their fellows a sense that those individuals themselves enjoy some special access or proximity to the deity, and who reinforce the sense of alienation that requires sacrifice. Not unlike many *Aufklärers*, Hegel understands the voluntary self-impoverishments of sacrifice as a fraud—both against the deity (since it is ultimately a form of self-assertion) and against those who are enjoined to sacrifice (since it eventually produces and enriches a special priestly class).

"The more astute and cunning people, chosen to serve the deity, noticed these inclinations. They saw that the people could be guided through nothing so willingly as religion.

Since they could not profit, satisfy their desires and passions, or work for the general welfare by anything else as much as by making use of this obedience.”⁴⁶ Given the misapprehension of their own finitude cultivated in this form of natural religion, a priestly class emerges which attempts to foster this form of misapprehension.⁴⁷ “So they strengthened those inclinations, captivated the imagination, and nourished it along certain lines and occupied it by frequent, sensuous ceremonies all aiming in this direction.”⁴⁸ On the one hand this is, from the priestly perspective, a matter of securing the common good or “welfare” where appeal to reason would not suffice. On the other, it is clearly also, from Hegel’s perspective, a sly ploy for self-aggrandizement, acquisition of goods, and personal satisfaction which is further supported by two interrelated kinds of claims. Priests engage in a sort of post-hoc self-sanctification. This in turn becomes the self-perpetuating basis for priestly authority and disconnects the observations, proscriptions, and exhortations which constitute religion from any adjudication by way of reason. “They braced themselves against all rational attacks by connecting religion with all their actions and thus sanctifying [*heiligten*] them.”⁴⁹ In other words, priestcraft is, according to Hegel, the perpetuation or reproduction of the conditions which demand sacrifice.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 43-44. Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 11.

⁴⁷ Again Hegel’s account is not unlike one propagated by the *Encyclopédistes*. Cf. Baron d’Holbach. “Prêtres” in *Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisonné Des Sciences Des Arts Et Des Métiers, Volume 13, Part 1*, (Paris, 1765) ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, (Nabu Press, 2011), 340-341. It is closer still to Kant’s assertion in the opening passages of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that “*Priesterreligion*” is the “oldest fiction.” Cf. Kant, Immanuel. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason in Religion and Rational Theology*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69 [6:18-19]. Additionally, it clearly anticipates central ideas present in the third Treatise of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werk* 1, 44; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 11.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 44; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 11 (Translation modified).

Philosophy, as opposed to priestcraft, presents a different response to the logic of sacrifice. At the end of the essay Hegel contrasts priestly “craftiness” [*Listigkeit*] with philosophical “wisdom” [*Weisheit*]. The “wise men” of Greece offered more “enlightened” [*aufgeklärtere*] conceptions of divinity. Instead of cultivating the alienation of the laity through the institution of priesthood, philosophers argued that “blessedness” [*Glückseligkeit*] could in principle be achieved by anyone through the cultivation of wisdom [*Weisheit*] and moral goodness [*moralische Güte*].⁵⁰ Hegel offers little explicit analysis of such “wisdom” here, but several features of this moment of his essay should be remarked upon. However, it would seem that to reveal, in a given historical example, the insidious manipulation of our own misapprehended finitude in the form of a cult of sacrifice, is to reveal the mechanism of the moral and economic exploitation of religious peoples in any culture. The more fundamental *telos* of religion as such is thus identified by philosophers, not as attempts to propitiate or soften [*besänftigen*] the deity through an economy of ingratiation, but rather to actualize human freedom and dignity. The sacrificial economy instated in the misapprehension of human finitude as ruled by a capricious anthropomorphic sovereign is in fact already aimed at actualizing human freedom, i.e., of making Being—nature and god—tractable in light of human projects and concerns. The philosophical critique of sacrificial religion is not an absolute negation of sacrifice as something we can relegate to the dustbin of history, but as intimating something about the negative significance of human freedom—pursuit of a given end always entails the negation of some other actual or possible state of affairs. In that qualified sense, “sacrifice” as negation is perhaps built into the very structure of human agency. But a human being will not count as a free

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 44; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 12.

agent, it would seem, until she is capable of acting on grounds that she rationally endorses—not those which come from some heteronomous authority. Thus the rational critique of religion must be to disabuse people of their illusions regarding God and nature, that is, to suspend the sensuous content of religion in favor of its rational content and moral possibilities.

In many ways, then, Hegel's early essay on the "origin of sacrifice" among Greek and Roman religious is unremarkable. In the end, voluntary self-improvement is the means by which a priestly caste hoodwinks individuals and communities through a manipulation of their natural desire to render Being habitable and tractable. Instead of leading the way to true reconciliation and freedom, they cultivate alienation by emphasizing the historically contingent elements of religious beliefs. Where priests cultivate alienation by insisting on the sanctification of signifiers—of specific gestures and images—philosophers insist on a rational overcoming of sensibility for the sake of the rational *logos* or *spirit* which comprehends the letter of religious prescription and proscription.

The "masses" mistakenly attribute the ultimately true and valuable in religion to the representational content of a particular, historical faith and practice. This tendency can be traced to a failure of education, Hegel claims. Religion arises out of an authentic encounter with human finitude, but where this is shaped by the wrong sort of "education" it elicits a sense of attachment to one's finitude and extorts sacrifices from its adherents to propitiate the deity. The history of religions is thus an all-too-human record of errors. "Seen from these points of view, some things in the concepts of religion—and I have only stated a few—will never strike us as inconceivable or ridiculous if we consider that human beings, endowed with the same abilities as we, lost their way in the same manner, i.e., by developing these abilities through an irregular education

[*ungleichmäßig Ausbildung*] and a distorted direction [*Irrwege*].”⁵¹ However, as we have seen, though Hegel understands religion as justified by and suffused with moral reason, it is not identical with it. Its role is to provide moral reason with a concrete, affectively motivating or “enlivening” form. Hegel sees this stage of sensuality and heteronomy as a necessary component to the development of religion—perhaps to historical experience generally. The aim of the “wise” person is thus to re-direct popular religion toward a consideration of its origins in human finitude and the idea of human freedom and, grasping the essence of religion, to thus elevate particular religious imaginaries and traditions into rational universality through a straightening of the path of education made crooked by competing psychological and social demands. In short, the education of the people, *Volkserziehung*, must take the shape of a rational clarification of religion.

Both Sides of Sacrifice

Having remarked on Hegel’s understanding of sacrifice as the core feature of religious life, its role as a response to human finitude, and its role in subjectivation and moral formation, it is possible to return to the 1793 fragment with a clearer sense of what is at stake for Hegel in locating sacrifice within a *Volksreligion* that will give affective force to moral ideas through institutions, narratives, and gestures that shape and enliven the shared historical imagination of a community. The task of “wise men” thus corresponds—to a certain extent—to the way in which Hegel understands his own intellectual task in 1793. As I noted prior to the excursus above, the question of where sacrifice fits within Hegel’s typology in the *Volksreligion* fragment (and thus

⁵¹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 44-45; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 12.

how it factors into attempts to reform historical religion into moral religion) arises almost certainly with reference to his earlier views. I've sketched above Hegel's view that sacrifice is essential to the structure of religion as a means of responding to human finitude by attempting to negotiate the disparity of human and divine wills through an economy of "gifts" [*Geshenke*]. Having done so, I'll pause to draw some connections between the two texts which will help in understanding why sacrifice represents a difficulty for Hegel in this text and, furthermore, how an awareness of this problem and of the centrality of sacrifice forms the backdrop for Hegel's more robust Kantianism in the Bern period.

On the one hand, as he emphasized in the 1787 essay, sacrifices are clearly to be understood in terms of utility or as "means." They mark a circulation of goods, or a form of economic or moral exchange between individuals and divine agencies for the sake of repaying or instituting debts. The defining characteristic of "utility" or of being a "means" is just what Hegel proposes for sifting purely accidental "ceremonies" from "essential practices" which more completely instantiate universal reason. At the same time, Hegel is convinced that sacrifices cannot be relegated to the third class of "ceremonies." This is because, as he claims, sacrifices are in fact *essential* to religion as such: "Sacrifices [*Opfer*] too belong here [with "ceremonies,"] but they cannot properly be called ceremonies since they are essential to the religion with which they are correlated; they belong to the structure itself [*zum Gebäude selbst gehören*], whereas ceremonies are only the decorations, the formal aspects of the structure."⁵² Sacrifice, in the essay "On Greek and Roman Religion," was described as a strategy for negotiating the vicissitudes of human finitude and, to that end, as a means to actualize human freedom through a system of

⁵²Hegel, *Werke* 1, 38; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 64 (Translation modified).

economic reciprocity. Implied in that analysis is a system of differences that is expressed by a series of mutual self-negations or negative mediations (divine and human, celestial and terrestrial, transcendence and immanence). However, as I noted in my reading of these passages, the very existence of such an economy would seem to imply some unthought unity that conditions this system of differences.

Hegel does not raise such points here. As soon as he has presented sacrifice as a possible objection to his typology, and in so doing hinted that it may have a role to play conceptually in the articulation of his eventually dialectical solutions to such issues, he attempts to reintegrate it by introducing an internal distinction. Sacrifices, Hegel writes, will be considered from “both sides” [*Auch die Opfer können von zweierlei Seiten betrachtet werden*].⁵³ First, there are offerings that aim to affect atonement, which Hegel characterizes as [*Sühnopfer*]. These are offerings that attempt to “sneak” back into the good graces of the authority which dispenses rewards and punishments (I take it that these would correspond, roughly, to priestly religion as explicated in 1787). “From this point of view the irrationality and bastardization of the concept of morality is properly condemned.”⁵⁴ Forms of asceticism, he argues, should be understood as developments of this basic form of sacrifice as expiation. Those who pursue religion in this way are forever strangers to the world and to God. They are wandering pilgrims [*Pilger*] who—anticipating Hegel’s later analysis of Abraham—reject or abandon [*verlassen*] all natural bonds of filiation: family, fatherland, “soil;” and who can only “wander” through the world [*durchwandern*], at home nowhere, friend and family to none. Through each act of sacrifice [*aufopferung*], he is

⁵³ Hegel, *Werke* 1, 38; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 64 (Translation modified).

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 65.

solaced with the thought of Christ, who suffered for him, and with whom he suffers now. Hegel notes, curiously, that perhaps no religion has ever understood sacrifice in this way, save Christianity. Any attempt to resuscitate Christianity on Hegel's part will thus need to deal critically with the interpretation of sacrifice as atonement and its expression in practices of *ascesis*, renunciation, the experience of "homelessness," and iconoclasm. "The Christian Religion" Hegel writes, "gives phantasy [*Phantasie*] plenty of room for play [*einen weiten Spielraum*]" from which "more majestic" [*majestätischere*], "more nightmarish" [*schauerlichere*] and "more poignant" [*rührendere*] representations in art and religious imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] of the people.⁵⁵ But perhaps due to this economic conception of sacrifice as *Sühnopfer*, it integrates or internalizes a sort of perpetual ascetic and iconoclastic momentum into the libidinal economy of Christianity itself. Because of this momentum, Christianity does not develop a form of religious imaginary proper to a modern political order, despite all the "room for play" [*Spielraum*] it provides to the faculty of the *Phantasie*. "The imagination of the people [*Die Einbildungskraft*]" has no beautiful plastic or visual forms to which it can cling. For its very origin [*Ursprung*] is marked by a war [*Krieg*] against all images of the divine being [*nach allen Bildern von göttlichen Wesen*]. This declaration of war follows from the form of life assumed by the ascetic pilgrim [*Pilger*] caught in the "bad infinite" of economic sacrifice [*Sühnopfer*].

To this "crass" and alienating form of sacrifice—which seems to correspond to the "priestly" sacrificial form described in 1787—Hegel contrasts an *integral* model of sacrifice, which he understands as a moment of an integral unity of self, society, and nature in the Greek

⁵⁵ Hegel, Text 13, "Aber Die Hauptmasse..." (Notizenblatt) in *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 78-79. (translation my own)

polis. These sacrifices are what Hegel calls thanksgiving [*Dankbarkeit*] given in “good-will” [*Wohlwollen*] as a sort of counter-gift which expresses the consciousness of human beings that whatever properties they do possess are ultimately derived from some deeper ground of being upon which they depend.⁵⁶ These sacrifices are given joyfully in response to a gift antecedently given. “The disposition in which a sacrifice such as this was offered was far removed from the thought of having done penance for some part of one’s sins [*die Sünden*] and the punishments [*das Strafen*] one deserved...”⁵⁷

In other words, Hegel here privileges thanksgiving or gratitude, a *redondance* of the gift, as a model of sacrifice in this context. He consciously rejects the economic model as incoherent and in the years prior to his entrance at the *Stift* only considers the question of sacrificial destruction as accidental to the process of this redoubling or returning the gift to the giver. In an untranslated manuscript likely dated prior to the “*Volksreligion* Fragment” (ca. 1792), Hegel draws all of these issues into a point as he considers for the first time the difference between “subjective” and “objective” religion in the context of the possibility of *Aufklärung* as a wider cultural project and—indeed—how far reasoning [*Räsonnement*] can meddle [*einmischen*] in religion while allowing the latter to remain [*zu bleiben*] religion. And again, the sticking point is the act of sacrifice which mediates between divine and human, infinite and finite, activity and passivity. Rationality condemns as idolaters [*Gözendiener*] [*sic*] those who offer economic sacrifice to attain some good. They do not worship the divine but seek to enrich themselves.

⁵⁶ Pace Christopher Lauer, Hegel was clearly interested in the notion of creation as “gift” long before taking up *Entäußerung* as the essential, speculative meaning of sacrifice during the Jena period. Cf. Christopher Lauer “Sovereign Gratitude: Hegel on Religion and the Gift” (2011), *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011), 274-395.

⁵⁷ Hegel *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 109; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 66.

“Sacrifice [*Opfer*] and the concepts based on it can never be introduced to a nation which has reached a certain level of Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]*—*they must originate in the childlike spirit [*kindlichen Geist*] and be propagated by custom [*Herkommen*].”⁵⁸ Here, we find Hegel insist that the only way sacrifice will accord with modern, rational freedom is through its institution as acts of thanksgiving [*Dankbarkeit*]. “How can [Sacrifice and sacrificial concepts], once there, be held by an enlightened nation? [Sacrifice] belongs to, or is maintained by a spirit of gladness [*ein geist der Frohheit*], of well-being [*des Wohlseyns*], *—*it requires a voluntary offering [*ein freiwilliges Darbringen setzt ihr voraus*].”⁵⁹

A note, written by Hegel at a later date in the margins of these remarks, stakes out the role of gratitude or thanksgiving in his early religious thought even more clearly. “[W]e are too far away from nature, we never see the hand of the giver—we see only our activity” [*wir sind zuweit von der Natur entfernt, wir sehen nimmer die Hand der Geberin —wir sehen nur dabei unsere Mühe*].⁶⁰ As a diagnosis of the religious life Europe in his day, this accords with Hegel’s rejection of the calculative understanding. At the same time, it seems to foreshadow Hegel’s ultimately dialectical solution to the transcendental antinomies with which he comes to grapple in the following years. As I have made clear, however, Hegel’s focus on sacrifice here appears in the context of other problems. And the fact that a mind as penetrating as Hegel’s does not undertake an investigation into the very nature and possibility of thanksgiving re-confirms this. Comments such as those adduced above are as close as Hegel ever comes to a logic of sacrifice

⁵⁸ Hegel *Gesammelte Werke* 1, Text 12 “Wiefern ist Religion...” (Notizenblatt), 75 (Translation my own).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

which—in the re-gifting of what is antecedently given—might gesture, sacramentally, beyond the strictures of ontotheological necessity. But Hegel does not consider the phenomenological or affective problems that arise vis-à-vis thanksgiving. To the first point, Hegel’s concerns are different from those animating the meditations of Martin Heidegger or Jean-Luc Marion.⁶¹ While Hegel conceives of sacrifice [*Opfer*] in terms of gifts [*Geschenke*], and the genuine gift as a redoubling of the gift which allows us to appreciate the antecedently given character of the gift as such, Hegel does not broach what Marion has called “the major *aporia* of the gift,” (i.e., that it annuls its own conditions of possibility). In addition to the telling, and perhaps in some way decisive avoidance of this problem, Hegel also seems to understand thanksgiving as, on its face, a source of reconciliation, and does not interrogate what Moshe Halbertal has called “the dangerous gap” which opens between giving and receiving where the necessary conditions of gift-giving—the suspension of typical norms of exchange within a hierarchical relationship—can produce anxiety and trauma when a gift is delayed or withheld.⁶² Hegel is primarily interested in the role religion will play in the propagating of *Aufklärung* in the wider culture, for the hearts and minds of the common people [*der Pöbel*] who do not have the time or inclination to devote themselves to intellectual labors. “Thanksgiving” [*Dankbarkeit*], for Hegel appears first as the form of sacrifice appropriate to modern religion, precisely in its ability to instantiate and represent a fundamental truth about the finitude of human agency, the reciprocity of action and passivity. The scene of thanksgiving marks the scene of reconciliation. There the human agent

⁶¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Nachwort zu ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’” (1943) in Martin Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, bd 9: Wegmarken 1919-1961*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm Von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M: Verlag Vittorio Klosterman, 2004). Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “Esquisse d’un concept phénoménologique du sacrifice” *Archivio Di Filosofia* 76, no. 1/2 (2008): 9—22.

⁶² Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 13.

comes to terms with her finitude and passivity before “the hand of the giver” [*die Hand der Geberin*] through a display of gratitude. This is a normative theory of sacrifice which sets, as its standard, the production and maintenance of integral unity of affect and reason through relating to, and constituting, the features of religious imagination through the pose of gratitude. It seeks to break with the ethos of the wandering *Pilger* and to become at home in the world in which it finds itself.

Sacrifices offered in the spirit of thankfulness are thus seen by the youthful Hegel as an opportunity for philosophy of religion to reappraise the status of religion in terms of a concept native to religiosity, though not obviously bound to dogma or superstition, nor to the asceticism and self-mortification which Hegel understands as their practical expression. A religious and ethico-political concept which takes its organizing principle from the act of thanksgiving depends upon a fundamental recognition of the historically situated sensual and agentic finitude of human beings and communities, in the young Hegel’s view, where one grasps this finitude as participation in, and responsiveness to, a greater reality upon which it ultimately depends. It is a concept of sacrifice capable of according with Enlightenment rationality. Reason and a religion of thanksgiving can, *mutatis mutandis*, enrich and ennoble one another on this view. In as much as this conception of religion posits an exigency that cannot be cognized, a negativity or distinction of the human being and the world that cannot be conceptually grasped, we can see how far afield it is from Hegel’s later claims that religion anticipates and prefigures its own sublation in philosophical discourse.

If Hegel the student differs from Hegel the philosopher in this regard, even stronger contrasts can be drawn with another roughly contemporaneous and altogether more prominent theory of sacrifice in this period. Joseph de Maistre’s vision of sacrifice, for instance, could

scarcely be more different than the young Hegel's. Maistre, some years later but with no less careful attention to the contradictions lurking within the incipient liberal order, offers a conceptual and historical examination of sacrifice in his *St. Petersburg Dialogues*. The differences and similarities between Maistre and the young Hegel are not insignificant. Like Hegel, Maistre conceptualizes sacrifice as a response to human finitude, particularly its constitutive "duality." This problem is legible in all traditions and in all times, in Maistre's view: it appears in the classical Greek and Latin authors as the division between higher and lower types of "soul" [ψυχή, *anima*],⁶³ an imbalance of which could cause disease or vice and had to be corrected. Biblically it appears as the distinction—featured so prominently in the Pauline epistles—of the distinction between "flesh" and "spirit."⁶⁴ Later, in the writings of Augustine, it features as a sort of temporal self-alienation constitutive of subjectivity itself, a "*différance entre moi-même et moi-même*."⁶⁵ The theme even survives in anatomy and metaphysics.⁶⁶ According to Maistre, guilt accrues only to the lower, animal aspect of human beings. This "lower" aspect is identified with *blood*. Hence, as blood is identified with the vital forces that moves the flesh to rebel against divine order, it is from blood, or through blood, that recompense must be made: "*que le siel irrité contra la chair et le sang, ne pouvaît apaisé qu par le sang*."⁶⁷ Within this matrix, the doctrine of reversability appears—completely obscure to reason, and inimical to our

⁶³ Joseph de Maistre, "Elucidation on Sacrifices" in *St. Petersburg Dialogues: Or Conversations on the Temporal Government of Providence*, 2nd ed. (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 354; "Éclaircissement sur les sacrifices" in *Les soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg; ou, Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence, suivies d'un traité sur les sacrifices* (Lyon J.B. Pélagaud, 1854), 324-327.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 355; 329.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 356; 332.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 353; 330-331.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 357; 339.

natural sympathies.⁶⁸ In sacrifice, guilt is expiated through the suffering of an innocent victim, substituted for the one who has sinned. Historically, Maistre claims, pagan animal sacrifices are a dim anticipation of this notion, and the abhorrent practice of human sacrifice arises where the sacrificers infer the need to render a proportionate offering to achieve satisfaction: the greater the stakes, the greater the cost. The true meaning of these repeated, insufficient sacrifices is finally revealed in Christianity and in the one and only truly satisfying sacrifice, that of God, the only true innocent, taking on the sins of the flesh in order to effectively expiate them. The celebration of the Eucharist participates in this restoration of all creation, and willing martyrdom and suffering in response to this divine self-sacrifice constitute a reproduction of this sacrifice, which they resemble, Maistre claims, like two congruent figures of different sizes.

But, in Maistre's view, the age of revolutions had sundered the spiritual unity of Christendom and redirected its sacrificial energies. Instead of finding their proper expression in asceticism, pilgrimage, devotion, and martyrdom, the demand for sacrifice had been transformed into a rage against the social and political order. War re-inaugurates the problem of duality, Maistre claims, dragging Europe into a sort of pre-Christian sacrificial frenzy. The French Revolution was, so to speak, the object lesson of Maistre's theory of sacrifice. In his famous proclamation that King Louis must die "that the nation might live," Robespierre interpreted Louis as a human sacrifice whose blood was needed to pay for the life of the nation.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Maistre, 358-359; 345-347.

⁶⁹ We find in this idea a clear anticipation of Renee Girard's theory of sacrifice as a substitution which puts the brakes on an escalating crisis of human violence, and the eruption of violence in history as a reflection of the failure of a process of scape-goating. Girard's theory should, I think, be identified as an elaboration of Maistre's interpretation of sacrifice as a response to the problem of duality, where the latter is interpreted as the structure of mimetic desire. Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, (Baltimore: W.W.Norton & Company, 1979) ; Cf. Ivan Strenski, "At Home with René Girard: Eucharistic Sacrifice, the 'French School' and

Hegel, as we have seen, anticipates this interpretation of sacrifice as a response to the problem of duality. And as I will show throughout this dissertation, this lays the groundwork for a speculative interpretation of kenotic sacrifice in Christianity as the transcendence (and preservation) of the negativity of understanding [*Verstand*]. The status of sacrifice brings to light, in these early Hegelian texts, the form of the finitizing judgments which transcendently underwrite the problem of duality. Hegel was, quite unlike Maistre, a partisan of the republican aspirations of the Revolution in its early phases, as well as Enlightenment generally. Further, while Maistre recognizes expressions of gratitude as one of the roots of religious institutions, he rejects both Hegel's desire to "republicanize" religion, as well as the possibility of replacing propitiatory sacrifices for those of thanksgiving. If Hegel anticipates the problem posed by Maistre, he clearly proposes a rather different solution. According to Hegel, sacrifice must be reimagined in such a way as to transform the religious imagination, to show the integral unity of humanity and God, rather than reproduce it through attempts at propitiation. Propitiation is at the heart of religion for Maistre, and forms the basis for recognition of divine and temporal sovereignty, forming as it does the scaffolding of European absolutist states. Hegel, at this stage, interprets propitiation as perversion of the essence of sacrifice as thanksgiving.

The very fact that Hegel introduces this internal distinction to the concept of sacrifice implies a cursory grasp of the philosophical problem that is implicit in his analyses, though he has not yet articulated a conceptual framework by which to effectively address the issue. The question of sacrifice as he articulates it, and the problematic opposition of universality and particularity, ideality and reality, thought and being, press directly on the possibility of religious

Joseph De Maistre," in *Religion in Relation: Method, Application and Moral Location*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993) 202—216.

reform. Moral religion, as conceived by Hegel, must balance the demands of sense and rationality. But sacrifice seems to thwart the attempt to effectively configure these elements so as to unite the universal and the particular in the right way, i.e., to effectively minimize the risk of religious particularism and priestcraft, and to maximize religion's capacity to convey universally rational morality within the particular sensuous media. This is because the question of where to locate sacrifice is indicative of the *problem* of reconciling universal and particular in a moral religion. Recognizing this, several questions must be posed. Sacrifice—whether a gesture of propitiation or thanksgiving—is always the negation of something particular. The giving, relinquishment, or destruction of property, inclination, or enjoyment remains as a trace in the memory, binding the sacrifice to the very division the gesture aims to overcome. The negation of the particular for the sake of the universal serves as an index, or dramatization, of the insistent difference between them. How then can a balance between universality and particularity ever be struck in religion without introducing an act of exclusionary negation that sunders the very unity the act of sacrifice sought to achieve? The negation of the particular for the sake of the universal, it would seem, reveals the universal to be constituted through an act of negation or exclusion. To what extent is the universal, as approached through acts of sacrifice, genuinely universal if it only exists in virtue of the negation or exclusion of the particular? The inverse of this question would apply to the particular. If the particular can only be articulated through the exclusion or negation of the universal, then to what extent can the particular be said to instantiate universality? The implications of this logico-metaphysical issue are pressing for Hegel's view in that they call into question the very form a moral religion is capable of taking. If the universal can only be concretized via sacrificial acts which negate the particular, and the particular can only convey the universal through a negation of its universality, is the moral reform of particular,

historical religions even possible in the sense which Hegel has articulated above? At the same time, if an “economic” relationship between universal and particular does suggest some “common currency” shared between them, then ought there be a medium or ground of commensurability, absent which no such series of exchanges would be thinkable? In other words, Hegel’s depiction of the imagined economy of sacrifice anticipates what he will later call the “tremendous power of the negative” [*die ungeheure Macht des Negativen*] and “the power of Spirit” [*die Kraft des Geistes*] which finds its highest expression in the economy of the Absolute as concept, i.e., as the all-encompassing synthetic function of reason, the identity of which is constituted in and through its negation.

Thus, as noted in drawing the contrast between Hegel and Maistre, a broad conceptual problem is being sketched with respect to the status of sacrifice in these early works. What is insinuated in the instability of sacrifice in the *Volksreligion* Fragment is not only a question as to the possible form moral/rational religion may take, but also an adumbration of the territory that Hegel’s philosophical researches occupy for more than a decade, and through various iterations in a variety of theoretical contexts: the reconciliation of what has been put asunder by the “abstract” negations of the understanding. It is with respect to the opposition between universal and particular, and the possibility of thinking through their relationship as a sacrificial “economy,” that the paradigmatically Hegelian gesture of speculative unity in a higher and more comprehensive concept is adumbrated some years prior to his fateful and philosophically fruitful reunions with Hölderlin and Schelling.

This is not to say that Hegel has yet seen a way out of these oppositions so much as he has provided us with an exegetical clue. As I noted above, the young Hegel has raised a question here which seems ripe for a dialectical solution, but for which none is offered. The question of

sacrifice stands here in place of a truly dialectical formulation that will not be articulable by Hegel until his more intimate acquaintance with Fichte's system through his friendship with Hölderlin and his pursuit of "Identity Philosophy" with Schelling.

But in the period immediately following the composition of the *Volksreligion* fragment, Hegel's texts take on a more decidedly Kantian tone. The unstable position of sacrifice serves as a guiding theme in Hegel's close study of Kant's moral philosophy while living in Bern, and to his literary experiments applying Kantian principles to the interpretation and reconstruction of the Gospels. Kant, it would seem, has an answer to the question of where sacrifice fits within a religion of modern freedom and takes advantage of the "negative" relation characteristic of the opposition between universal and particular described above. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant specifically identifies sacrifice with the alignment of subjective maxims to the objective will, specifically through a process that for any finite agent will always take on the characteristics of the "sacrifice" [*Aufopferung*] of one's empirical, sensual, or "pathological" particularity. Later, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant suggests that the idea of a self-sacrificial individual is an indispensable "schematism of analogy" that, by rendering sensibly a seemingly perfect subordination of the particular to the universal, gives agents hope for the conversion of their own wills, despite their "radical evil." In the end, the concept of sacrifice which emerges from Kant's moral philosophy and philosophy of religion, I'll argue, is the suppression of particularity for the sake of the universal. Hegel tries his hand at reconstructing the Gospel and the early history of Christianity along these lines. But, as I'll show, Hegel quickly grasps that "sacrifice" conceived in terms of Kantian practical reason (and the relation to sensuality and historical particularity which it

institutes) leads to a fateful return of a repressed “positivity”; it does not live up the integral standard set by sacrifice as *Dankbarkeit*.

Chapter Two

During his time in Bern, Hegel extends his investigation into the canons of *Volksreligion* through a careful reading of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. The necessity of a thorough and critical evaluation of the mode and aim of religious reform would have been all the more pressing given the rather violent and iconoclastic turn of events in France with the onset of the Terror. In addressing these imbricated intellectual and historical challenges by way of Kant's practical philosophy, Hegel grasps a new way of imagining sacrifice which dovetails with the problem of its essential but unstable position within *Volksreligion*. According to Kant, the moral essence of sacrifice is the negation or suppression of particularity for the sake of the universal. Intellectual causality, the causality of autonomous freedom, first appears as painful self-negation in Kant's view. As a rebuke to our self-love, the moral law is experienced as a frustration of our hypothetical imperatives and sensible desires as pain [*Schmerz*]. This is internalized as a kind of humiliation [*Demütigung*] whereby the subjective maxim is slowly aligned with the objective moral law. Finally, much like the Hegelian dialectic which eventually follows it, this process produces a positive result in the form of moral incentive [*Triebfeder*] which Kant describes as "reverence" [*Achtung*]. This process, Kant claims, always requires some kind of "sacrifice" [*Aufopferung*], the negation of the particular for the sake of the universal, the real for the sake of the ideal.¹

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. V (Berlin: Georg Reimer Verlag, 1913) ; Kant, Immanuel, *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor, 2 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 60-73.

These sacrifices come to play a decisive and necessary role within the religious imagination as a "schematism of analogy with which we cannot dispense."² Where inference and introspection fail to provide sufficient basis for faith in the possibility of moral conversion, sacrifice—properly imagined—succeeds. Fixing the religious imagination on a sacrificial exemplar who negates the entirety of his or her empirical particularity for the sake of the universal moral law provides a qualified religious hope for the possibility of moral conversion from particularity to universality—precisely the sort of reflexive self-representation that religion must have if it is to cultivate moral freedom and political reform. Hegel's use of the Kantian idea of sacrifice in texts such as "The Life of Jesus" and "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" thus attempts to profit from the conceptual instability of sacrifice which had initially troubled him during the composition of the *Volksreligion* fragment. The implicit development from Hegel's account of sacrifice in the *Volksreligion* fragment to that of his Bern-period writings is this: the conceptual instability which Hegel identified in 1793 is no longer construed as a matter of conceptual confusion about whether sacrifice ultimately binds religion to particularism and positivity or to universality and freedom. Rather, this instability expresses the inherent dynamic and task of moral religion as such: it presents, in a sensual or imaginative form, the struggle against particularity, contingency, and historicity that moral religion must pursue—an image of rationality becoming concrete. Successfully articulating the conditions of a rational, modern *Volksreligion* will require that sacrifice be taken up by the imagination in the right way, i.e., in a way which does not fetishize the particulars of sacrifice, but which grasps its universal essence

² Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VI (Berlin: Georg Reimer Verlag, 1914), 64-65n. *Religion and Rational Theology*, 107n.

as the negation of particularity, hence the actualization or “emergence” [*Ausgang*] into autonomy.

In Bern, Hegel employs Kant’s conception of sacrifice as the principle whereby the Gospel narrative might be reconstructed, as well as a means to measure the historical failure of Christianity to live up to its promise. However, in accounting for the historical failure of Christianity to sustain such a *Volksreligion*, Hegel realizes that Kant’s conception of moral reason reproduces the same heteronomy characteristic of Christianity’s self-subversion and positivity, which Hegel initially understands as represented in the propitiatory sacrifices of “*Sühnopfer*”. The practical postulates, which according to Kant derived from the formal requirements of practical reason itself, rule out the possibility of “integral” sacrifice emblemized in the model of *Dankbarkeit*. This is because they reinstate an economic relationship that corresponds to what Hegel identified as an irrational, economic *Sühnopfer* in the *Volksreligion* Fragment. In setting reason and sensibility into a fixed, transcendental opposition, Kant’s practical postulates seem to obey the logic of *Fetischglaube* rather than overcome it. Where sacrifice is understood thusly, the commission of duty becomes a means to achieve some “return” on deferred satisfaction in the form of *Glückseligkeit*. Hegel’s transition away from a sort of standard Kantian moralism toward a more holistic account of agency and religion is thus occasioned in part by the perceived failure of Kant’s account of sacrifice to meet the requirements of a rational *Volksreligion*. Hegel is trying to imagine sacrifice in a different way, namely, in a manner which reconciles universality and particularity without merely subordinating the former to the latter, thus mitigating the tendency to slide back toward positivity. In later fragments from his time in Bern, Hegel argues that an act of sacrifice can affect a sustainable reconciliation between universality and particularity only where it is offered

without a transcendent guarantor or guarantee. In his first attempt to imagine such sacrifices in contrast to Kantian subordination of particularity to universality, Hegel adduces the figures of national heroism. These are individuals who fight for the honor and interests of their *Vaterland* out of genuine willingness and not a sense that in the end, their sacrifices and even deaths will be the occasions for some personal reward. The perceived inability of the Kantian moral sacrifice to sustain a rational *Volksreligion* is thus the first intimation of Hegel's emerging concept of love [*Liebe*] as the integral unity of universal duty and particular inclination. Hegel's transition away from an espousal of Kantian sacrifice as submission to duty and toward sacrifice as an expression of the integral *pleroma* of duty through *love* thus frames the mythopoetic task of the Frankfurt period: the fashioning of a new mythology for a modern *Volksreligion* must represent sacrifice as love, rather than submission to duty.

Revolution, Reason, and Religion

During the summer of 1793, in which he composed the Essay on *Volksreligion*, Hegel was offered a job as a *Hofmeister*, a sort of live-in tutor to the wealthy von Stieger family in Bern. Despite the fact that Hegel did not relish the idea of pursuing such a vocation in the long term, this was not an uncommon career trajectory for a man of his education (especially one with no interest in joining the clergy). Further, it afforded Hegel the opportunity to escape the *Stift*, which he was keen to do. In September of 1793, Hegel completed his examinations and began to make preparations for his move to Switzerland. It was during this period that Hegel began his first attempts to integrate Kantian insights into his own project of articulating the necessary elements of a modern *Volksreligion* in the two major essays of the period: "The Life of Jesus" (1795) and "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" (1796/1797). As noted above, the former attempts to reconstruct the Gospel narrative by way of the Kantian conception of moral duty and

the mode by which this idea enters into the religious imagination, i.e., sacrifice. The latter essay explores the reason for Christianity's reversion to positivity, alienation from God, and the "economic" conception of sacrifice which such a reversion reproduces.

The continued concern with *Volksreligion* which animates his readings of Kant during this period is almost certainly impelled in part by roughly contemporaneous political events unfolding in France. As noted in Chapter One, Hegel was an enthusiastic supporter of the cause of the French Revolution in its inception. But his enthusiasm did not extend to the spiraling violence and brutality of the Terror. Through the increasingly dictatorial authority of *la Comité de salut public*, Robespierre and the Montagnards were carrying the ideals of the Enlightenment in a rather more iconoclastic and certainly more violent direction³ than had been advocated in constitutional-reformist views of the Girondists (with whom Hegel sympathized).⁴ Mass executions of the "enemies" of the Revolution (including the Girondists themselves) were sanctioned by law with the passage of *Le loi de suspects*⁵ and became so common that Hegel would later famously describe them as being, in the collective consciousness of the Reign of Terror, no more consequential than cutting off a head of cabbage or taking a gulp of water.⁶ This is to say, the mass executions showed a sort of perverse inversion of the aims of the Revolution. A movement intended to guarantee the security and happiness of all French peoples according to

³ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution: Third Edition*, 3 edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴ H.S. Harris, "Hegel and the French Revolution," *Clio* (1977), 7:5.

⁵ Doyle, *French Revolution*, 251.

⁶ Hegel, *Werke* 3, 426; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360.

the values of personal liberty and rule of law had led instead to the mass liquidation of individuals thought to stand in the way of the concretization of a republic founded on universal reason. As Hegel would later note in the *Phenomenology*, given the demand of “absolute freedom” and unmediated universality, the only work such a revolution could ultimately pursue was the death of the particular—and it did so on a shocking scale. Christmas Eve of 1794, Hegel expresses relief that Robespierre and his faction have been removed from power, and disgust at the brutal details of the charges levied against Jean-Baptiste Carrier prior to his execution.

The iconoclasm and outright brutality and violence toward Catholic institutions and clergy would have been of keen interest to Hegel, occupied as he had been with the relationship between the religious imagination, religious institutions, and the possibility of political and moral reform of Europe. At the height of the Terror, various agencies, both official and unofficial, sought to replace Christianity entirely with new religious forms more properly suited to the ideal of freedom espoused by the new regime—not to reform the content of extant popular religion as Hegel had initially suggested, but to replace it entirely. The rise of the atheistic *Culte de la Raison* among the *sans-culottes* and Hébertists eventually led Robespierre, fearing the potential for moral degradation of outright atheism,⁷ to execute the intellectual leaders of these radical factions⁸ and to establish *la Culte de l'Être Supreme*, a deist rejoinder with much the same rationalistic emphasis.⁹ These events must have seemed nothing less than a confirmation to Hegel that his initial thesis had been correct: a purely rational religion is impracticable in

⁷ Doyle, *French Revolution*, 262.

⁸ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 703.

⁹ Richard Ballard, “The Supreme Being” in *The New Dictionary of the French Revolution*, (London: I.B. Taurus & Co, Ltd. 2011), 500.

principle—the Revolution had spiraled out of control in its impatient quest for unmediated universality in government and religion. Without some shared ethical substance, the impulse toward rational universality had become nothing but a blind rage against particularity. Though they receive no explicit mention in his Bern writings, such events could not have failed to impel Hegel to further reflection on the status of Christianity, specifically with respect to its relation to authoritarianism and the possibility of its resuscitation, especially since Hegel still saw himself in the vein of a *Volkserzieher* and was singularly concerned with the intellectual preparation for a more moderate political revolution in German lands.

As if adapting the question of *Volkserziehung* to respond to the spiraling violence and recent hostility toward Christianity in France, Hegel is occupied in Bern with a new inflection of his initial questions: would it even be possible to retrieve Christianity as a rational *Volksreligion* which can resist the tendencies toward fetishization historically evinced in priestly religion and theoretically accounted for by the psychological demand for sensuous representations to convey non-sensuous content?¹⁰ Though events in France had not completely dampened Hegel's enthusiasm for the Enlightenment generally, they likely oriented him to a more critical examination of his task of working toward the articulation of a rational *Volksreligion*, if for no other reason than the fact that it was clear such measures could quickly spiral out of control. Again, we can draw both a parallel and a contrast with Joseph de Maistre's interpretation of events and their relation to the enigma of sacrifice. Though Hegel never accepts Maistre's reactionary position, we can detect in his emerging critique of revolutionary violence a certain

¹⁰ Nohl *Hegel theologisches Jugendschriften*, 48-50; Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 75.

parallel which finds its inflection point in the trauma of the Terror.¹¹ Like Maistre, Hegel comes to interpret the violence of the Terror as an expression of Enlightenment rationality. Unlike Maistre, Hegel saw this not as reason to reject Enlightenment rationality so much as to transform and reimagine it. Whatever else had occurred amidst the violence of the revolution, it would seem that a failure to properly calibrate the relationship between particularity and universality had occurred. The revolutionary fervor for universal reason had become a sort of frenzied attempt to negate all particularity—not unlike Maistre’s interpretation of the Revolution as tragic release of sacrificial energies through hubris and apostasy. Still, Hegel held fast to the hope that such popularization of Enlightenment universalism through concrete historical religions was possible. It wasn’t the aim that was wrong, so much as the conception of reason itself. And, as he wrote to Schelling in 1795, it was through the application of Kant’s account of reason that Hegel believed such efforts at popularization and reform could and eventually would be carried out.¹²

Between August of 1786 and September of 1787, prior to Hegel’s enrollment at the *Stift*, Reinhold’s *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* were published in *Der Deutscher Merkur*. Reinhold’s *Letters* were understood by their author as a work of philosophical reverse-engineering, so to speak. Beginning with the concrete moral and religious consequences of Kant’s critical thought (i.e., the defense of free will and the possibility of a moral argument for God’s existence), Reinhold single-handedly made the notoriously complex transcendental philosophy accessible to a larger audience and rendered it atopic of wide cultural relevance and

¹¹ Cf. Maistre, Consideration on France; For an extended discussion of the reception of De Maistre in German Romantic philosophy more generally, Cf. Adrian Daub “‘All Evil is the Cancellation of Unity’: Joseph de Maistre and Late German Romanticism” in *De Maistre and his European Readers*. Brill. Ed. Richard Lebrun (2011).

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Letter to Schelling, (April 16, 1795) in *Hegel: The Letters*, 35.

discussion.¹³ At the *Stift*, there were even contentious debates between the orthodox, conservative faculty members and the more *Aufklärung*-oriented students as to the ultimate relevance of Kantian thought for traditional, “revealed” religion.¹⁴ There is no credible doubt then that Hegel would have been aware of Kantian critique, at the very least in its broad outlines, during his time at the *Stift*. Nor is there credible doubt that Hegel was not concerned to some extent as to how critical philosophy related to religion. As to this last point, I noted in Chapter One, Kant’s concern with the constitutive tendency of particular religions to betray their putatively *a priori*, practical meaning. This same concern is clearly reflected in Hegel’s analysis of *Fetishglaube* and the need to reform religion by configuring the relationship between the ideal and real, universal and particular, rational and empirical, so as to minimize the risk of religion becoming overly attached to its own historical and sensuous particularities. In the 1793 Fragments, Hegel distinguishes between two forms of sacrifice. One form of sacrifice succeeds in uniting sensuality and rationality (*Dankbarkeit*) while the other (*Sühnopfer*) does not. If certain Kantian themes resonate in Hegel’s 1793 fragments however, it is not until his time in Bern that we find clear evidence that he undertakes a careful reading of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.¹⁵

¹³ In a letter (December 28 and 31, 1787) Kant thanks Reinhold profusely for his support in the *Merkur*, and praises the perspicacity of his interpretation: “I have read the lovely *Letters*, excellent and kind sir, with which you have honored my philosophy. Their combination of thoroughness and charm are matchless and they have not failed to make a great impression in this region. I was therefore all the more eager somehow to express my thanks in writing, most likely in the *Deutscher Merkur*, and at least to indicate briefly that your ideas agree precisely with mine and that I am grateful for your success in simplifying them.”

¹⁴ Pinkard, *Hegel* 33-38.

¹⁵ T. M. Knox, “Hegel’s Attitude to Kant’s Ethics,” *Kant-Studien* 49, no. 1—4 (2009): 70—81.

Through his reading of Kant, Hegel comes to interpret sacrifice in terms of the negativity of practical reason vis-à-vis sensual particularity. At the level of institutions, Hegel now interprets sacrifice as emblematic of the continual struggle of the universal essence of religion *against* its own historical contingency, sensuality, and particularity. But this process, as religion, still must take a particular, sensible form. At the level of the subject, sacrifice is the process whereby particularity is negated for the sake of the universal, whereby a subjective maxim is aligned with an objective moral law. Remarks from Schelling early in 1795 must have driven the point home. If the *Reiches Gottes* is to be achieved, it must be grounded in the unconditioned [*Unbedingt*]: that which is known through itself, and which exists in virtue of itself. But theoretical reason is not up to the task of saying anything more about this unconditioned, save indicating its necessity within the system of our concepts. We can only bring ourselves into relation to it, as Fichte enjoined, through perpetual striving [*Streben*]. And this practical reconciliation to the unconditioned exists precisely as the negation of what constitutes the particularity of consciousness within the context of particular things [*Dingen*] and within particular states of affairs. As Schelling puts the matter rather more provocatively, “our highest endeavor is aimed at the destruction [*Zerstörung*] of our personality.”¹⁶

Sacrifice also plays a special role within the religious imagination, Kant argues, as a “schematism of analogy with which we cannot dispense.”¹⁷ As noted, it is essential that the entire process of religion’s struggle to properly integrate universal and particular be presented in a historically particular form, that it be made available in the moral imagination by means of an

¹⁶ Schelling to Hegel; February 4, 1795.

¹⁷ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:64-65; Kant, *Religion* 107.

analogy to possible objects of experience. Fixing the faculty of imagination on a sacrificial exemplar who negates the entirety of his or her empirical particularity for the sake of the universal moral law produces a form of rationally qualified religious hope for the possibility of moral conversion from particularity to universality. In other words, a crucial reinterpretation of the rational and sensual valence of sacrifice becomes possible at this juncture. The instability of sacrifice within the constituent elements of a *Volksreligion* is thus reinterpreted by Hegel as indicative of a dynamic essential to the essential task of moral religion as such: the struggle of rational universality against historical, empirical, and sensual particularity emblemized *within* an historico-empirical, sensual form. This analogy is, in other words, an example of sacrifice which can arouse moral feeling within the subject. Hegel employs these principles in reconstructing the Gospel narrative to meet the challenge of articulating a modern *Volksreligion*, in distinct contrast to the *sui generis* religious efforts of some French revolutionaries.

In accounting for the historical failure of Christianity to achieve this aim, however, Hegel realizes that Kant's conception of moral reason reproduces the same heteronomy characteristic of Christianity's self-subversion and positivity. The postulates, a necessary step for Kant in developing practical reason in accord with its own formal requirements, rule out the possibility of a genuine sacrifice for Hegel because they reinstate an economic relationship that corresponds to what Hegel identified as an irrational, economic *Sühnopfer* in the *Volksreligion* Fragment, failing the integral standard set by *Dankbarkeit*. Where sacrifice is understood thusly, the commission of duty becomes, *pace* Kant, a means to achieve some "return" on deferred satisfaction in the form of *Glückseligkeit*. Hegel's transition away from a sort of standard Kantian moralism toward a more holistic account of agency and religion is, I will argue, occasioned by the perceived failure of Kant's account of sacrifice to meet the requirements of a rational

Volksreligion in unifying universality and particularity. Hegel is trying to imagine sacrifice in a different way, namely, a way that reconciles universality and particularity without merely subordinating the former to the latter, thus obviating the tendency to slide back toward positivity and authoritarianism. In fragments from his time in Bern, Hegel argues that an act of sacrifice can affect a sustainable reconciliation between universality and particularity only where it is offered without a transcendent guarantor or guarantee. In his first attempt to imagine such sacrifices in contrast to Kantian subordination of particularity to universality, Hegel adduces the figures of national heroism. These are individuals who fight for the honor and interests of their *Vaterland* or *polis* out of genuine willingness rather than a sense that in the end, their sacrifices and even deaths will be the occasions for some reward.¹⁸

The perceived inability of the Kantian conception of moral sacrifice to sustain a rational *Volksreligion* by way of the representation of an *integral* sacrifice is thus the first intimation of Hegel's emerging concept of *Liebe* as the integral unity of universal duty and particular inclination. Hegel's transition away from an espousal of Kantian sacrifice as submission to duty toward sacrifice as an expression of love is thus also the source of the mythopoetic task of the

¹⁸ The correlation between the nascent critique of Kantian sacrifice and a roughly "civic" model which in figures how negate their immediate, familial substance for the good of the *polis* seems to lend credence to Peter Wake's view that Hegel's rereading of Kant and Christianity in the mythopoetic phase of the Frankfurt period draws significantly on Hegel's attempt to understand the social function of Greek tragedy. Cf. Peter Wake, *Tragedy in Hegel's Early Theological Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014). We can in these passages which propose a model of sacrificial desire opposed to the Kantian project, perhaps for the first time, an anticipation of the conflict between familial substance and its political mediation which is emblemized by the figure of Antigone in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. This conflict of duties, in the ancient world, can only end in death. Cf. Patricia J. Mills, "Hegel's 'Antigone,'" *Owl of Minerva* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 131—52. As Françoise Meltzer indicates however, we should be wary of interpreting Antigone's desire as a desire *for* death, rather than the tragic result of her desire's constitutive "unmappability," in virtue of her dis-locatedness in both the familial and civic orders. I am in substantial agreement with Meltzer's assessment, though the question of tragedy generally and Antigone specifically are deserving of much lengthier attention than I can devote to them in the present study. Cf. Françoise Meltzer, "Theories of Desire: Antigone Again," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 2 (2011): 169—86.

Frankfurt period: the fashioning of a new mythology for a modern *Volksreligion* must represent sacrifice as love, rather than submission to duty.

Imagining Sacrifice

A sketch of the role of sacrifice in Kant's moral philosophy and philosophy of religion is necessary to make sense of the conceptual resources that Kant's thought afforded Hegel during his brief employ in Switzerland. During this period, Hegel devoted a great deal of his time to the study of Kant's second *Critique* and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. What I will argue in the course of the following passages is that the task of imagining sacrifice is essential to Kant's understanding of moral conversion: first, the process of aligning one's subjective maxims to the objective moral law is understood, analogically, as a kind of "sacrifice" [*Aufopferung*], according to Kant. Second, as Kant argues in the *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, this process of self-sacrifice must be appropriated in a certain way by the imagination, namely, in the form of a self-sacrificial exemplar who negates the entirety of his or her empirical existence for the sake of the moral law. Imagining the self-sacrifice as a willingness to die is the only way in which our intelligible agency can be rendered compatible with our empirical sensuality. In other words, Kant's account of sacrifice in the *Religion* affirms what my reading of Hegel's *Volksreligion* fragment previously implied: that in moral religion, the idea of sacrifice is emblematic of the struggle to negate the particular for the sake of the universal, or as Schelling's remarks suggest, the destruction of the finite personality as a striving for the unconditioned. The task of imagining sacrifice would thus seem not some vestigial element of superstition or authoritarian religion, but rather as intimately related to the comprehensibility of *Aufklärung* as such: for it would seem that the latter is nothing if not a form of conversion. Ultimately, I will show how Hegel attempted to apply this conception of moral sacrifice as a means to conceive the

relationship between universality and particularity as negation, and this as the basis for a reconstruction of the Gospels and of the failure of Christianity to sustain itself as a *Volksreligion*. In the process, as I've noted above, Hegel comes to see that Kant's conception of the negativity of sacrifice is ultimately implicated in the same failure evinced in Christianity. This leads to the attempt to reconfigure the relationship of universality and particularity in sacrifice as one of a *pleroma* of love, rather the suppression or negativity.

Kant affords us a schematic view of his conception of Enlightenment and its central problems in his famous essay "Answering the Question, What is Enlightenment?" Appearing in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784, it comprises one of Kant's most direct statements on the matter as a response to a question posed by JF Zöllner a year earlier in the same publication. Zöllner was on the whole a friend of so-called Enlightenment. However, he was concerned that without a clear account of the meaning of Enlightenment, critical rationality threatened to run amok and erode basic social institutions (almost prophetic in his anticipation of recent political debate in the United States, Zöllner was specifically worried that attempts to define marriage in purely civil terms would undermine the sanctity of the institution).¹⁹ Kant provided an answer to this challenge: "Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] is the emergence of man from his self-incurred [*verschuldeten*] immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*]."²⁰ This famous dictum contains both theological

¹⁹ *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 2 (1783), 516. Cf. Henry E. Allison, "Kant's Conception of *Aufklärung*" in *Essays on Kant*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by H.S. Reiss. Translated by H.B. Nisbet. 2nd Edition. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54; "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" in *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (December 1784), pp. 481-94.

²⁰ Kant, Immanuel. "What Does it Mean to Orient One's Self in Thinking?" in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Translated by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Revised edition. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18n [8:146n].

and legal resonances that help to contextualize the major architectonic opposition of the Kantian system, and suggests certain paradoxes generated in attempting to conceive of the reconciliation of that opposition in terms of “conversion,” which Kant treats explicitly in 1793’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason*. “Aufklärung,” of course, evokes metaphors of light: elucidation, clear-sightedness, a progression from confused to rationally clarified ideas about ourselves and the world, characterized here by Kant as a transition into maturity [*Mündigkeit*]. This means, simply stated, thinking for one’s self—not relying on heteronomous authorities for the ground of one’s theoretical or moral commitments, but to make use of one’s own reason. This has, in Kant’s view, the opposite effect of solipsistic retreat from publically adjudicable claims. To make use of one’s own reason is not to abjure the recognition of other rational agents for one’s claims. To make use of one’s own reason means to have recourse to putatively *good* reasons. In other words, the use of one’s faculty of reason is evidently a matter of universalizability of one’s claims or inferences: “To make use of one’s own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason.”²¹ Thus, both our moral and epistemic commitments are open to rational critique, and a proper critique of these commitments means an examination of the faculty whereby we render them, Kant believes. This means assessing, *a priori*, the suitability of the human faculty for knowledge and action, hence articulating the proper scope and function of each form of judgment (which corresponds precisely to the scope and task of the critical project

²¹ Kant, Immanuel. “What Does it Mean to Orient One’s Self in Thinking?” in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Translated by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Revised edition. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18n (8:146n).

itself). But such critical clarification occupies a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the act or acts that constitute “maturity” [*Mündigkeit*].

The theological and legal valences of “*Mündigkeit*” would have been known to Kant. Theologically the term should be traced to the Luther Bible in which Paul’s *Galaterbrief* describes conversion to divine sonship in precisely the same terms: “*Ich meiner aber: Solange der Erbe unmündig ist, unterscheidet er sich in nichts von einem Sklaven, obgleich er Herr über alles ist... So verhält es sich auch mit uns: Als wir unnmündig waren, waren wir unter die Elemente der Welt versklavt.*”²² The passage continues to describe the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ as the event, properly appropriated, whereby those who were previously subjected to the heteronymous authority of the law [*Gesetz*] might now be “adopted” as an heir to God’s kingdom. The term’s valence as a legal category is clearly anticipated in its theological context: before the advent of Christ, human beings were subjected to a law which imposed an unconditional demand, and which sprung forth as if from a heteronomous, transcendent source. Exploiting this resonance was in no way alien to contemporaneous German homiletics—including those which Kant followed with keen interest, e.g., the sermons of Johannes Joachim Spalding.²³

In jurisprudential terms, *Mündigkeit* denotes the status of legal responsibility, as in the case of an individual who can give account for their actions before a court. An additional

²² Füssel, *The Luther Bible of 1534, Galaterbrief* 4:1-3.

²³ Ursula Goldenbaum, “Understanding the Argument through Then-current Public Debates or My Detective Method of History of Philosophy” in *Philosophy and its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Mogens Laerke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

connotation of vocality arose through the phonemic resonance of its cognate *Mund* or “mouth.”²⁴

This testimonial model of responsibility seems to mirror Kant’s ostensible, overarching point in the *Aufklärung* essay: one’s “emergence” [*Ausgang*] is a matter of accounting for the grounds of one’s moral and epistemic commitments—a taking responsibility for one’s self and those commitments to which one would attest in speech and action. In both cases this implies the usage of one’s own universal, rational faculty to judge whether moral or epistemic claims are justified, as opposed to submitting to a heteronomous law which seems to spring from an alien source, and couches this in terms of realizing one’s autonomy. Here, the ambiguity which I noted above arises. Is our “maturity” an effect of our having undertaken a critical appraisal of the form and scope of theoretical and moral judgments, or is it the condition of possibility of such an appraisal? How is the conversion to “maturity” thinkable unless on the basis of some antecedent maturity which grounds it or motivates it? Or, in fact, is such mature responsibility identical with critique as such? In other words, how can we comprehend the temporal development of rational agency from within a situation of unreason? How is such a *metanoia* comprehensible? Is *Aufklärung*, so-conceived, possible? These concerns are, clearly, of a piece with Hegel’s project of the rational reform of religion, forming as they do its theoretical and philosophical backdrop.

The second *Critique* provides a clue to the questions posed above which the *Religion* develops further still. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant gives an account of the pure idea of duty as the criterion of moral action, opposed to any eudaemonist or consequentialist basis for ethics. In order for the ascription of moral predicates to be intelligible whatsoever, Kant holds, they must issue from a morally autonomous agent, i.e., one who gives the moral law to one’s

²⁴ O’Sullivan, Helen. *Language Learner Narrative: An Exploration of Mündigkeit in Intercultural Literature*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 118-119.

self. Said otherwise, actions can only be judged to be properly moral where they are endorsed on the basis of an agent's own capacity for universal moral reason. "Universality" of a certain sort is one of the hallmark tests of practical rationality for Kant. If an agent cannot will, without contradiction, that her subjective maxim become a universally binding moral law, then the action is a merely "hypothetical" or conditioned imperative to action. In those instances, one is not "autonomous" but governed by some phenomenal, temporal determination of action—a heteronomous constraint on one's rational capacity, and a source of an imperative that is imposed extra-rationally, compromising autonomy. In other words, moral acts must be justified by universal practical reason, the way that any rational agent ought to behave *as* a rational agent, and not in their relations to any contingent determinant of the act. Such determinants would include, for instance, the consequences of one's actions, the pleasure or pain accruing to an action, one's desire for happiness. All these empirical grounds of action are intuitionally and imaginatively enshrined within the various religious practices deemed "*Afterdienst*" by Kant and "*Fetischglaube*" by Hegel.

Religion still has a place within Kant's moral philosophy and within his system as a whole: instead of conceiving of religion as the source of morality, Kant re-interprets it as an expression of morality. The content of theistic religion is, according to Kant, a corollary arising from an analysis of the formal requirements of the pure idea of moral duty or law: while the ends of putatively moral actions do not and cannot serve as their properly moral justification, this does not render them matters of indifference to us.²⁵ We must will that dutiful action lead to the actualization of the Highest Good, or a correspondence of virtue and happiness, despite the fact

²⁵ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:5; Kant, *Religion*, 58.

that apparently this is not the case in the phenomenal world of nature and experience. The development of this formal requirement of the idea of duty leads to what is often termed Kant's "moral argument" for the existence of God. Given that morality must be oriented toward the Highest Good, Kant argues that it is necessary for us to postulate the existence of God and an afterlife as the conditions necessary for the realization of the Highest Good—not as a matter of theoretical judgment, but as a development of moral or practical reason. But the commission of dutiful actions cannot be motivated by the pursuit of divine favor and reward as the justification of moral action, lest we give up our autonomy and seek to follow a law foisted upon us rather than one which is self-legislated. Where the justification for an action is contingent upon some satisfaction, that action fails to live up to the standard of duty. Kant's account of duty clearly parallels Hegel's critique of *Sühnopfer* in 1793: where the commission of duty becomes a matter of calculation for some "return" on an investment, a deferral of one's particular satisfaction, or self-negation as a means of surreptitious self-assertion.

Still, with respect to the interplay of our phenomenal and intelligible agency, Kant aligns the idea of sacrifice with the commission of moral duty, such that seeming correspondence emerges between economic conceptions of sacrifice vis-à-vis "hypothetical" or conditional imperatives on the one hand, and authentic sacrifices or "categorical" or unconditional imperatives on the other. The process of enacting moral duty, as an expression of a categorical imperative, is explicitly conceptualized by Kant with reference to the idea of sacrifice. At the level of moral psychology, Kant claims that for finite agent such as human beings, there is no transition from conditional, particular maxims to alignment to the unconditional, universal moral law except through a process of self-sacrifice whereby one's particularity is suppressed or negated. Some exit from economic reasoning is necessary in order to enact the moral law as

such. In other words, there is no conversion to the universal, rational form of moral rectitude without sacrifice.

That is to say, if a rational creature could ever reach the stage of thoroughly *liking* to fulfill all moral laws, this would mean that there would not be in him even the possibility of a desire [*Begierde*] that would provoke him to deviate from them; for, to overcome such a desire always costs the subject some sacrifice [*die Überwindung einr solchen kostet dem Subject immer Aufopferung*], and therefore requires self-restraint, that is, inner necessitation to what one does not altogether like to do [*Aufopferung*] and hence requires self-constraint [*Selbstzwang*], i.e. inner necessitation, to do what one does not do gladly.²⁶

For Kant, the *moral* concept of sacrifice is thoroughly bound up with the conception of freedom as rational autonomy, and as a process of becoming capable of self-governance. It is an act whereby the agent negates some conditioned, empirical good for the sake of a higher, practically rational necessity. As such a negation, this moral conception of sacrifice can be deployed in imaginative or narrative forms in such a way as to provide an analogical basis of conceiving of the possibility of conversion to moral rectitude. The rules which govern the phenomenal causality at work in an act of sacrifice—negation or self-negation—are reflected onto the supersensuous content of moral judgments. That is to say, the use of sacrifice in the second *Critique* seems to instantiate, *avant la lettre*, Kant’s conception of “reflective” judgment, developed in the context of the major architectonic difficulty (reconciling the system of nature with that of freedom) which Kant pursues in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.²⁷ Such judgments display a different formal structure than theoretical judgments and practical judgments which “determine” their respective contents by the application of some universal concept antecedently available in thought. Reflective judgments would begin from a particular

²⁶ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 5: 83; *Critique of Practical Reason*, 69.

²⁷ Kant *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* in *Gesammelte Schriften* 5:175-176; Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 63.

that insists upon itself as somehow *exceeding* the determination of the antecedently available universal, thus seeking an as-yet *unknown* universal which would properly express it.²⁸ Such judgments have two roles: on the one hand, to explain how moral ideas can be made comprehensible in sensible terms (aesthetic judgments) and on the other to show how nature can be conceived as ultimately amenable to our moral aims (teleological judgments). The “unity” achieved therein is only through the merely regulative application of reflective judgments, however.²⁹ These ways of reconciling the opposition of theoretical and practical reason only occur through *analogy*, rather than providing some objective determination.

That is to say, even though the idea of sacrifice provides an analogy which allows agents to represent their empirical, sensual nature as being ultimately compatible with their rational, moral nature, it goes no distance in explaining whether or not an agent can actually become moral. According to Kant, human beings are “radically evil”; this is to say that human actions “are so constituted that they allow the inference of evil maxims in [the human].”³⁰ Kant’s understanding of evil can easily be summarized: a maxim, or a subjectively held justification of action, is “evil” where it treats as *conditional* an unconditional moral law. As Kant has it, the radical evil of humanity “cannot mean anything else than that he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it.”³¹ This is simply to say that human beings have a disposition [*Gesinnung*] which inclines them to act in accordance with subjective maxims that do not arise from respect for the objective, universal moral law. The

²⁸ Ibid., 5:179; 67.

²⁹ Ibid., 5:360-361, 379; 234, 250-251.

³⁰ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:20; Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 70.

³¹ Ibid., 6:32; 79.

necessary condition for predicating the existence of an evil disposition in humanity (i.e., toward subjective maxims which render conditional the unconditional, objective moral law) is merely the ability to infer maxims that are not motivated by respect for the law. It becomes clear then how Kant thinks it feasible to make the claim that humans are “radically evil.” All human beings occasionally deviate from the moral law in their actions—this much seems quite plain. Given this observation, only one sound line of inference is open as to the maxims which motivate such actions and the disposition from which they arise. A morally good disposition cannot explain the presence of evil maxims and acts which issue from them. By contrast, an evil disposition and the maxims produced thereby can explain both apparently moral *and* immoral acts, inasmuch as the former may be in accordance with duty without being motivated *by* duty (since we have no access to the maxims themselves but only the acts which issue from them). That all human beings occasionally incorporate “the (occasional) deviation” thus necessarily implies a radically evil disposition, since it is only in virtue of such a disposition that such deviations can be explained, according to Kant. In light of our “evil” disposition, a fundamental transformation within the human person is necessary if moral rectitude is to be achieved—a “revolution” or *metanoia* must occur whereby the disposition is radically reoriented from the particularity and conditionality of evil maxims to the universality and unconditionality of the moral law.³²

The difficulty of comprehending the possibility of conversion was already indicated in the *aporia* indicated above with respect to Kant’s 1783 understanding of “emergence” [*Ausgang*] from minority [*Unmündigkeit*] (do we become responsible through our autonomy or do we become autonomous by taking responsibility?). The question of conversion as it arises in the

³² Ibid., 6:46-48; 92.

context of the *Religion* presents a tremendously thorny problem as well. “How it is possible that a naturally evil human being should make himself into a good human being surpasses every concept of ours. For how can an evil tree bear good fruit?”³³ If the human disposition [*Gesinnung*] is radically evil or “corrupt” [*verderbt*], how is it possible for anyone to transform one’s self to become morally upright since, *ex hypothesi*, their actions will proceed from an evil, rather than a morally dutiful motivation? Even the attempts to become morally upright would be grounded in morally evil motives. Given this disposition, is the hope of becoming morally upright even remotely reasonable? And even if it is, how can we conceive of it, given that it seems to require a transformation which occurs beyond the temporal relation of our actions and the grounds of our actions? Here the problem takes on a new dimension: if a radically evil disposition is at the basis of all our actions, how is conversion possible or even *thinkable*? If we are evil by nature, then even our attempts to convert ourselves by action in accordance with duty are themselves based on an evil maxim. Kant insists that this problem can only be resolved through moral faith, i.e., a qualified, rationally justified hope in the possibility of conversion. “Assurance of [conversion] cannot of course be attained naturally, neither via immediate consciousness nor via the evidence of the life he has hitherto lived...yet he must be able to *hope* that, by the exertion of *his own* power, he will attain to the road that leads in that direction.”³⁴

We must thus represent to ourselves this prototypically moral human being as a genuine possibility of our conduct, which will thereby enable us to achieve a “single and unalterable decision” by which an individual “reverses the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was

³³ Ibid., 6:44-45; 90; Cf. also 6:50; 90.

³⁴ Ibid., 6:51; 95.

an evil human being (and thereby puts on a ‘new man’).”³⁵ By this revolution in one’s disposition, one becomes receptive to the good, Kant writes. The inner transformation of one’s *Denkungsart* or “mode of thought” slowly transforms one’s mode of sensibility, *Sinnesart*, in a constant labor of self-transformation to attain to moral rectitude.

Practical reason is given license by Kant to postulate the conditions necessary to its self-consistency and efficaciousness. Thus the need for human beings to render moral conversion comprehensible feeds the religious imagination.³⁶ The scope and function of practical reason thus takes on a thoroughly incarnational tone here for Kant: the formal requirements of practical reason demand the possibility of moral conversion, and thus lead human beings to represent to themselves the idea of humanity in its fullest moral perfection.³⁷ It is “the *Word*” or the “begotten son” of God by which human beings are capable of representing this prototypically moral humanity. However, we can only recognize such an individual as an incarnation of the divine command to the extent that such an individual must overcome obstacles—his or her own sensuality, particularity, and historicity—that compete with the moral law to serve as the ground of his or her maxims. It is only through representing that individual as overcoming such obstacles that we can understand a motivation which arises purely from duty:

We cannot think of the ideal of humanity pleasing to God (hence of such moral perfection as is possible to a being pertaining to this world and dependent on needs and inclinations) except in the idea of a human being willing not only to execute in his person all duties...but also, though tempted by the greatest temptation, to take upon himself all sufferings, up to the most ignominious death...For human beings cannot form for themselves any concept of the strength and degree of a force like that of moral

³⁵ Ibid., 6:48; 92.

³⁶ Ibid., 6:6; 59.

³⁷ Ibid., 6:60; 103.

disposition except by representing it surrounded by obstacles and yet—in the midst of the greatest possible temptations—victorious.³⁸

Imagining such an individual fulfills two roles in Kant’s argument regarding the need of practical reason to render itself comprehensible. Recognition of the moral motivation of the “son” awakens us to our own moral sensibility; absent practical faith in the possibility of a truly moral disposition, we would be unable even to understand the sacrifices offered by such an individual—they would appear at best incomprehensible, at worst, pathological. By this same practical faith, through which we can recognize and comprehend the moral motivations of such an individual, one is enabled “to *believe* and self-assuredly trust that he, under similar temptations and afflictions (so far as these are made the touchstones of that idea), would steadfastly cling to the prototype of humanity and follow [his] example,” and by this alone “consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure.”³⁹

Representation of the incarnate “Word” as a *living sacrifice* thus fulfills an essential function. “We have here, as a means of elucidation, a schematism of analogy [*der schematismus der Analogie*] with which we cannot dispense.”⁴⁰ Not only does this “schematism of analogy” provide the negative instantiation of rationally universal duty vis-à-vis the particularity of self-concern, Kant argues, but it also reflects, necessarily, the presence of a moral sensibility within us which we cannot directly observe through introspection or grasp through inferences based on observable behavior. Imagining sacrifice as the negation of particularity, even unto “ignominious death” for the sake the universal is to imagine “the highest sacrifice [*Aufopferung*] a living being

³⁸ Ibid., 6:61; 104.

³⁹ Ibid., 6:62; 104-104.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6:65n; 107n.

can ever perform.”⁴¹ It is indispensable with respect to the rational task of the religious imagination, Kant tells us, in developing moral agency. This is by no means the only time Kant broaches the issue of sacrifice. Turning to the *Critique of Practical Reason* helps to further elucidate why sacrifice as a schematism of analogy is so “indispensable.” I noted already the role that sacrifice plays in Kant’s moral psychology. Here, we see that for Kant, one of the supreme tasks of religious imagination, as an expression of practical reason, is thus to “imagine sacrifice” in a way which facilitates a certain form of rationally qualified moral hope. Only by “imagining sacrifice” can finite humans articulate the conditions of comprehensibility for moral education, and hence religious and eventually political reform. The conversion of one’s mode of thinking [*Denksart*] and firm resolution to live according to and out of one’s intelligible, moral nature, leads to a gradual reform of one’s mode of sensibility [*Sinnesart*], Kant writes.⁴² That is to say, the conversion of one’s disposition sets one on a path of self-sacrifice [*Aufopferung*], suffering [*Schmerz*], and despair of self, which negates and transforms one’s historical and empirical particularity. In emulating the self-sacrifice of Christ, Kant enjoins us to nothing less than a “crucifixion of the flesh.”⁴³

The account of sacrifice as a “schematism of analogy” in Kant’s *Religion* thus aligns with the instability sacrifice and its ritual expression in Hegel’s attempt to theorize modern *Volksreligion* which I described in Chapter One. Again, the status of sacrifice is linked to a broader conceptual issue arising from the attempt to critically redraw the limits and roles of the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 6:47; 92.

⁴³ Ibid., 6:74; 114.

religious imagination. Both Kant and Hegel situate sacrifice at the boundary of universality and particularity, ideality and reality, activity and passivity. Indeed, as Kant argues, it is only through imagining sacrifice as the negation of the particular for the sake of the universal—the renunciation or suppression of one’s particularity for the sake of rational universality—that conversion to moral freedom is even thinkable for a finite agent. Kant’s conception of rational sacrifice, it seems to me, sharpens Hegel’s initial conception of religious reform as articulated in the *Volksreligion* fragment. Sensuality finds its utility in religion as mode of conveyance for a universal, rational content. Just as the subject must struggle against her sensual particularity, so also must religion struggle at the level of institutions and culture. It is with these aspects of Kant’s doctrine of sacrifice in mind that we may accurately grasp the principles at work in Hegel’s version of the Gospel stories. In taking up the Kantian conception of sacrifice, Hegel works to articulate a telling of Jesus’s life that emphasizes the ethos of sacrifice which Jesus lived, and the program of religious reform as a struggle against the potential corruption of historical particularity which that conception of sacrifice enjoins.

Applying and Overcoming Kant’s Model of Moral Sacrifice

It would be an ill-appointed task to attempt a systematic reconstruction of the “argument” of Hegel’s “Life of Jesus” for the simple reason that the text does not really present an argument. What occurs in that text is, as I’ve noted, Hegel’s attempt to reinterpret some central episodes of the Gospels in terms of Kant’s account of moral religion and of practical reason in terms which bring to the fore the Kantian task of imagining sacrifice. In “The Life of Jesus,” which he composed in May of 1795, Hegel presents a collection of interrelated narratives, presented in the form of a chronological reconstruction of Jesus’s life from his baptism to his death (miraculous events such as virgin birth and the resurrection of the body are conspicuously and intentionally

omitted from Hegel's account). But while the principle of organization is merely chronological, the principle of selection and interpretation is philosophical. As I noted above, Hegel is vague in earlier writings about precisely what the "universal" rational content of religion is or ought to be, but here takes a firm Kantian stand, with the stated aim of practically applying the results of the Kantian moral philosophy.⁴⁴ Here, Hegel understands the "universal" rational content of religion to be the objective moral law that actualizes human autonomy and respects the humanity within all agents. This is the rational core of religion, according to Hegel's Kantian reading of the Gospels. Hegel echoes Kant's categorical imperative formulation of the law in this regard: " 'To act only on principles [*Maxime*] that you can will to become universal laws among men, laws no less binding on you than on them'—this is the fundamental law of morality [*Sittlichkeit*], the sum and substance of all moral legislation and the sacred books of all peoples.'"⁴⁵

This universal, rational content of religion is, says Hegel speaking through Jesus, directly opposed to the sacrifices of propitiation and the complex of priestly exhortations and regulations which foster them and derive social and material capital from their continuing commission. Hegel identifies the latter with religious particularity generally, and Judaism specifically. The opening lines of the "The Life of Jesus" carry this Kantian moral re-interpretation of the Gospel so far as to describe the Johannine *logos* as pure practical reason. "Pure reason, transcending all limits, is divinity itself [*die Gottheit selbst*]."⁴⁶ This divinity is the spark of spontaneous, rational freedom within every human being. It is in virtue of one's humanity that one participates in this

⁴⁴ Cf. Hegel, *Letters*, 30.

⁴⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Three Essays, 1793-1795: The Tübingen Essay, Berne Fragments, the Life of Jesus*. Edited by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 117.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 207; *Three Essays*, 104; Cf. I. Kant et al., *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); 312; A317/B347.

universal logos—not a matter of community, paternity, or lineage. The thrust of the rational reform of Christianity becomes clear from the outset. If Christianity is capable of becoming a religion of universal moral reason, it will only be in virtue of the erasure of the traces of Judaism from its central tenets and practices. Along these lines Hegel seeks to systematically disabuse Jesus and his teachings of their Jewishness, as well as to cast Jesus’s teachings as fundamentally opposed to any and all particularity as instantiated in Jewish religion, rites, and laws. Thus, the central task of rationalizing Christianity—which amounts to de-Judaizing it—would be to formulate a corrective to the economic interpretation of sacrifice that places the major emphasis on universal rationality as conceived in Kantian terms. “‘Not sacrifice [*Opfer*],’” Jesus notes, quoting Hosea 6, “‘but righteousness [*Rechtschaffenheit*] are pleasing to me.’”⁴⁷

The first example of this tendency in Hegel’s Jesus is the repudiation of the temple cult of sacrifice. “As he entered the temple...Jesus encountered a crowd of merchants speculating on the religiosity of the Jews, selling them all sorts of goods to be used for sacrifice [*zum Opfern gebrauchten*], and indeed taking special advantage, right there in the temple, of the influx of people from all over Judea gathering for the feasts.”⁴⁸ This, and Jesus’s later prediction of the destruction of the Temple, are attacks on the sacrificial religion of the temple cult, not only as an institution, but as a way of thinking about the relation of the relationship of human and divine. Much like Hegel’s indictment of *Sühnopfer* in the *Volksreligion* fragment, Jesus rejects the idea of sacrificing to God as a means to enter the good graces of some alien agency, or, to put the matter in a rather more Kantian fashion, as an external determination of the will. But Jesus does

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 222; *Three Essays*, 117 (Translation modified).

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Three Essays*, 107.

not dispense with the idea of sacrifice entirely on Hegel's reading. The negation of the particular is still necessary for the realization of the universal. Hegel's Jesus as Kantian sage would have us re-imagine the significance of sacrifice as the ascetic cultivation of moral uprightness through an affirmation of rational autonomy and a transformation of their inner dispositions to accord with duty for duty's sake. In other words, Hegel's 1795 understanding of the figure of Jesus is—at least for the time being—precisely aligned with the Kantian conception of sacrifice articulated in the *Religion* (1790), outlined above.

This transformation of the agent, in which all of the particularity of inclination, lineage, and ritual are negated, is what Hegel identifies as Jesus's "completion" of the law. "Do not imagine for an instant that I have come to declare that the laws are no longer valid. I have come not to annul what the laws demand but rather to make them complete...Heaven and earth may pass away, but not the demands of the moral law nor the obligation to obey them."⁴⁹ The same ethic of heteronomy and propitiation which animates the activities of the temple cult are attacked in Jesus's indictment of Pharisaic legalism. Pharisaic religion acts in accord with the "letter" of the law. Jesus would teach an inner transformation of an agent's disposition that would lead to acting from the "spirit" [*Geist*] of the law. Thus, for example, Jesus enjoins his followers not only to obey the law which prohibits murder, but also to avoid anger. This fulfills both the requirement of the letter of the law, by obeying its specific command, but also the internal disposition which exhibits the divinity of pure practical reason through the respect for human autonomy. In other words, Jesus exhorts his followers to a sort of rationalistic asceticism which mirrors Kant's conception of a moral conversion that, by an "unalterable decision" transforms

⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

one's inner disposition (e.g., abstain from anger), and which slowly transforms one's sensible reality (one thus avoids murder, but also has transformed the maxim of one's acts). In other words, one must cultivate unconditional obedience to the moral law within one's self. At the same time, this implies, as Kant would argue, a respect for all rational agents as "ends in themselves," since to will otherwise would be to will a world in which one's own autonomy is similarly undermined. "If you cannot love your enemies, at least respect the humanity in them."⁵⁰ This understanding of the spirit of the law demands a re-thinking of the concept of sacrifice that was only intimated in Hegel's earlier essays. "In a like manner, you are commanded to offer sacrifices [*Opfern*] at specified times. But if, as you approach the altar, you remember that you have offended someone...then let your offering sit before the altar and go to your brother, extending your hand in reconciliation [*Aussöhnung*], for only then will you have approached the altar in a way pleasing to God."⁵¹

All this amounts to hearkening to the voice of conscience that is, as Hegel identifies it at the outset of "The Life of Jesus," pure reason or *die Gottheit selbst*. "I cling only to the untainted voice of my heart and conscience [*die unverfälschte Stimme meines Herzens und Gewissens*]; whoever listens to these honestly receives the light of truth. And all I ask my disciples is that they heed this voice too. This inner law of freedom to which a person submits voluntarily, as though he had imposed it on himself."⁵² This is not the self-objectification which Hegel claims to find in the submission of the Pharisees to some heteronomous law, but the *voluntary self-*

⁵⁰ Ibid., 112.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 216; Hegel, *Three Essays*, 112.

⁵² Ibid., 234; 127.

submission to the moral law within and the ascetic cultivation of obedience to this law. In other words, opposed to all economic interpretation of sacrifice, this is not a matter of achieving some desired end, but of realizing a good will within oneself, of doing what is right for the sake of its rightness as dictated by universal practical reason, which we grasp through imagining the sacrifice of Jesus. Acting in accordance with the moral law will not be an *investment*, or a provisional detour of loss that is ultimately transformed into personal gain, as Hegel locates in the economic logic of *Sühnopfer*. Acting in accordance with the moral law may be at odds with one's own natural inclinations, even to the point of complete self-abandonment and willingness to die. Jesus predicts his death in these terms, on Hegel's telling. If the Pharisees manage to convince the authorities to execute him, Jesus claims, this will ultimately be an expression of his freedom, because he will be giving his life freely to obey the dictates of the universal moral law within, *die Gottheit selbst*.⁵³ "Anyone meaning to pursue virtue must be prepared to make sacrifices, anyone intending to remain true to [virtue] must be ready to give up his life."⁵⁴

The self-sacrifice of Jesus is not only the ultimate example of human freedom as fulfillment of the imperative to sacrifice particularity on behalf of universal moral law, per Hegel. Hegel's analysis of the relevance of Jesus's death to the autonomy of the disciples also evinces the thrust of religious reform Hegel is pursuing generally. Only through the disappearance of the empirical person of Jesus as a heteronymous authority could the disciples cease to be disciples as such, and become autonomous. "My departure is to your advantage, because only through your own experience and practice will you achieve independence and learn

⁵³ Ibid., 234; 127.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 234; 128.

to govern yourselves.”⁵⁵ In other words, sacrifice, as the gesture of a moral agent working to align herself with the rational demands of duty, has yet another valence here that connects it directly to problem of the *Volksreligion* fragment of 1793. One must be willing to sacrifice any and all grounds of action which are external, heteronymous, or alien to one’s own rational will, i.e., the universal, formal requirement of moral law. Understood in this way, sacrifice would express the essence of concrete autonomy—emergence from sensuality, conditionality, or “immaturity,” and by the same token lay out a program for religious reform. Jesus must himself disappear so as to avoid being fetishized by his followers and turning into a sort of transcendent or “alien” authority. Unless Jesus gives himself over to death, he risks, simply by continuing to live and teach, persisting as a heteronymous authority or standard of moral judgment and action over and against the practical reason of his followers. If this were to happen, the same sacramentalism, legalism, and authoritarianism that Jesus struggled to overcome would be reintroduced, and moral conduct would be re-interpreted along the lines of economic sacrifice.

Of course, Christianity seems to have proceeded down just such lines. The simple moral teachings which Hegel detects in the pseudo-mythological, pseudo-historical form of the Gospels has developed into a full-fledged religion with ritual prescriptions, proscriptions, and a moral code which finds its authoritative basis in a specific historical revelation of God in the person of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus are not obeyed by Christians because they take such teachings to be universally rational, to reveal the identity of the divine logos with the moral law. Rather, the Christians obey them because—much like the deities as conceived in Hegel’s *Stuttgart* fragment—they take them to be dictates passed down from an infallible authority figure. This

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Three Essays*, 155.

extends the Kantian point: the self-sacrifice of Jesus is imagined as a schematism of objective determination, rather than one of analogy.⁵⁶

If Christianity was, in its most primitive form, a religion of universal moral reason, how can such a reversal be explained? How did Christian rationality become its opposite? If Jesus was indeed “the teacher of a purely moral religion, not a positive one,” whose teachings constituted a call to maximally rational and minimally sensuous *Volksreligion* that rejects sacramentalism and legalism, how indeed did Christianity finally become a sacramental and legalistic religion? How did an attempt to reject the spiritual profiteering of priestcraft, as identified in the essay on Greek and Roman religion, end up devolving into priestcraft? This question can be seen as echoing the concrete concerns with the possibility and ramifications of political revolution in Europe: how does an anti-authoritarian message become an expression of a will to authoritarianism? How did the attempt to extricate, on one hand, the rational idea of sacrifice as self-negation for the sake of autonomy from, on the other, the crass misinterpretation of sacrifice as an economy of propitiation finally betray itself? How did a purely rational religion which sought, in Hegel’s view, to re-signify sacrifice as gestures necessary to the actualization of rational autonomy, finally reproduce an alienated relation to God which in turn reinstates a system of debts and credits through an authoritarian demand for propitiatory sacrifices? In the next essay produced that year, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion,” Hegel approaches this difficult historical question. While in this essay the failure of Jesus’s reinterpretation of sacrifice is a matter of making *too many* concessions to historical contingency and determination, Hegel’s initiation into the controversies of post-Kantian idealism will, as I’ll later show, change his

⁵⁶ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:65; *Religion*, 107n.

understanding of the self-betrayal of Christian sacrifice in a radical way, directly anticipating his dialectical phenomenology, and a wider significance for the idea of sacrifice.

The aim of the essay as stated by Hegel already shows a tendency toward broad questions of philosophical reference. He is not interested in developing a historical account of how any particular positive rite or superstition became a part of Christianity, but how a purely rational religion such as Christianity became “positive” at all, in general. “We are to search, partly in the original shape of Jesus’s own religion, and partly in the spirit of the epoch, for certain general reasons which made it possible for the character of the Christian religion as a virtue religion to be misconceived in early times and turned at first into a sect and later into a positive faith.”⁵⁷

Hegel’s response is, roughly, to claim that Jesus’s message was simply an untimely one.⁵⁸ The Jewish people were not spiritually prepared to receive Jesus’s message of universal rational autonomy. Thus the theoretical difficulties in undertaking *Volkserziehung* which Hegel delineated in his 1793 fragments at Tübingen were even more pronounced for Jesus. As noted explicitly in that text, and obliquely in “The Life of Jesus,” universal moral reason cannot be directly disseminated to a popular audience. This was particularly true of the Jews, Hegel believes, given their religious acculturation. According to Hegel, these were a people who were thoroughly bogged down in positivity and authoritarian dictates. The lawfulness of the law was not established or adjudicated according to any tribunal of reason. It was only lawful as a fiat from a radically transcendent and divine authority, aptly referred to as “The Lord.”

⁵⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 110; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion.” In *Early Theological Writings*. Translated by T. M. Knox. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), 73.

⁵⁸ This must be contrasted to Hegel’s mature philosophy of religion as articulated in the Berlin Lectures. There, in keeping with the place of Christian religion in the speculative architectonic, Hegel insists repeatedly that Christianity was only capable of appearing at a particular moment in history, the rationally necessary fullness of its time.

In order to make his moral teachings palatable, Jesus needed to operate within the discursive and imaginal registers of traditional Jewish religion—by appealing to miracles, prophetic narratives, and employing Jewish scriptures as a litmus for judging the “spirit” of Jewish life, Jesus attempted to awaken his followers to the dignity, power, and universality of practical reason. “On this view, many ideas of his contemporaries, e.g., their expectations of Messiah, their representation of immortality under the symbol of resurrection...were simply *used* by Jesus...with a view to attaching a nobler meaning to them.”⁵⁹

Jesus’s teachings were thus aimed at straddling the middle ground between superstition and reason. Hegel claims that they occupied a sort of middle ground between “philosophical” sects and “imaginative” sects. The former attempts to establish the essence of morally obligatory behavior through the establishment of purely rational principles. The latter, by contrast, are any communities grounded in teachings that repudiate rational principles from those generated by or culled from “popular imagination.”⁶⁰ While this opposition may seem an example of crass philosophical elitism vis-à-vis earnest, if often rough-hewn, popular beliefs, the opposite is true. Rather more precisely, we might say that it is Hegel’s concern with democratizing morality (in the sense of affirming morality’s universally binding character) that motivates his suspicion of the products of “popular imagination.” For if particular, sensuous representations offer the ultimate standard for morality—a standard beyond which all communicative and critical rationality must, *a priori*, cease—then a community is set once again upon a path toward the excesses and exploitations of priestly religion as indicated in his essay on the origin of sacrifice.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 108-109; 71.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 111; 74-75 (Translation modified).

In any case, Jesus's teachings lie in this tenuous middle ground between these two poles. This clearly evokes the danger of the "detour" or the transactional nature of the relationship between universal and particular in Hegel's assessment of *Volksreligion*. Jesus affirms the idea of duty as divinely ordained as a principle of religious teachings, but also seeks to clarify the nature of duty by extricating the rational essence of these teachings from the particular, empirical mode of their conveyance or communication. "Between these two kinds of sect [philosophical and positive], we might place a third which accepts the positive principle of faith in and as knowledge of duty and God's will, regarding it as sacred and making it the basis of faith, but holds that it is the commands of virtue which are essential in the faith, not the practices it orders or the positive demands it enjoins or may entail."⁶¹

"The aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality, and that all the more detailed doctrines of Christianity, all means of propagating them, and all its obligations (whether obligations to believe or obligations to perform actions in themselves otherwise arbitrary) have their worth and their sanctity appraised according to their close or distant connection with that aim."⁶² The task of Jesus is to further the rational *telos* of religion by applying an internal critique to Judaism. By such a critique, Hegel argues, "[Jesus] undertook to raise religion and virtue to morality and to restore to morality the freedom which is its essence." The critique was internal to Judaism to the extent that it drew its strength from a resignification of the extant tradition by which "Jesus recalled to the memory of his people the moral principles in their sacred books," citing Matthew 22:37, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

⁶¹ Ibid., 112; 75.

⁶² Ibid., 105; 68.

heart” in this regard. With this, and similar principles, Jesus undertook to assess “the mass of expedients [the Jewish people] had devised for evading the law, and the peace which conscience found in observing the letter of the law...”⁶³ Hegel notes that this love of the Lord, on his reading, contested the ties of natural filiation that bound the Jewish people together. Obedience to the moral law “alone, not to descent from Abraham, did Jesus ascribe value in the eyes of God...”⁶⁴

As in “The Life of Jesus,” Hegel suggests here that Jesus was a sort of Kantian moral sage *avant la lettre*, who invited his followers to imagine sacrifice in a new way. He taught a “simple doctrine, which required renunciation [*Entsagung*], sacrifice [*Aufopferung*], and a struggle [*Kampf*] against inclinations.”⁶⁵ Again, Hegel emphasizes the value of asceticism in this regard. Where in 1793 Hegel sees asceticism as premised on the “bastardized” view of sacrifice as atonement [*Sühnopfer*], that constantly seeks to overcome its own finitude and alienation in continual self-defeat, he seems to have changed his mind under the influence of Kant’s conception of autonomy and moral religion. As suggested in the “Life of Jesus,” Hegel here argues that self-sacrificial discipline, the submission of the sensual particular to the rational universal that breaks the natural bonds of filiation, is part and parcel of practical reason. This makes self-sacrificial ascetic denial of the particular (sensuality, inclination, historicity) as the highest and purest expression of human freedom.

⁶³ Ibid., 107; 70.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Ultimately, the failing of Jesus's movement was that he conceded *too much* to history, that the principle of moral duty that he taught ultimately "falls" into history and is perverted. Jesus drew too liberally from the well of Judaic "popular imagination" to strike a lasting and appropriate balance between rational universality and historical contingency. The most salient examples of this failure occur in Jesus's Messianic claim, and Jesus's failure to repudiate claims that certain of his deeds were in fact "miraculous." These were not examples of deceit or self-deceit on Jesus's part, Hegel tells us. But given the scope and depth of positivity in the Jewish religion, it was the only way to effectively communicate his message. Since God's pronouncements were taken to be the absolute and unquestionable source of political, religious, and civil law, only a similarly divine authority could be taken to challenge the prevailing order. Furthermore, this could not be a matter of denying them out and out, but only of "completing" them or showing their true meaning. "A teacher who intended to effect more for his people than the transmission of a new commentary on these commands and who wished to convince them of the inadequacy of a statutory ecclesiastical faith must of necessity have based his assertions on a like authority."⁶⁶ To attempt to challenge the extant religious order by an appeal to reason would have been, Hegel claims, completely incomprehensible given the religious and cultural climate.⁶⁷ While we might reject the content of Hegel's premises here (i.e., his repulsively bigoted interpretation of Judaism as a religion of mindless, submissive automatons), it is clear that the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 113; 76.

⁶⁷ This view is almost directly cribbed from Kant's *Religion* (GS 6:84; RRT 104ff): "When a religion of mere cult and observances has run its course and one based on the spirit and the truth (on moral disposition) is to be introduced in its place, it is entirely conformable to the ordinary human way of thinking, though not required by the [new] religion, if the historical introduction of the latter be accompanied and as it were adorned by miracles, to announce the end of the previous one which without miracles would not have had any authority at all: indeed, even in such a way that, to win over the adherents of an earlier religion to the recent revolution, the older religion is interpreted as the ancient prefiguration, now come to fulfillment."

form of his argument is consistent with his concerns in Tübingen and Stuttgart two years earlier. Jesus's predicament is much the same as that of those earnest thinkers who want to popularize the Enlightenment. How, given the extent to which the popular imagination is gripped by fantasies of a transcendent authority, can people be convinced that the true tribunal or morality lies within their own rational powers? Only, Hegel claims, through the invocation of supernatural forms of authority such as divine son-ship and miraculous acts. "The teacher has not alternative save to oppose to [positive religion] an equal authority, a divine one."⁶⁸ Given the extent of Jewish positivity and the communicative and normative exigencies of expressing a religion of moral autonomy, Jesus had no choice, Hegel tells us, than to suggest that he was in his own person, divine. He was "bound continually to bring himself, the teacher of this religion, into play; he had to demand faith in his person, a faith which his virtue religion required only for its opposition to the positive doctrines [of Judaism]."⁶⁹

As in the case of the reformed *Volksreligion*, Jesus's teachings had to make a detour through history, particularity, and sensuality. This detour eventuates in the very fetishization and concomitant positivity that Jesus's teachings were arrayed against. The claims to Jesus's divinity, testimony as to his miracles became not the means of conveyance for some rational, moral content, but finally became understood to be the authoritative basis of moral claims as such. That is to say, the person of Jesus becomes a fetish-object, which helps to explain, among other things, the fantastic story of the Resurrection. Hegel believes that Jesus likely understood his death not only to be necessary as a faithful expression of a life of duty, but also as a means to

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 113; *Early Theological Writings*, 76.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 114; 77.

disabuse the disciples of their character *as* disciples, to remove his external authority as teacher, the final obstacle to a realization of their autonomy. The fantasy of a resurrected Christ undoes the self-sacrifice of Jesus and imagines him as ascending to the right hand of the God the Father: the sacrifice which aligns Jesus with the divine will is no longer a “schematism of analogy” but a schematism of “objective determination.” It is no longer an expression of the highest adherence to duty even to the renunciation of all particularity, but a loss which reassures that what has been negated will be regained in the afterlife, in which God will redeem such suffering in accordance with one’s virtue. The man who taught the divinity of pure practical reason, innate within all rational human agents, and to thus initiate them into their proper dignity, is thus ironically placed in the position of transcendent authority which he aimed, if not to repudiate, at least to revise. No longer a teacher or a friend, Jesus is now a God. Because of his concessions to the historical moment—necessary as they were to combat the sorts of authoritarian claims constitutive of Judaism on Hegel’s view—Jesus’s message is transformed into its opposite. He himself becomes a fetish, a representation or a sensuous signifier that ultimately eclipses the rational content it aims to convey. As such, the fetishization of Jesus initiates a movement back toward positivity—religion as submission to an alien authority—and the economy of propitiatory sacrifices attendant to this relation of alienation. “Just as the Jews made sacrifices, ceremonies, and a compulsory faith into the essence of religion, so the Christians made its essence consist in lip service, external actions, inner feelings, and a historical faith.”⁷⁰

Reminiscent of the events of the French Revolution, the ideal of Christianity as a religion of autonomy takes on a historical form that subverts its putatively universal, rational content.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 117; 79.

This is due in part to a misunderstanding of the task of imagining sacrifice as means to propitiate an alien or heteronomous authority, rather than the grounds for hope in the possibility of moral conversion, as I've intimated above. Christianity, in making the self-sacrifice of Jesus as an objective schematism instead of an analogical one, reinstates the relation of heteronomy which characterizes life prior to "conversion" to moral law. Jesus's sacrifice is understood as an otherworldly miracle rather than an expression of moral freedom, and attempts to cling to the historical forms through which that sacrifice was expressed lead to a reinstatement of the division between God and humanity. Insofar as this is the case, moral freedom as expressed within the Christian religion thus takes the form of negotiating with an alien constraint, and not as the form of self-legislation it promised. The sacrificial economy of propitiation and thanksgiving is reproduced by way of this reinstatement of heteronomy.

Kant's moral philosophy provides Hegel with principles to understand the moral pathology of Christianity. However, as is apparent given the "Positivity" essay, it is not altogether clear that such principles provide a concrete means of redressing those reversions or self-subversions. Additionally, the young Hegel's diagnostic use of Kantian moralism in the context of his project of a revived *Volksreligion* ultimately serves to problematize the Kantian moral thought upon which it seems to be grounded. Reading, as Hegel does, the "rational" history of Christianity as an expression of Kantian moral principles *avant la lettre*, the historical path to "positivity" as heteronomy and a re-institution of sacrificial economy would seem to be indicative of an inherent limitation of Kantian moral philosophy itself. Kant's moral philosophy—like Christianity—seems to revert to a form of heteronomy in the form of the practical postulates (the very same conditions postulated by Reason in order to harmonize the grounds and objects of the moral law).

This criticism of Kantian moral faith arises from Hegel's attempts to develop a Christian *Volksreligion* along Kantian lines, and with reference to the Kantian doctrine of sacrifice, essential to obviating the difficulty Hegel encountered in the 1793 *Volksreligion* fragment with respect to the instability of sacrifice within a typology of religious ideas, representations, and practices. The suspicion that Kantian moral faith reproduced the heteronomy it sought to overcome is first announced in a fragment, "*In dieser Rücksicht heißt Glauben...*"⁷¹ that Hegel composed during his work on "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" (1795), but which, unfortunately, has been omitted from Knox's translation of the *Early Theological Writings*, obscuring for Anglophone readers the centrality of the idea of sacrifice in Hegel's developing philosophical position. *Nolens volens*, Kant's attempts to render practical reason consistent with itself via the practical postulates of God and immortality compromises its initial commitment to absolute autonomy, Hegel comes to believe. This is because acts of sacrifice which negate particularity for the sake of the universal moral law must ultimately be understood as a deferral of satisfaction, and in that sense constitute a confusion of the object and grounds of the will. Where the postulates are accepted, the renunciation of one's sensual particularity for the sake of actualizing one's universal rational autonomy would ultimately be a matter of investment. In the end, God will coordinate one's virtue with happiness, and sacrifice will be met with enjoyment. Read in this way, Kant's practical postulates appeal to a spurious transcendence which undermines the principle of autonomy that they sought to secure. For example, Hegel says, we can conceive of a "republican" or a "warrior" who willingly sacrifices his particular existence for some purpose he rationally proposes for himself, e.g., the continued existence of "fatherland" or

⁷¹ Nohl, *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, 238-239.

for his or his people's "honor".⁷² We don't find any appeal to the particular agent's "Happiness" [*Glückseligkeit*] among his motivations, nor is there any guarantee of his actions ultimately contributing to the "highest good." But according to Kant's understanding of moral cognition, autonomy cannot be maintained without being rational, hence free of self-contradiction. This requires in part a willing into reality a world in which virtue and happiness are indeed coordinated. Such coordination can evidently not be guaranteed by any human effort. The realization of this coordination is only possible given some "foreign aid" [*fremden Beihilfe*] that guarantees a return on one's sacrificial investment on the altar of duty. This is all to say that the same problem that Hegel traces in the development and perversion of the pure moral teachings of Christianity is characteristic of the Kantian moral philosophy that Hegel uses to diagnose it. Schelling, it would seem, noticed this at around the same time: in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (the first of which we can be certain, from their correspondence, that Hegel did indeed read),⁷³ Schelling makes much the same point. "This idea [of a moral God] takes away with one hand what it gave with the other; and it would give on one side what it wants to wrest from us on the other; it would cater at the same time to weakness and to strength, to moral despondency and to moral autonomy."⁷⁴ The Kantian conception of autonomy—though on the right track as to its desideratum of freedom—seems to lead back to the vulgar "economic" conception of sacrifice discussed by Hegel in Stuttgart, which relies on some alien being to

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cf. Hegel, *Letters*, 43-44.

⁷⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Erster Brief, *Philosophisches Briefe Über Dogmatismus und Kirticismus* in *Werke*, Band 3 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982) ; First Letter, "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism," in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays* trans. by Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Associated University Press, 1980).

guarantee its acts as investments in future satisfactions. Perhaps surprisingly, given the manifestly “economic” conception of negation at work in Hegel’s mature dialectic, it is only if we grasp the act of sacrifice as a rupture of economy, rather than a moment of it, that the rational kernel of Kantian ethics is raised into its proper dignity and coherence: a willingness to die for the sake of duty, and without hope of return in the form of any sensible or subjective “happiness” or enjoyment. “Where reason itself attains its full and proper mastery over the mind, a man may sacrifice his whole sensible existence (his life) for an ideal of honor or patriotism.”⁷⁵ In other words, Hegel doubts the rationality of sacrifice—and by extension religion as such—in the context of any theistic commitment to a transcendent being that coordinates virtue with happiness. Again, his view here accords with that of Schelling the *Letters*: The freedom of the spirit [*Die Freiheit der Geister*] must be known in a way which dispenses with appeals to a transcendent law-giver, parts ways with the idea of a “moral” God as little more than a reactionary and superstitious adherence to the mere “letter” of Kantian thought, and thus seeks “to stop man from deploring the loss of his fetters.”⁷⁶ Here is where an essential cleavage opens between the Kantian and Hegelian perspective: the transcendent guarantee of this coordination cannot sustain itself at the level of a *Volksreligion* without reverting to a form of mechanical repetition, hypocrisy, asceticism, and “positivity.” Combined with the tendency of fetishization inherent to the dynamic of a *Volksreligion* that can engage individuals on the level of feeling, rationality, and shared culture, what begins as a *hope* for transcendence posited by *Vernunft* as a means to satisfy its requirements is slowly subject to self-subversion, and the necessary object of

⁷⁵ Harris, *Towards the Sunlight*, 227.; Cf. Nohl *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, 238.

⁷⁶ Schelling, Zweiter Brief, “Philosophisches Briefe,” *Werke*, vol 3; Schelling, *The Unconditional*.

moral action is confused with its ground. Where sacrifices are made with this transcendent hope in mind, they are merely postponements of satisfaction, thereby negating the autonomy and dignity of the act and reinstating heteronomy within the supposedly moral will. As Schelling argues in his *Letters*, while dogmatic philosophy seeks to find a system of morality to accord with its desire for happiness, critical philosophy seeks a happiness to accord with its system of morality.⁷⁷ The latter thus seeks to be an active force in the whole scope of norm-conferring activities, but ultimately accedes to its passivity in the face of some transcendent being which it deems ultimately necessary to shore up the coherence of its practical commitments. Sacrifice is only possible where a true and full abdication of one's particular, sensible existence occurs—where the willingness to give, to forget one's self, or to die coincides with, rather than suppresses, one's subjective inclinations.

Two major, related questions emerge, with respect to the integrative ideal Hegel pursues through the articulation of a rational, modern *Volksreligion*. Firstly, given that Kant's practical postulates seem to compromise the autonomy which they seek to secure, is there a different way of imagining the conditions which would allow an integration of particularity and universality? Could an appeal to the imagination as such provide the means to generate a new (or at least revised) mythology that would form the basis of a *Volksreligion*, which a Kantian reading of Christianity fails to achieve? Secondly, Kantian moral faith leads to a doctrine of sacrifice that ultimately amounts to a deferral of satisfaction (hence an abdication of autonomy). Assuming that the idea of sacrifice is still a necessary one for rendering comprehensible the conversion from particularity to universality by way of representing this transition, what form must sacrifice

⁷⁷ Schelling, *Werke* 3, 98-88; *The Unconditional*, 186.

take in order to truly integrate these poles? In other words, how is the unity described in the case of heroic figures such as the “warrior” and the “republican” possible, practically speaking? Clearly the questions converge: in pursuit of *Volkserziehung* through the rational clarification of popular religion, it will be necessary to imagine sacrifice in a new way which expresses the unity of particularity and universality without merely suppressing the former, facilitating its eventual return, transposed into a transcendent, rather than phenomenal, economy of satisfaction.

In the nascent critique of Kant, Hegel begins to intimate a new form of integrative ideal, namely, *love*. In the *Volksreligion* fragment, Hegel has already suggested that the empirical character of human love mirrors that of universal rationality: “The fundamental principle of the empirical character [suited to inhibit evil and promote rationality] is love, which has something analogous [*die etwas Analoges*] to reason in it, insofar as love finds itself [*sich selbst findet*] in other men, or rather by forgetting itself [*sich selbst vergessend*], puts itself outside its own existence, and so to speak, lives, feels, and acts in others, just as reason as the principle of universally valid laws knows itself again in every rational being, recognizing itself as fellow citizens of an intelligible world.”⁷⁸

Love, as a kind of willing self-sacrifice, a negation or a paradoxical “*sich selbst findet*” through “*sich selbst vergessend*,” is not achieved through a struggle to negate particularity through submission to duty. Rather, it suggests to Hegel the possibility of a *coincidence* of the universal and the particular, reason and sensibility, duty with inclination. As the “beautiful” union of these poles, love thus provides the new principle for the task of imagining sacrifice as a means to develop a modern *Volksreligion* and to express an integral unity of particularity and

⁷⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 1, 31; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 59.

universality. Upon his reunion with Hölderlin in Frankfurt and his subsequent exposure to critiques of post-Kantian idealism, the shift initiated by Hegel's concerns with the practical postulates in the Bern period is completed. Kantian duty becomes identified with an internalized authoritarianism, rather than genuine autonomy, and is associated with the "positivity" of Judaism. The ideal of sacrificial love will also take on an expanded significance in Hegel's critical reflections on Kantian moralism and Fichtean foundationalism. Between 1797 and 1800, Hegel reconceives the meaning of sacrificial love as not only *moral* but, in a sense, metaphysical. A more radical way of imagining sacrifice would be necessary in order to reconcile freedom and nature, a giving over of one's self to a dynamic of negativity already at work, and without hope for a "return" on the loss. Hegel thus rejects both Kantian sacrifice as the negation of the particular, and Fichtean sacrifice as the negation and recuperation of the ego as expressions of the very tendencies which they work to overcome. Kantian self-sacrifice against the background of the postulates of practical reason is a matter of surreptitious self-assertion and asceticism. Genuine sacrifice and authentically rational religion constitute a way of being in the world evocative of one's connection to a ground of being that cannot be thematized by cognition or reflection, but must be explored by an "aesthetic" philosophy. What becomes clear to Hegel through the process of reflecting on these issues is that human freedom, as an integral unity of particularity and universality, can only be adequately expressed through a negativity cannot be coherently articulated at the level of understanding [*Verstand*].

CHAPTER THREE

Hegel's employ in Bern was destined to be short (1793-1796). His continued research into the ethico-political potential of *Volksreligion* and Kantian moral philosophy notwithstanding, the role of live-in tutor was simply not satisfying to a person of his intellectual ambition. Hegel also chafed under the aristocratic sensibilities of his employers, the Von Stiegers.¹ The intellectual frustration and social isolation Hegel experienced during the period soon led him to seek a new arrangement. Hölderlin—keen to assist his friend and, doubtless, to be reunited with him—helped arrange for Hegel to take up employment as *Hofmeister* for the family of a wealthy Frankfurt wine merchant.² Hegel was enthusiastic about the prospect and moved to Frankfurt as soon as he was able, beginning his responsibilities there in January of 1797. Upon moving to Frankfurt, Hegel continued to work out the foundations of his practical project of transforming the moral imagination of Europe through religion. Of central importance during this period is Hegel's shift to an analysis of the disposition of *love* as the integration of ideality and rationality, and self-sacrificial love as the practical structure of reconciliation that reflects a non-dualistic conception of autonomy. The aim of this chapter is threefold: first, to sketch the Fichtean background of the new approach Hegel develops in Frankfurt. Second, I want to demonstrate how a critique of Fichte, following Hölderlin, further pushed Hegel away from the Kantian conception of sacrifice as "duty" toward an interpretation of sacrificial action as the expression of "love." Finally, I will show how this shift necessitates a change in Hegel's

¹ Pinkard, *Hegel*, 50-52.

² *Ibid.*, 57-58.

appraisal of “positivity” or heteronomous constraint in religion in preparation for a new, decidedly un-Kantian interpretation of Christianity.

As I showed in Chapter One, Hegel believes that the structure [*Gebäude*] of such a modern *Volksreligion* will, necessarily, include sacrifice. Rather than a dis-integral or suppressive form of sacrificial action, which will reproduce alienation or self-opposition in the spiritual life of the community, Hegel suggests that a modern *Volksreligion* will employ an integral model of sacrifice which expresses gratitude or *Dankbarkeit*. Hegel associates *Dankbarkeit* with Greek religion, as a reversal of the “gift-economy” of *Sühnopfer*, which thereby preserves and suspends opposition. Kantian critique was apparently a central motivating force in Hegel’s project of religious reform. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, Kant’s philosophy of religion did not, on Hegel’s view, meet the standard of integral sacrificial action. Rather, Kant falls back into dualism and moral servitude by way of his conception of moral autonomy and invocation of “practical” faith in a transcendent God and immortality to reunite the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. In attempting to exit the gift-economy of *Sühnopfer* through the pure idea of duty, Kant, *eo ipso*, reproduces that very same economy in a new form. Hegel’s question thus becomes the following: what understanding of sacrifice—hence moral and religious agency—is necessary to actualize the “spirit” of Kantian moral religion, transcending its dead “letter”? Toward the end of his time in Bern, Hegel begins to shift toward a trajectory characteristic of classicists and romantics of the period, seeking in the republican virtues of the Greek *polis* a disposition that effectively unites affect and reason, particularity and universality, reality and ideality. Such a disposition could serve, Hegel believes, as the basic anthropological datum for his *Volksreligion*, organized around the cultic gestures of *Dankbarkeit*. The limits of Kantianism, and the lure of Hellenism, prepare Hegel for a focus on the idea of self-sacrificial

love and Hölderlin's aestheticism while in Frankfurt. Especially crucial is Hölderlin's critique of Fichte's subjective foundationalism. Hölderlin argues that Fichte's self-positing ego is constitutively incapable of being "Absolute" in and for itself, since every act of consciousness implies dialectical opposition to that which it excludes. One needs a kind of "aesthetic" intuition, rather than an act of self-positing, to grasp this objectively non-phenomenalizable ground of being. Hegel never goes quite so far in his flirtation with romanticism. However, the nascent insight about the constitutively dialectical character of consciousness, I will show, provides Hegel with a deeper understanding of the theoretical issue implicit within his practical project: the challenge of practically expressing a non-dualistic account of freedom in acts of sacrifice reflects the limitations and dialectical reversals of the finite understanding as such. "Aesthetic intuition" of the whole is, for Hölderlin, the theoretical structure whereby the pre-reflective unity of the Absolute can be glimpsed, fleetingly, in beauty. Beauty elicits the affective response of love, which in turn gives rise to the practical structure of self-sacrifice, aligning duty and inclination, and thereby effecting a suspension of the opposition between subject and object.

It is this practical structure of reconciliation which Hegel investigates at length in Frankfurt. Self-sacrificial love is the act whereby ideality and reality can be re-united, and the ground of Being can be recollected and represented in acts of religious devotion. In acts of self-sacrificial love, as in Hegel's initial conception of *Dankbarkeit*, the sacrificial "economy" is reversed: "'The more I give to thee, the more I have'."³ The formal opposition of subject and object is negated, and suspended, and the other appears no longer as an object, but as the beloved in whom one discovers one's own subjectivity is constituted. Thus, the shared imaginary of

³ Hegel, *Early Theological Works*, 307.

Volksreligion must fix itself upon the “beautiful” [*Schönheit*], if it is to overcome the fragmentation of modern moral psychology and political life, and support the sustainable emergence of a Republican order in Europe. As the practical structure of recollection of the infinite, sacrificial love, in more or less durable forms of art and ritual, provides modern *Volksreligion* occasions for an “aesthetic intuition” of the whole. Sacrifices issuing from the disposition of love are expressive of the unity of real and ideal, immanent and transcendent, particular and universal. In such gestures, the human agent affirms both her role as an integral element of the totality of nature (expressed via affect or inclination) as well as a member of a community of free, rational beings. Hegel’s mythopoetic task in the Frankfurt period thus becomes threefold: (1) to describe the way in which a religion of “beauty” elicits the integrative response of sacrificial love and its suspension of the formal oppositions of finite understanding, (2) to articulate a new concept of “positivity” or “positive religion” based on the failures of certain sacrificial imaginaries to foster the suspension of opposition in love, and (3) to delineate the conditions under which such attempts have failed and devolved into “positivity” (specifically in Christianity) with an eye to understanding how the “new religion” that arises from the ashes of that tradition can avoid those pitfalls. The culmination of this task is found in “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (1798) which anticipates key features of the mature dialectic, and exhibits parallels between the nascent dialectical interpretation of “Spirit” and Hegel’s earliest comments on the origin of sacrifice. What is most curious in this essay however, and what distinguishes it most profoundly from Hegel’s nascent speculative system in Jena, is the highly dismissive assessment of kenosis it contains. Kenosis is the central figure of mediation in the Jena writings. However, in the major work of his Frankfurt period, Hegel argues that the process of self-othering represented by kenotic interpretations of Christian dogma are emblematic of the

failure of Christianity to constitute itself as a “beautifully humane” religion, a “confusion,” rather than a true “union” of subject and object.

Excursus on Fichteian Idealism

At roughly the same time that Hegel was sketching the need for an integral doctrine of sacrifice to replace that of Kant, his former roommates, Schelling and Hölderlin, were pursuing their own, more strictly philosophical aims vis-à-vis Fichte. Schelling’s first publications presented renditions of Fichteian arguments that he seems to have been moving toward independently while still at the Tübingen *Stift*. While Schelling was at this point more or less in the Fichteian camp, Hölderlin began to gesture toward a break with Fichte’s foundationalism, specifically through appeal to the ideal of *love* which would perhaps open a dimension of relation to the Absolute other than desire to assimilate its mystery through pure reflexivity or self-transparency. This proves for Hegel, who would live and work closely with Hölderlin for a time after relocating to Frankfurt, to be decisive. For Hegel, modern *Volksreligion*’s need for self-sacrificial love—love which “finds one’s self” [*sich selbst findet*] by “forgetting one’s self” [*sich selbst vergessend*]⁴—is first articulated in the context of the contrast drawn between Hellenic civil religion and Hegel’s Kantian reconstruction of Christianity. Hölderlin’s ideal of love would dovetail with this concern for transcending and preserving opposition. In Hölderlin’s case, this ideal is elaborated with respect to Fichte’s attempt to articulate a foundationalist philosophical system grounded in transcendental subjectivity. According to Hölderlin Fichte’s account of transcendental subjectivity involves the suppression of an essential contradiction within consciousness. On Hölderlin’s view [*Theilung*], the non-identity of consciousness with

⁴ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* I,31; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 59.

itself is essential to consciousness as such. It follows then, *pace* Fichte, that the self-referential character of transcendental consciousness cannot serve as an unconditioned and self-evident ground, even when conceived as a primordial act of self-assertion and self-apprehension. This is because it remains conditioned by self-opposition of the consciousness as subject and consciousness as its own object. Furthermore (and compounding the problem), this opposition opens, for Hölderlin, upon a transcendental deduction of a more basic unity that makes this reciprocal interrelation of subject and object possible in the first place. The only way to step beyond the dialectical opposition of subject and object is through self-surrender to beauty. It is this metaphysical account of love which will decisively expand the Hegelian problematic of sacrifice.

Hölderlin was even less well-disposed to the life of a *Hofmeister* than Hegel. Schiller arranged Hölderlin's employment with the Von Kalb family of Waltershausen beginning in 1793. The arrangement would only last about a year. After Hölderlin began to administer corporal punishment to cure his young charge of an alleged masturbation compulsion, it was clear that neither party was benefitting from the arrangement, to say the least.⁵ Soon thereafter, in December of 1794, Charlotte von Kalb dismissed Hölderlin with a generous severance package. Hölderlin used the funds to relocate from Waltershausen to Jena at the outset of 1795, with the aim of joining the literary and intellectual ferment there.⁶

Upon relocation, Hölderlin attended Fichte's lectures faithfully, producing some philosophical writings alongside his poetic works. During this period, he began (and apparently

⁵ David Constantine, *Holderlin*, (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1988), 44-45.

⁶ Friedrich Hölderlin, "Letter to Hegel, Jena, January 16 1795." *Friedrich Holderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and edited by Thomas Pfau, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 124-126.

abandoned) four philosophical essays, likely intended for publication in Schiller's *Die Horen* or Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal*. The most crucial of these for Hegel's development is known as "On Judgment and Being," [*Über Urtheil und Seyn*], the definitive statement of Hölderlin's response to Fichte's idealism, which I will discuss briefly below.⁷ First, it is necessary to discuss the genesis of Fichte's early philosophy, for there is no way to grasp the systematic points made by Hölderlin without at least a cursory grasp of the problems Fichte had set himself to solve.

After his sudden philosophical celebrity with the publication of *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (for a time mistakenly attributed to Kant, due to a publishing error which omitted its authorship), Fichte became embroiled in a controversy surrounding the question of what philosophical options remained open in the wake of Kant's critical project. Did Kant's philosophy hint at the possibility of an exhaustive, systematic science of philosophy grounded in an irrefutable first principle, for which an exhaustive transcendental deduction had not yet been achieved? Was the task now, as a nineteen year-old Schelling intimated in a letter to Hegel (January 5, 1795), to unearth the premises that the results of Kant's transcendental philosophy had failed to make plain? This path was first forced in KL Reinhold's attempts to trace the Kantian architectonic back to a primordial "fact" about the structure of consciousness as a faculty of representation [*Vorstellung*]. It was later taken up in more logically rigorous and

⁷ It was perhaps also a response to Schelling's early endorsement of Fichte's philosophy of the Absolute-Ego. Schelling completed *Vom ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* (Schellings Werke, 2), toward the end of March, 1795 (the book is dated March 29—Hölderlin's Birthday, according to *Stift* records). Its first edition appeared at the Tübingen Stift's 1795 Easter bookfair. Hölderlin was of course not present at the fair, living as he was in Jena. However, the presence of two copies of the book in Hölderlin's estate (one with an inscription from the author), suggests that Schelling may have sent a copy of the volume to Hölderlin (perhaps for the occasion of his birthday). Cf. Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 97ff.

speculative fashion by Fichte and, eventually, Schelling himself. This was not the only live option —indeed, this foundationalist project was pursued in no small part in reaction *against* fideist and skeptical interpretations of Kantian metaphysics. Did Kant’s philosophy terminate in a reaffirmation of the very skepticism regarding human knowledge and freedom which he had struggled to overcome? Such a path was suggested in Jacobi’s critique of conditionality and insistence on the ultimacy of “faith” as well as through Schulze’s skeptical rejoinder to Reinhold’s *Satz des Bewusstseins*.⁸

Fichte’s project of a *Wissenschaftslehre* aimed at putting this controversy to rest, definitively, by way of a certain version of the foundationalist option that sought to ground the entire system of knowledge in the self-positing *activity* of a transcendental ego. In order to establish a *Grundsatz* that does not concede the premise of skepticism, Fichte would need to establish a single, absolutely unconditioned ground for all other judgments that relies in no way on those judgments for the establishment of its truth. This principle cannot merely be a “fact” among others, but also must be the *act* that makes such judgments possible in the first place: the self-positing of the transcendental *ego* and its corollary, the transcendental object, or *non-ego*. “Such a principle does not have to express a fact just as *content* [*eine Tatsache*]; it can also express a fact as a *performance* [*ein Tathandlung*].”⁹ Fichte here introduces his famous neologism. The principle of transcendental philosophy is not merely a “fact” [*Tatsache*] nor simply an “act” [*Handlung*] but an act that is a fact and a fact that is an action, *ein Tat-handlung*.

⁸ Cf. Ameriks, Reinhold.; Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus* (Wentworth Press, 2018) ; Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Aenesidemus: Oder Ueber Die Fundamente Der Von Dem Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena Gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Wentworth Press, 2018).

⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Review of *Aenesidemus*” in *Between Kant & Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, trans. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, Revised edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000) 141n23.

This fact-act or “performance” must be understood as a case of intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle Anschauung*], a state of the subject which is non-reflective (i.e., immediate and “intuitive,” relying on no discursive, inferential procedure), but that is still a case of knowledge (i.e., “intellectual,” hence capable of grounding *other* judgments, of “transmitting” its certainty through the chain of subsequent judgments, thus avoiding a problem of infinite regression). In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant regards such intuition as merely hypothetical and quickly dismisses it. While the transcendental unity of the subject is a necessary condition of experience, it cannot be an item of knowledge either as an object of experience (since it never appears within experience as such) or as some form of privileged inner intuition of its own self-constitutive activity (since such intuitions never rise to the level of experience and are not inter-subjectively judicable). Said otherwise, Kant denied that the spontaneity of subjective organization of experience could be theoretically or practically reconciled with its receptivity without begging the question one way or the other, and hence lapsing into the sort of pre-critical metaphysical dogmatism (which Kant was, of course, at pains to avoid). Fichte contended that (1) not only could such a unified standpoint be attained, but (2) in fact Kant’s system actually presupposed it unwittingly, and (3) that it was only in virtue of admitting such intellectual intuition in the form of the self-apprehension/constitution [*Tathandlung*] of the ‘I’ that an irrefutable, foundationalist option could be developed in the wake of Kantian critique, thus obviating the threat of skepticism, since (4) the self-positing ego allows for a non-reflective ground that serves as the unconditioned transcendental presupposition for all discursively generated judgments.

According to Fichte, it is in the ‘I’ which posits itself, that the subject and the object are united, the “proposition’s inner content is posited along with its form: ‘I am posited, *because* I

have posited myself. I am *because* I am.”¹⁰ Unlike a simple statement of identity, ‘A=A,’ the content of this claim is not merely hypothetical. The form necessitates the content and vice-versa. In other words, the fact which is expressed by the claim “I am I” is made true by the very act of expressing it —*ein Tathandlung*. This is not an event within the stream of representations that constitute empirical consciousness—it is the necessary *a priori* condition of that stream of representations. The formal characteristics of “objectivity” emerge as a logical corollary to this self-positing *Tathandlung*. To a certain extent, Fichte thus remains an intimate of Kant’s. Kant had claimed that the transcendental unity of apperception was required to give a temporal structure to experience and to constitute a thinkable but unknowable transcendental object to which sensory intuitions are understood to refer, or from which they are understood to arise. Fichte agrees, but with a decisive difference aimed at overcoming the empiricistic limitations of previous attempts at developing a foundationalist idealism after Kant, and in order to combat skeptical objections to such an option. As noted above, the way out of the dilemma for Fichte is to argue for the necessity of the very intellectual intuition that Kant denied was possible: a non-reflective knowledge of the self-positing activity of the transcendental ego. Such knowledge is *absolute* and unconditioned—it relies on no previous discursive procedure, and institutes the distinction of subject and object that is the precondition of all inferential judgments. The “infinite” or “unconditioned” term that underlies all the distinctions possible for empirical consciousness—e.g., the distinction between thinking and being, finite subjects and finite objects—is the activity of an infinite, or Absolute Ego. In other words, Fichte radicalizes Kant’s “primacy of the practical.” All theoretical reference to objects is, ultimately, a species of self-

¹⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, ed. Immanuel Hermann von Fichte (Berlin Veit, 1845), 69; *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Daniel Breazeale. (NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) 124-125.

reference of the self-positing Ego. Thus, the Absolute Ego is the unconditioned ground of knowing.

Fichte appears to make some rather extraordinary claims, *prima facie*. Some concerns are apt to arise. There is, firstly, the question of the extent to which Fichte's position can be reconciled with our actual experience at all. Evidently, in the actual concrete experience of selfhood (thinking, willing, acting), there is little "absolute" about subjectivity. Objects of theoretical reason beyond the subject, and the subjective determinations of the will that are in part constitutive of the subject are both, in manifold situations, recalcitrant in the face of our attempts to manipulate and understand them. How, then, can we claim that objects which are apparently resistant to all manner of theoretical and practical activities on that part of the I are "posits" of that very same I? Further, at perhaps a more fundamental level, is not the phenomenological character of intuition itself quite readily indicative of a passivity at odds with such an account? Does Fichte's view amount to nothing more than a rendition of a roughly Cartesian argument? Does this amount to the claim, given that a *Grundsatz* that is properly *grundsätzlich* must be unconditioned both inferentially and ontologically, that only the finite ego, or egos, exist?

But Fichte's claim is not that the ego's "positing" of objects is the causal ground of objects. Rather, Fichte's foundationalism is a kind of normative demand for the thoroughly rational character of all experience and knowledge. The *Grundsätzlichkeit* of the *Grundsatz* present in Fichte's self-positing ego is not that of self-satisfied, finite knowledge. It is, rather, infinite activity, a striving to fulfill the *demand* that the ego actualize its rationality and become fully transparent to itself. As I noted above, Fichte's idealism carries Kant's "primacy of the practical" to a radical conclusion. Fichte radicalizes and expands the ethos of

Enlightenment as “*der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit.*”

The character of the ego as self-positing ought to be understood not as a statement of fact, but as the pure demand of practical reason: the ego *ought* to be self-determining.¹¹ The self-determining ego is a self-consummating practical demand, *arche* as well as *telos*. The starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the absolute, self-positing form of practical rationality that aims to become identical to its content. The fully-transparent telos of the system, an ego which grasps itself in perfect transparency, is an Idea in the Kantian sense, toward which we reach in ceaseless striving [*Streben*]. In that connection, it should be noted also that the “Absolute” ego grasped in the intellectual intuition of practical reason is not identical to an individual, empirical ego, and does not constitute, in Fichte’s view, a case of subjective idealism from the theoretical standpoint, or of egoism from a practical one. Though it is revealed to finite consciousness through its own activity, an intellectual intuition, Fichte’s Absolute Ego is not a particular *instance* of transcendental subjectivity. It is, rather, the ideal structure of the world which encompasses and grounds both its “subjective” and “objective” aspects. The theoretical and practical activity of this ego, and its place within a world which appears independent of it, is a reflection of the Absolute Ego’s primordial self-positing of *I* and *Not-I*. The ability for a finite ego to grasp itself, for its activity to constitute its own object in intellectual intuition, reflects, or partakes in, the Absolute-I’s self-constituting activity, toward which it strives.

Hölderlin’s first exposure to some version of the central premises of Fichte’s system was likely in his reading of certain works of the latter, obtained by Charlotte von Kalb while the poet

¹¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 286.

was still employed as *Hofmesiter* in Waltershausen.¹² He also attended Fichte's lectures intermittently in 1794 and regularly in 1795, with great enthusiasm and admiration for the man whom he described as "the soul of Jena".¹³ His admiration was not without a critical edge, however. Hölderlin was concerned that Fichte's project would carry philosophy into "dogmatism" by transgressing the transcendental limits set in place by Kantian critique.¹⁴ To that end, he thought he detected a contradiction in the very concept of identifying the unconditioned with the self-constituting act of Absolute self-consciousness. In a letter to Hegel, about a month after his move to Jena, Hölderlin puts matters this way:

[Fichte's] "I" (=Spinoza's Substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside it there is nothing; hence there is no object for this "I," for otherwise not all reality would be within it; however, a consciousness without object cannot be thought, and if I myself am this object, then I am as such necessarily restricted, even if it were only within time, hence not absolute; therefore, within the absolute "I," no consciousness is conceivable; as absolute "I" I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing.¹⁵

Hölderlin had long been an admirer of Spinoza and, during their studies at the *Stift*, famously inscribed Hegel's *Stammbuch* with the Greek phrase "*hen kai pan*" [One-and-All]—an approving reference to Lessing's much-discussed deathbed profession of Spinozism.¹⁶ The impact of Spinoza's conception of substance on Hölderlin had not lessened in these later days. Hölderlin first reads Fichte's work alongside Spinoza's *Ethics*, and this has a decisive impact on

¹² Pfau, Letter to Hegel, Jan 26, 1795 in *Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, Letter to Hegel, 124-126.

¹³ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 286.

¹⁴ Frank, *Philosophical Foundations*, 115.

¹⁵ Thomas Pfau, *Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, 125.

¹⁶ Pinkard, *Hegel*, 30-32; Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, 2nd edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 77. Cf. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).

the way he understands role of the “unconditioned.” If Fichte’s self-positing ego is to fulfill the necessary and sufficient conditions of an unconditioned or absolute *Grundsatz*, then it must meet the same logical conditions of the infinite described by Spinoza in his account of substance, Hölderlin claims. It must exist *in se* (as ontologically self-sufficient, existing on the basis of no other being) and *per se* (as conceptually basic, known without reference to the concept of any other being).¹⁷ The Absolute thus appears as a regulative ideal, in the Kantian sense. At this phase Hölderlin is content to state that Fichte’s identification of self-consciousness with the unconditioned simply implies a contradiction: self-consciousness can never meet such logical conditions given that it includes, essentially, reference to the object of consciousness from which it is distinguished—even where this object is self-consciousness itself. In “On Judgment and Being” however, Hölderlin takes the disjunction of object and subject in consciousness to be instructive, to open a different way of relating subject and object. Not only is this opposition necessary to the internal constitution of self-consciousness. It also implies, of necessity, an antecedent unity of which both are modifications, or more precisely, negations.¹⁸

¹⁷ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics in Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley, First Edition edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), I, d.3.

¹⁸ In the course of developing this position, Hölderlin anticipates arguments made in Schelling’s *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, published a few months later at the *Stift* Easter book fair, April 1795. The major difference between the two young philosophers at this stage are their respective emphases on theoretical versus aesthetic reconciliation of the antinomy. In *Vom Ich*, Schelling seems to consider the Fichtean position as, *mutatis mutandis*, providing the essentially self-positing structure of the absolute. Hölderlin sees in Fichte’s system, rather, a feature of irreducible self-alienation and antinomic opposition within cognition. Hölderlin makes the shift toward an “aesthetic” grasp of the Absolute while Schelling is concerned with a theoretical union of the two through “intellectual intuition.” Each will, over time, drift closer to the position of the other. Schelling begins to invoke the necessity of this “aesthetic” sensibility by the time of 1800’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Conversely, Hölderlin, in a letter to Niethammer (February 24, 1796), express that he desires to offer a theoretical accounting of the aesthetic intuition necessary to shoring up the oppositions of post-Kantian idealism (though we can assume, pursuant to Hölderlin’s other fragmentary comments on the impossibility of a systematic exposition of the Absolute, that such a theoretical account of aesthetic intuition would be something quite different from the grand systems of Fichte and eventually Hegel).

The basic thrust of the fragment is this: Fichte's attempt to articulate a self-grounding and irrefutable system of science by appeal to the putatively unconditioned principle of a self-positing subject cannot succeed. This is because the attempt to articulate non-reflective knowledge in the form of self-grounding judgment offered by self-consciousness interrupts the very unity it seeks to express. Self-consciousness—even transcendental self-consciousness—is articulated in the form of a judgment which separates the activity of the I as subject from the I constituted as its own object in order to correlate and reunify them, “I am I”.¹⁹ But if we attempt to clarify the rational constraints of any such possible *unconditioned* principle, it becomes apparent that no such principle can ever, according to Hölderlin, be expressed in the form of such a judgment. In that case, the principle on offer is not “unconditioned” [*unbedingte*] but is conditioned by reference to what it excludes. It thus fails to fulfill the necessary conditions which Hölderlin assimilates from Spinoza's definition of substance in the *Ethica*.²⁰ So far, so good. Hölderlin has recapitulated the logical objection against Fichte in his letter to Hegel. But this does not mean that one can dispense altogether with the idea of the unconditioned—what Spinoza called “substance” and which Hölderlin here calls “Absolute Being” or “Being as such.” In fact, as Hölderlin makes clear in “On Judgment and Being,” it implies, rather, that there can be no distinction of subject from object absent an antecedent unity which provides the shared logico-metaphysical medium of said distinction. It follows that Absolute or the unconditioned unity is necessary, but that it cannot be expressed as an element of propositional knowledge. The self-relation of consciousness must presuppose, but cannot cognize, this Absolute unity. In other

¹⁹ “On Judgement and Being” in Pfau, *Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, 37.

²⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1d6.

words, Hölderlin's polemic against Fichtean idealism must be understood as a two-pronged attack that draws simultaneously on a Spinozist conception of substance and Kantian critique.²¹

It does not, however, follow that there is *no* possible mode of access to this unity. Indeed, according to Hölderlin, it is still possible to bring one's self into relation with this absolute unity. Such a unity must be brought to light in a manner not subject to the discursive operations of the finite understanding. How can such a lost unity be recollected? Hölderlin suggests, in a letter to Schiller a few months later, that it is perhaps through an "aesthetic" intuition that "the union of subject and object in an absolute 'I' or however one wants to call it, is indeed possible aesthetically in intellectual intuition, theoretically however only as an infinite approximation, like the approximation of the square to the circle."²² This developing critique of Fichte is crucial to Hölderlin's understanding of the primacy of the aesthetics, i.e., that the apprehension of the beautiful occasions recollections of the lost unity of the Absolute. The experience of *love*, engendered by the experience of the absolute unity-in-difference which can only be intuited in beauty, becomes the only possible route of reconciliation to the Absolute.²³ This is of course not entirely novel. The conciliatory valence of the "aesthetic" has been a part of its definition since the invention of the term by Baumgarten, who insisted on the "confused" nature of aesthetic objects. As Cassirer notes, this must be taken in its etymologically strict sense as a "fusing together" of adventitious sensory experience and *a priori* necessity, thus allowing us to open a

²¹ Dieter Henrich, "Hölderlin über Urtheil und Sein: Eine Studie zu Entstehungsgeschichte des Idealismus" in *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).

²² Letter 104, to Schiller (September 4, 1795) (SE:VI181) cited in Introduction, Note 24, Pfau, *Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*.

²³ Dieter Henrich, "Chapter Six" in *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*, ed. Eckart Förster, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 121-128.

new field of inquiry into the analogical relationships between sense and reason.²⁴ For Kant, the unity of the ideal and real in the beautiful object constituted a reflection of the laws of freedom into those of nature and vice-versa. The experience of the beautiful could thus be understood as providing symbols of ideal moral life as the alignment of inclination and duty.²⁵ But as I have already shown, the moral psychology of Kantian practical philosophy involves, of necessity, pain. For Schiller, from whom it would seem Hölderlin drew much inspiration,²⁶ the arid self-discipline of Kantian duty was not true freedom but servitude to reason.²⁷ Only by harmonizing the sensuous and rational principles of human knowledge and action could the consummation [*Konsummation*] of one's humanity be attained through a cultivation of beauty of soul.²⁸ "Aesthetic intuition," for Hölderlin, is not merely a mode of apprehension that mediates between reason and sense, as for Baumgarten, nor a way of representing an Idea in Kant's sense, nor a merely practical structure, as for Schiller. Decisively, given Hölderlin's account of the relationship of the Absolute, Being, and Judgment, it cannot be assimilated to a theory of self-consciousness that emerges from reflection to claim for itself a sort of self-verifying immediacy. For Hölderlin, rather, it is through "aesthetic intuition" that the objectively non-phenomenalizable Absolute reveals itself in the moment of understanding's self-suspension,

²⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. FCA Koellen and JP Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951) 346; Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, "Prolegomena" in *Aesthetica* (Traiecti cis Viadrvm: Ioannis Christiani Kleyb, 1750).

²⁵ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5:351-354; *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 228.

²⁶ Henrich, *Konstellationen*, 258-263.

²⁷ J. C. F. von Schiller, 12th-14th Letters in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, English and German facing, ed. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

²⁸ Schiller, 15th Letter in *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1983.

through which the fugitive infinite shines forth in the beautiful, the union of sensuality and rationality, subjectivity and objectivity. In aesthetic intuition, the aporetic limits of transcendental reflection vis-à-vis the *ens realissimum* are represented in a form that points beyond the limits of representation itself, but does not provide some form of objective knowledge.²⁹

Hölderlin left Jena in the early summer of 1795 and returned home.³⁰ After some months, he secured another tutorial position, this time in Frankfurt, and later that year he relocated.³¹ As noted above, Hölderlin helped facilitate new employment for Hegel there as well. Hegel enthusiastically accepted the position and moved to Frankfurt in January of 1797. The two seem to have spent much of their leisure time together discussing the issues of post-Kantian philosophy, especially the issues raised by Hölderlin with respect to the Fichtean system. Clearly, Hegel saw Hölderlin's critique of Fichte as a critical theoretical extension of his own practical concerns. In pursuing the idea of a modern *Volksreligion*, Hegel gestures toward the need for an integral, rather than suppressive, model of sacrifice, both at the level of individual moral psychology, as well as in the shared religious imagination of a people. Hölderlin's ideal of love as engendered by beauty must have seemed the perfect systematic partner for Hegel's project, searching as Hegel was for a more suitable anthropological and metaphysical grounding

²⁹ Friedrich von Hardenberg (better known by his pen-name, "Novalis") presents a strikingly similar view of the role of art as that which "presents the unrepresentable" [*er stellt das Undarstellbare dar*]. For more on the relationship between Novalis's critique of Fichtean idealism and his theory of art, and its parallels with Hölderlin's critique, Cf. Vorlesungen 32 & 33 Manfred Frank, "*Unendliche Annäherung*": *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, 1. Aufl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997). For a contrary view on the relation of Novalis' critique of Fichte and his view of Art, Cf. "Interpreting the *Fichte-Studien*" in Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

³⁰ Constantine, *Hölderlin*, 54.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

than the one provided by Kant. At the same time, Hölderlin's arguments mark a crucial turning point in Hegel's own sensibilities. Hölderlin's critique of Fichte prepares Hegel for a turn toward more decidedly theoretical issues: the problem of heteronomy, with which Hegel had grappled for some years now, was not a question restricted to moral and social psychology, nor the rational clarification of religion. Rather, the problem of heteronomy or finitude was endemic to the structure of self-consciousness and understanding as such. The oppositions with which Hegel has heretofore dealt (particular/universal, sensible/rational, private/public) are all comprehensible as reflective oppositions generated from the *Ur-theilung* whereby understanding [*Verstand*] sunders [*trennt*] "Absolute Being."

This does not mean that Hegel has suddenly given up the role of *Volkserzieher* for that of systematic philosopher. His concern is still squarely that of developing a modern *Volksreligion* capable of expressing and fostering moral autonomy in non-dualistic terms. But Hegel seems to have deemed a more radical approach necessary, or at least worth considering—the development of a “new mythology”³² or perhaps a consideration of the conditions under which it would be possible “to make a religion.”³³ Further, while Hegel's overarching project remains the same, the context has changed. Now such a conception of sacrificial love is understood as reflective of this central question of post-Kantian theoretical philosophy:

The theoretical syntheses become quite objective, completely opposed to the subject—practical activity annihilates the object and is completely subjective—only in love is one at one with the object, it does not command and is not commanded. This love, made by the imagination into an entity, is the divinity separated man then has reverence, respect

³² GWF Hegel, *Frühe Schriften II*, ed. Friedhelm Nicolini et al., *Gesammelte Werke 2* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2014); “*Eine Ethik*”; “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism” in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 110–112; Cf. also J. Hoffmeister, *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung* (Fr. Frommanns Verlag, 1936).

³³ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 2*, Text 41, “Religion...”, 8; *Miscellaneous Writings* (Translation modified) 118.

for it, for love united with itself; his bad conscience—consciousness of separation—instills fear of it in him.³⁴

The central issue for Hegel now is how the religious imagination must be constituted to elicit and develop the integral unity of love. This will take place through sacrificial, cultic actions that express a harmony or unity of subject and object, universal and particular, ideality and reality, rather than their opposition. The basic sketch has already been provided by Hegel in *Dankbarkeit* as a reversal of the gift-economy of *Sühnopfer*, and a suspension of difference. How can such a suspension be grasped in experience and fostered in the shared religious imaginary? Hölderlin's invocation of "aesthetic" intuition would have to play the central role here. The experience of beauty allows finite consciousness to resonate with Absolute Being, to glimpse its fugitivity. At the same time, Absolute Being glimpsed in beauty does not appear under the rubric of objective presence, and can thus never be thematized by determining judgments [*Urtheilungen*]. In the experience of the beautiful [*Schönheit*] the universality of the concept and the particularity of sense are not presented as two opposed elements of a predicative structure. Rather, they are encountered in a unity: the sensible appearance of the rational.

The "Oldest System-Program of German Idealism"

Hegel thus entertains the idea of a *Volksreligion* whose aim is to imagine this "beautiful" union of reason and sensibility as a means to cultivate unified dispositions of love. Taking sight of the beautiful in aesthetic intuition suggests the possibility of obliquely engaging with an originary unity which is phenomenologically prior to the analytical operations of the understanding. To state the issue yet another way: the *a priori* distinction between subject and

³⁴ Ibid., 9; 119.

object itself assumes a unity for which reflective understanding cannot account from within the standpoint of finite, thematic consciousness, consciousness that is *of* a subject and *about* an object. Their distinction implies some form of unity, but any attempt to ground one term in the other, or simply to affirm the validity of the distinction as such, would seem to end up begging the question. Mining our experience of the beautiful for a way to step out of this opposition amounts to taking up a different standpoint on the nature of these cognitive determinations, rejecting their ultimacy, seeking out a way of giving voice to that original unity that does not falsify it by reintroducing the same oppositional articulation in a new form. This does not mean disengaging from the concrete experience of objects or of denying altogether their finitude vis-à-vis subjects.

Hegel's new conception of religious reform takes shape within the context of this problem. The task of reforming *Volksreligion* falls to "philosophical poets" and "poetic philosophers" who do not aim to offer a new and better reflective interpretation of extant religion, but to develop new mythology that hearkens to the ideal of this original unity through representations of the beautiful and thus opens a phenomenological horizon foreclosed to acts of reflective understanding, namely *love*. Hegel first reimagines his project in this direction in a famous text,³⁵ most likely dating to late 1796 or early 1797, known as "The Oldest System-

³⁵ Authorship of the text has been contested since its discovery. The text was purchased by the *Preußische Staatsbibliothek* in 1913. Early editions of Hegelian miscellany excluded "Oldest System-Program." Though the only extant version of the text is clearly written in Hegel's hand, editors were initially unsure of how these folios fit, thematically speaking, within the rest of the early Hegelian fragments. Given the lengthy correspondence between Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin during Hegel's time as a Bernese *Hofmeister*, there has been a great deal of conjecture as to whether the text of the "Oldest System-Program" was merely transcribed from a document produced by Schelling or Hölderlin. At the very least, it clearly bears the imprint of their respective philosophical reflections. But as the analyses above make plain, the themes present in the text are not alien to Hegel's works in Bern (1793-1796) or Frankfurt (1797-1800) either. As early as 1795, Hegel had begun sketching an account of "sacrifice" which motivates his later reflections on love [*Liebe*], the latter being a touchstone of the "Oldest System-Program." Further, it is apparent that the major impetus of reforming extant *Volksreligion*—namely, the articulation of the necessary features of a religious sensibility capable of supporting a modern socio-political order—is also

Program of German Idealism.”³⁶ The section that most clearly resonates with Hegel’s avowed concerns, in the years since the *Volksreligion* fragment, is the call to develop a “new mythology.”

Here I shall discuss particularly an idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone else. We must have a new mythology [*ein neue Mythologie*], but this mythology must be in the service of ideas, it must be a mythology of reason.³⁷

The need for a mythology “in the service of ideas” had already been articulated in a different form in Hegel’s *Volksreligion* fragment. In order to cultivate rational autonomy within the context of a non-dualistic metaphysic, it is necessary to communicate a rational content via particularized sensible signs: a shared history, religious imagination, symbols, etc. Without this appeal to the “psychological faculties” other than understanding, “ideas... have no interest for the *people* [*Volk*].” In addition, Hegel now calls for an explicit engagement with mythology on the part of philosophical analysis, “Until mythology is rational the philosopher must be ashamed of it.”³⁸

operative in this text. At this point, however, Hegel entertains the possibility of developing a “new mythology” for this purpose, rather than reinterpreting an old one. It is of course possible that the text is essentially synthetic: it could represent an attempt on Hegel’s (or another’s) part to systematically integrate the ambitions of his friends within a single document, envisaging each contribution as an element in a broader intellectual manifesto. I do not wish to make a foray into controversies surrounding authorship. I will simply say that even taking very seriously the possibility that the authorship is not to be ascribed to Hegel, one is hard-pressed to make the case that the themes therein do not reflect Hegel’s mythopoetic concerns during this period of transition. Additionally, Hegel’s subsequent analyses of Christianity while in Frankfurt clearly bear the mark of the text’s aestheticism. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, *Das älteste systemprogramm des deutschen idealismus; ein handschriftlicher fund*, vol. [bd. 8] jahrg. 1917, 5. abh., Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse; (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1917) ; Cf. David Farrell Krell, “The Oldest Program Towards a System in German Idealism,” *The Owl of Minerva* 17, no. 1 (1985).

³⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 615-617; “Earliest System-Program of German Idealism” in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 110-112.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 616; 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The need for this reciprocal enrichment of mythological imagination and philosophical rationality is articulated in the manuscript precisely as a corrective to the Kantian elaboration of practical reason in the postulates. Following Kant, the manuscript states that metaphysics as such will be henceforth circumscribed by the demands of morality or practical reason, its aim and method dictated by establishing the necessary conditions for human freedom to give a satisfactory account of the question: “how must a world be constituted for a moral entity [*Wesen*]?”³⁹ This central question of post-Kantian metaphysics clearly develops themes Kant approached in the second *Critique* with the practical postulates. It would not be self-consistent for the moral will to seek to actualize anything other than the “Highest Good”—a just state of affairs whereby virtuous action is coordinated with its deserts. While such a coordination of nature and freedom never appears as a theoretical object, practical reason may “postulate” the conditions whereby such a coordination would occur. To do otherwise would lead the moral law into contradiction. Hegel’s manuscript addresses this feature of the Kantian system, but with a twist which suggests a wider store of religious shapes from which practical reason might draw: “Kant with his practical postulates has given only one *example*” of the future of metaphysics, “and not *exhausted* it [*nicht erschöpft hat*].”⁴⁰ Furthermore, Hegel has attempted to establish, this example is not suitable to a rational *Volksreligion*.

In other words, Hegel writes, theoretical philosophy of a roughly Kantian sort must now articulate a different set of possibilities for religious life and imagination than those proposed by the Kantian practical postulates in order to usher in “the development of what is peculiar to each

³⁹ Ibid., 615; 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

and common to all.”⁴¹ Universal rationality takes various determined, particular forms of imagination: “a monotheism of reason and heart, a polytheism of imagination and art [*Monotheismus der Vernunft und Herz, Polytheismus der Einbildungskraft und der Kunst*].”⁴² This will be achieved, Hegel claims, by pursuit of beauty [*Schönheit*] “in its higher, Platonic sense.”

Hegel will, many years later, describe Platonic beauty as the sensual expression of reason which it is the task of systematic “Science” to overcome and return to its native soil in the *Begriff*: “In Science the universal has again the form of the universal or of the Notion [*des Begriffes*]; but the beautiful appears as an actual thing...in the beautiful, reason appears in a thinglike manner” [*die Vernunft im Schönen auf dingliche Wiese erscheint*].”⁴³ Around 1796/1797, however, their priority seems reversed: “Truth,” he writes, “is beauty intellectually represented.”⁴⁴ *Schönheit* is not here understood as a sensuous expression of the true. Rather, theoretical truth is cast as an abstraction from the unsullied unity of reason and sensuality evinced by the beautiful. That is to say, apprehension of the “beautiful” is taken as phenomenologically prior to the reflective understanding whereby we establish distinctions such as abstract factual truth or falsity. It is this non-reflective apprehension of the beautiful that elicits the response of love. According to Plato, whom Hegel claims to follow here, all love is

⁴¹ Ibid., 617; 111.

⁴² Ibid., 616; 111.

⁴³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 2: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 116; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Georg Wilh. Friedr. Hegel's Vorlesungen Über Die Geschichte Der Philosophie, Als Vorschule Zur Encyklopaedie ,Mit Einigen Ausführungen Und Ankermungen Zur Erläuterung, Verteidigung Oder Berichtigung*, (Leiden, 1908), 455.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 196; Nohl, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, 254.

love of the beautiful.⁴⁵ And it is *eros* which marks, in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, the originary unity of religion and the pursuit of philosophy. Love is a “divine madness” [*theia mania*] when viewed from the perspective of common, finite understanding. It calls the soul to recollection of a unity lost through its incarnation. The parallel to Hölderlin’s account of the unity “Absolute Being” which is lost through the originary-sundering/judgment [*Ur-theilung*] of finite reflection is plain. As Plato has it, the experience of love reminds the soul of its immortality, its participation in the eternal forms. In this connection love has a potent, even fundamental pedagogical role. The experience of a particular, beautiful body can, where one’s attention is rightly directed, lead to the contemplation of the nature of beauty in bodies as such, onward to the beauty of the sciences and the laws of the *polis*, perhaps finally reaching knowledge of beauty itself. Initial erotic attraction has the potential, rightly cultivated, to lead up Plato’s famous “ladder” of ascending forms of love, or higher and more comprehensive forms of unity, lost in our incarnate state.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Plato has Diotima equivocate on this point, substituting the “good” for the beautiful, since apparently the young Socrates had some difficulty grasping the point in terms of “beauty.” The relationship between the two is not altogether clear. Does the parallel normative force of goodness and beauty say something about reality or about our norms about reality? Are these two aspects of the same thing, or two aspects of our way of committing ourselves to their value? Or rather, as the resonance of Plato’s words in the current context might suggest, that beauty marks a mode of apprehension or a way of being that suspends the opposition between these two putatively opposed forms of normative commitment?

⁴⁶ While Hegel has not yet taken on the task of developing a full-blown philosophical system, an interesting parallel between the movement of the Concept in his mature philosophy, and the expansive and synthetic function of Platonic love ought to be noted in passing. Plato’s account of love differs from earlier classical accounts in that the rational harmonization of the parts which constitute a whole (e.g., the proportions of a beautiful body) indicates a more comprehensive rational whole *beyond* this initial finite form of beauty—love for finite beauty leads to more comprehensive questions as to the nature of the beautiful (e.g., contemplation of the beauty of the body, to the soul, to the polis, and eventually to beauty itself). In the same way, fidelity to the explicit structure of a concept of knowledge in the *Phenomenology* leads necessarily, Hegel comes to believe, to the development of a more comprehensive conceptual determination that was functioning implicitly within the more finite, limited conceptual determination.

Plato's "ladder" thus might serve as a model of social and religious reform. Where the religious imagination is occupied with an aspiration to love of beauty, and thus produces and devotes itself to aesthetic representations of the beautiful (rather than with the elaboration and representation of the necessary formal conditions of duty as we find in Kant), there religious life may be developed in a fashion similar to Plato's erotic initiate. Productions of the religious imagination, objectified in art, are attempts to express the unity of love, as far as is possible, in increasingly perfect forms. The ideally rational religion, capable of overcoming the division of the reflective understanding and thus offering a path to an organically integrated political life, is thus very nearly identical to love itself.

We cannot set up the Ideal outside of ourselves, or it would then be an object—and not in ourselves alone either...Religion is one with love. The beloved [*der geliebte*] is not opposed to us, he is one with our essential being [*er ist mit unserem Wesen*]; we see only ourselves in him—and yet he is still not we—a miracle [*ein Wunder*] which we cannot grasp.

"The initiate (Plato, *Phaedrus* p. 330) who has enjoyed the full sight of the eternal beauty, when he beholds a godlike face, that is a good copy of beauty or any other incorporeal idea, is at first all a shudder, and something of the former awe seizes him; but then he looks at it more closely and reverences it like a god; and did he not fear the cry of 'madness!' he would, to the beloved, as to a sacred statue or a god, make sacrifice [*opfern*]." ⁴⁷

While the Ideal is unknowable, it is not posited in an abstract, transcendent "beyond" in the fashion of Kant's practical postulates. It is only by grasping that religion is, ideally, an expression of love, that the reflective oppositions occluding the Ideal (but which also depend upon it), are suspended (without being wholly abandoned). Hegel ends this manuscript with a quotation from Plato's *Phaedrus* cited above, explicitly establishing a connection between the

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, Text 50, "So Wie Mehrere Gattungen...", 97; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 120 (Translation modified).

ideal of beauty and the ideal of an integral conception of sacrifice, a revision of the suppressive, Kantian account. We rise into our freedom only in affirmation of our place as expressions of the Absolute, and we can affirm our place within the absolute only through the suspension of difference in love, expressed in cultic action and the imaginary that renews and sustains it.

Sacrificial Love and Positivity

Sacrifice, when it issues forth from the love that unifies an agent to the beloved, cannot be understood as a “detour” of the subjective will through the constraint of the demands placed on the subject by the objective, as the concession of a noumenal will to the constraints of objectivity in moral psychology (i.e., commission of duty as the self-sacrifice of one’s sensual particularity), or as the yielding of the noumenal will to the oblique demands of the theoretical faculty (i.e., the practical postulates subversion of dutiful sacrifice into a deferred satisfaction and surreptitious self-assertion). Love marks the suspension of the formal features of object and subject. Sacrifice is an expression of love in which the subject “gives up” its absoluteness vis-à-vis the object: the latter is not merely a “thing” which appears as an item for theoretical cognition or practical manipulation. In other words, in love, the object is deprived of its formal objectivity, while nevertheless distinctive in its specific difference. Subjectivity and objectivity can only be conceptualized in contradistinction. This suspension of formal objectivity is reflected into the subject. Like the object, the subject does not disappear in its difference, though the specific mode of difference articulated by theoretical understanding is suspended. As Hegel puts it: “Love completely destroys objectivity and thereby suspends [*aufhebt*] reflection, deprives man’s opposite of all foreign character...In love the separate does still remain, but as something united

and no longer as something separate; life senses life.”⁴⁸ It is essential to note that the suspension of objectivity in sacrificial love does not, at this point, imply the destruction of the being that has been objectively formalized by cognition—only the destruction of its formal character *as* objective. It is only then that it becomes plain how sacrificial love marks an advance on Kantian morality that does not dispense with practical rationality as such, but seeks to express it organically, for reasons clearly attached to Hegel’s nascent critique of Kantian sacrifice. Kant’s suppressive model of sacrifice reinstated heteronomy, and attempted to bridge the gap between these heteronomous poles (subject and object, practical and theoretical reason) through postulates and analogies. But these forms of coordination could not sustain a *Volksreligion* appropriate to a modern socio-political order, for they reproduce a religion of “fear and trembling” and asceticism. This does not mean Kantian practical reason is itself abstractly negated, “sacrificed” in the same way that Kant himself would sacrifice sensuality. Rather, the fulfillment of Kantian morality is the suspension of the formal opposition of reason and sense, duty and inclination, object and subject. Where we encounter the “objective” constraint of the law in the comportment of love, the formal opposition of duty and inclination falls away.

How can a philosopher or a *Volkserzieher* even speak of the unity of love in any intelligible fashion if it is, by definition, situated beyond the limits of reflection? According to the “Oldest System-Program” (1796/1797), philosophy must develop a “poetic” sensibility. Since it is *Schönheit* through which we might obliquely approach this unity through language, it is poetry’s peculiar role both initially to express the unified though irretrievable ground of philosophical concepts, as well as to overcome their inherent limitations, directing subjects back

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* 305; *Theologisches Jugendschriften*, 379 (Translation modified).

toward this ground. Does poetry intimate a way of speaking and seeing that would—beyond the finite functions of ostension, reference, and inference—open access to this unity in such a way that a religion of love can be developed within the poetic consciousness and concretized in the institutions of a free people? Is there a way to translate the suspension of the formal features of subjectivity and objectivity that occurs through love *into* the finite form of *Verstand* in such a way that would subsequently transform it, prepare it for the absolute, open it to the non-phenomenalizable ground it presupposes and to which it strives to return? Could poetry offer the *Volkserzieher* special access to a “logic” of sacrifice that transcends the reflective distinctions of the understanding, robs it of its putative absoluteness, and re-contextualizes it? For Hegel the answer to such questions seems to be yes. Rather than turning to Hölderlin (or, say, Novalis, Goethe, or Schiller), Hegel invokes Shakespeare in seeking the poetic clue for unlocking this logic of sacrificial love.⁴⁹ This logic repeats the reversal of the economy of *Geschenke* found in

⁴⁹ Hegel’s invocation of Shakespeare, while more geographically and historically remote than figures such as Goethe or Schiller, should hardly be surprising. Indeed, Shakespeare’s literary presence in Germany significantly outdates Hegel’s own. German was the first language into which Shakespeare’s works were translated. Shakespeare quickly became a central figure in 19th Century German literary movements, helping as he did to open German poets and dramatists and dramaturgists to literary modes distinct from (though not altogether alien to) the somewhat rigid classicism which reigned in France. The first German translations of Shakespeare’s work were the efforts of CW von Borck’s *Der Tod des Julius Caesar* in 1741 (with which the teenaged Hegel was apparently familiar). *Romeo und Juliet*, translated by Simon Grynäus from an abridged version of the English play, appeared in 1758. Over twenty of Shakespeare’s plays had been translated into German prose by Christoph Martin Wieland between 1762-1766, and those plays became the basis of *Sturm und Drang* enthusiasm for Shakespeare as the prototype of modern dramaturgical genius. Goethe offered an influential critical account of Hamlet in his *Wilhelm Meister* (1796-1797) and AW Schlegel (with often overlooked assistance from Caroline) published critical essays on Shakespeare in *Die Hören*. Lessing (*Briefe die neuste Literatur betreffend*, 1759) and Herder (*Von Deutscher Art und Kunst*) both offered influential critical remarks on Shakespeare. Hegel was very likely familiar with the latter, and both resonate with the sense employed here. Herder’s account breaks with the romantic interpretation of *Sturm und Drang* and offers a more historical interpretation of Shakespeare’s efforts. Lessing’s is perhaps most similar to Hegel’s own, convinced as he was that Shakespeare’s works were akin to German *Volksdrama*, and, with some classicist qualifications, that it was through emulation of Shakespeare’s example “Germany might be assisted to a national drama of her own.” Given that the development of a new mythology for German *Volksreligion* requires a transformation of popular aesthetic sensibilities, an aspiration to beauty expressed in and through historical contingencies (rather than through their suppression), the general parallel is striking. Cf. Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2011); Cf. J.G. Robertson, “Shakespeare on the Continent,” § 22. “German Shakespearean Scholarship in the Nineteenth Century” in *The Cambridge History of*

Hegel's account of *Dankbarkeit* in 1793. In a fragment on love written in late 1797 or early 1798 (about a year before Hegel's famous essay "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," which I will discuss below), Hegel draws on a paradoxical line from *Romeo and Juliet* to describe the non-reflective unity of sacrificial love *within* the language of reflective understanding: "The more I give to thee, the more I have [*je meh rich gebe, desto mehr habe ich*]." ⁵⁰ The "destruction of objectivity" Hegel describes in that same text, is expressed in acts of selfless giving, "[Love] is a mutual giving and taking...the lover who takes is not thereby made richer than the other; he is enriched indeed, but only so much as the other is. So too the giver does not make himself poorer; by giving to the other he has at the same time and to the same extent enhanced his own treasure [*Schätze*]." ⁵¹ The destruction of objectivity was explained above as the suspension of the formal characteristics of the object as a reflectively constituted formation vis-à-vis the subject. It is in this economy beyond economy, a giving and taking that is neither a giving nor a taking, whereby the subject discovers itself enriched by its concessions to the object. Through concessions made both in thought and in being, the subject discovers its essential being is constituted through the beloved, amounting to "the annulment and transcendence of all distinctions [*der Aufhebung aller Unterscheidung*] between the lovers." ⁵² In other words, the unity of love re-contextualizes the meaning of reflective understanding, sets it forth in another light: its distinctions are, as far as they go, "real," but they are *negations* of the primordial, non-phenomenalizable ground which

English and American Literature in 18 Volumes, Vol V. Edited by AW Ward and AR Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907-1921.

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* II, Text 49, "Welchem Zweckke...", 90; *Early Theological Writings* 307.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 91; 307.

Hölderlin calls “being itself” or “Absolute Being”—the Ideal or the infinite. The establishment of the formal distinction between subject and object is the most basic and fundamental expression of such negativity. What the reunion of subjectivity and objectivity in love reveals is the absolutely reciprocal character of all such finite determinations. The subject is what it is through love of the object and vice versa, and this love is an expression, or perhaps better still an echo, of their original unity in the Absolute. As Hegel writes in that same fragment, “Nothing is unconditioned [*unbedingt*]; nothing carries the root of its own being within itself. Each is only relatively necessary; the one exists only for the other, and hence exists in and for itself only on the strength of a power outside of itself.”⁵³

Hölderlin’s critique of Fichtean idealism thus radicalizes Hegel’s earlier suspicions (from 1793-1795) about the need for theorizing what I’ve called an “integral” form of sacrifice. Such an integral interpretation must itself transcend (though obviously not eliminate) a certain way of thinking, of thinking as reflection, representation, and syllogism. The logos of love must be beyond these finite conditions if it is to be capable of supporting a modern *Volksreligion*. In the idea of self-sacrifice as the highest expression of love, Hegel believes he has found precisely what is needed—a “logic” of sacrifice that will help to build a bridge between the poetic expression of Absolute Being in *Schönheit* and the concrete ethical life of a free, modern people. This identification of moral religion with an ethos of sacrificial love has another side as well: the concomitant redefinition of “positivity.”

Without properly grasping the relation of love and understanding, a *Volksreligion* capable of supporting a free, modern political order is impossible—or at least is set of necessity on a path

⁵³ Ibid., 84; 307.

to subvert its own aims. In a footnote which he later struck through, Hegel puts the matter succinctly: "Where man unites what cannot be united, there we have positivity."⁵⁴ He might have put it more precisely still: any attempt to theorize religion as the unification of oppositions through an objective or subjective synthesis of reflective understanding [*Verstand*] will reproduce the heteronomy characteristic of positive religion, because it cannot help but set forth this synthesis as some alien being that is opposed to the whole of beings and to the absolute ground of being, itself. Since this heteronomous term (e.g., the faculty of practical reason, or a transcendent deity, or even finite deities within nature) is something the subject encounters as "opposed," there can be no question of emerging from the "economic" conception of sacrifice that reinforces the opposition of these terms without suspending the nature of their opposition altogether. Hegel thus directly contrasts the "givenness" of the synthesis offered in positive religion to the integral unity of love; any attempt at moral or metaphysical union through reflection is bound to eventuate in heteronomy and positivity.

In positive religion any union is supposed to be something given [*etwas gegebenes seyn*]; what is given, that one still does not have until after one receives it; and after the reception something given is still supposed to be on the one side. But from this point of view something given is nothing else but an opposed term, and consequently the union would be an opposed term, and that too just so far as it is united, which is a contradiction. The contradiction arises from an illusion: these are less complete [*unvollständigere*] modes of union.⁵⁵

Positive religion is an abortive unification of opposites—it relies on the finite determinations of the understanding to offer a theoretical synthesis of oppositions, thus locating the ultimate ground of religious normativity in some transcendent, opposed term, thus reproducing

⁵⁴ Ibid., 97; 119.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, Text 42, "Glauben ist die art..." 12; "Frankfurt Sketch on Faith and Being" in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 135.

heteronomy, positivity, and conditional sacrifice. It cannot sustain a community of modern freedom because it cannot sustain a non-dualistic conception of autonomy, and thus slides into authoritarianism, heteronomy, and moral terrorism and scrupulosity. Positive religion's attempt to unify universal and particular, subject and object, human and nature, finite and infinite, always relies on a finite standard produced in and through the understanding. It thus circumscribes moral life, interrupts and divides it against itself, and renders it servile, self-opposed, mechanistic, hypocritical, and burdened by heteronomous authority, according to Hegel. A *Volksreligion* capable of sustaining a free, modern political order, by contrast, would be developed as the spontaneous expression of the unified disposition of love, the suspension of the oppositions of the understanding, rather than the interminable oscillation between one form of false synthesis and the next. The aim of religion, in its ethico-political role, is to make this love *reflexive* and *durable*. This is what occurs where religion "makes love objective," devotes itself to love through the medium of some poetic or plastic aesthetic production. Such occasions for aesthetic intuition of the beautiful should be relatively stable and enduring foci for religious devotion and the cultivation of the disposition of love. Further, they should reflect ideals which can be deployed in a variety of novel contexts, i.e., they must somehow serve to make love reflexive, to grasp the occasions within which love can continue to grow and overcome the oppositions of the understanding and their concomitant heteronomy and enmities.

Said otherwise, "positive" religion aims at the same kind of synthesis, but misconceives the way in which such a synthesis is actually possible, relying instead on the procedures of reflection (implicitly) to offer either a subjective synthesis (in the case of Kant), or an objective synthesis (in the case of supernatural religion) and ultimately these only oscillate between activity and passivity, between giving and receiving, between having and not yet having. And at

the level of religious institutions such an unstable synthesis, in which “both terms remain opposed,” seems destined to lead to tumult and upheaval characteristic of the French Revolution. “The one is the determining factor, and the other determined.”⁵⁶ Hegel now understands religious “positivity” as issuing from reliance on the finite distinctions drawn through reflection and as leading to a perpetual inversion of its terms where, ideally, love should instead affect a *suspension* of such distinctions and operations. A religion of sacrificial love should only invoke the understanding to give expression to the unity of love in the religious imagination, never confusing this mode of expression with its content. In other words, charting a course from “positive” religions toward modern *Volksreligion* that both accords with, and corrects Enlightenment rationality, means making use of the understanding [*Verstand*] in such a way as to overcome limitations that understanding, itself, imposes. The only true union of these terms, capable of sustaining a rational *Volksreligion* and a modern political order, is the love that suspends the oppositions of the understanding without erasing them.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 12; *Miscellaneous Writings* 136.

CHAPTER FOUR

Given the new understanding of *Volkseligion* and positivity that he developed through his readings of Kant and Fichte, Hegel is forced to reassess the nature of Christianity's putative slide from aspirations of non-dualistically conceived moral freedom to a form of life shaped through and through by dualism and concomitant moral servitude. Assuming now that Jesus's message was one of sacrificial love that seeks to suspend the opposition of subject and object, how can we account for Christianity's reversion to a reflective, representational synthesis that constitutes a "positive" religion? What Hegel shows in "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" (1798/99) is that the appeal to the unifying power of sacrificial love cannot remain at the level of affectivity if it is to sustain a modern political order. If the gesture of sacrificial love remains at the level of affectivity, Hegel believes that the unifying power of love inevitably seeks to maintain itself as a unity of duty and inclination by withdrawing from situations that threaten to undo its tenuous unity. In so doing, love opposes its own living "Spirit" to the dead letter of law. In attempting to overcome this opposition, sacrificial love must be "made objective" not by offering a synthesis present in the object itself, but as an occasion for the "aesthetic intuition" that initiates recollection of the Absolute and occasions the response of integral love. But Jesus's attempts to transform the ethos of sacrificial love into a reflexive and durable form do not ultimately succeed, Hegel believes. The Eucharist, and the kenotic sacrifice of Jesus and subsequent resurrection, merely confuse [*vermischt*] the terms of the oppositions they seek to unite, radicalizing their opposition, and oscillating between mourning and expectation, despair and joy, subject and object. Under the weight of (1) sacrificial love's tendency to retreat from objectivity in order to protect its subjective unity, along with (2) the confused and deficient imaginative syntheses offered by Jesus, (3) Christianity finally succumbs to the fate Hegel identifies with

Abrahamic and Kantian sacrifice. This is not in spite of Christianity's attempt to avoid such a fate by way of a radical departure from these models of sacrifice, but rather as a direct and tragic result of them. The very essence of Christianity as an ethos of sacrificial love is to undo the synthesis it seeks, to subvert itself and become other. What is most remarkable for the purposes of the current dissertation however, is Hegel's initial rejection of Christian kenosis as the appropriate model of sacrifice for a modern, non-dualistic *Volksreligion*. Characteristic of Hegel's ruminations of sacrificial "love" during this period, he decries *kenosis* as an insufficient representation of the practical structure of reconciliation—a stark contrast to the presentation of the kenotic gesture just a few years later in Jena.

The Spirit of Judaism

The "Spirit" essay begins by identifying Abraham as the progenitor of the so-called "Jewish spirit" [*Geist*] and emblem of its "fate" [*Schicksal*]. Abraham's spirit and fate have a definite systematic meaning—they pursue freedom in the key of "positive" religion, along the lines I enumerated above. Abraham understands his freedom to be a matter of self-maintenance and self-assertion; failing to achieve it, he must submit to an alien power which is the product of thought and imagination. As in the earlier account of *Sühnopfer* in 1793, Hegel sees Abraham's religion as oscillating between an attempt to master nature through a direct imposition of the will and, failing that, appealing to an ideal opposed to nature: submission to a transcendent, divine authority to which burnt offerings [*Brandopferungen*] are made. Human freedom is pursued through acts of sacrifice—but what kind? Abraham becomes enslaved to his own ideal of absolute self-mastery: he expresses willingness to sacrifice all bonds of filiation, love, mutual dependence, and responsibility, for the sake of self-mastery. Failing to achieve such mastery, he instead idealizes the relation of mastery as such in the form of a deity who enjoys all the power

and independence Abraham desires but cannot achieve. Abraham turns to the product of his thought, an ideal master with whom he can join forces. According to Hegel then, Abraham's religious life is an expression of this abortive desire for autarky and its eventual self-subversion into a religion of absolute transcendence, servitude, self-objectification, and mechanical obedience.

To say the least, there is much to be resisted in Hegel's unflattering, stereotyped vision of Abrahamic religion. Though I cannot undertake such a task here, it cannot be overemphasized that sustained analyses of the extreme anti-Judaic features of his argument are warranted. Indeed, given this text, and the later rehabilitation of a Christian account of kenotic sacrifice Hegel develops in between 1800 and 1806 in Frankfurt and Jena, it would seem that any attempt to grapple with Hegelian philosophy—either to endorse or resist it—must come to terms with Hegel's systematic use of Judaism and Jewishness as a “foil” to Christianity. This raises the familiar question of supersession, of whether Christianity is constitutively anti-Judaic.

Historiographically the question has currency as well: what role does the figure of the Jew play in constructions of history in the “West”? In the construction of subjectivities, moralities, and rationalities? These are essential questions, but I cannot deal with them at great length. It should be noted, however, that Hegel's location of the “Jew” as a religious type roughly correspondent to the moment of dialectical negation certainly seems to present “Jewishness” as something to be overcome within his system. Although any religious tradition may succumb to such “positivity” in virtue of its position between the oppositions of the understanding, Jewishness appears to be emblematic of the problem of positivity as such for Hegel. Interposing the religious imagination between human finitude and transcendence produces a sort of fantasy world that ultimately frustrates the will to self-determination and self-transcendence that animated it in the first

place—much as Kant’s vision of sacrifice as the commission of duty (despite inclination) ultimately subverted its principle of autonomy. The question thus remains as to the extent to which the Hegelian system must be conceived as an attempt to extricate from Christianity and German culture the residues of “Jewishness.”¹

For the time being, I can only note Hegel’s prejudice as I track the way in which this Jewish “spirit” and the “fate” it produces fit into the broader pattern of the systematically informed historiography that Hegel deploys in this text. According to Hegel, the systematically relevant features of the Abrahamic imagination—i.e., its self-defeating attempts at an objective synthesis that overcomes the antagonism of subject and object—must be understood as features of a longer historical process whereby earlier forms of proto-Judaic religion are elaborated, become untenable, and take on new, re-contextualized forms. The flip side also seems to be evident in Hegel’s writing: the historiographic features of the text are tied to the attempts, through the religious imagination and in concert with the establishment and revision of religious institutions, to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity in terms of the systematic problem Hegel was bequeathed by Hölderlin. “We cannot be concerned with the manner in which we might grasp this adventure [of Jewish spirit]...with our intellect. On the contrary, what we have to grasp is the fact that the Jewish spirit acted in this adventure in a manner corresponding to that in which the adventure was present to the Jews in their imagination and lively recollection.”²

¹ For more on the anti-Judaic dimension of Hegel’s thought Cf. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. Chapter 12: Philosophical Struggles with Judaism, from Kant to Heine. (New York, NY: WW Norton, 2013), 387-422.

² Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 189; *Theologische Jugendschriften*, 248-249.

This entire “adventure” appears as a dialectic that elaborates the inherent tensions within the idea of sacrifice, on my reading. The Noahic covenant gives way to the Abrahamic, eventually to the establishment of a monarchy in Egypt and then to Mosaic law. Jesus’s teachings are a struggle against the entirety of this spirit and fate, a struggle against legalism through appeal to the *pleroma* of the law, achieved in acts of sacrificial love. There, religious and moral action become a matter of the inner alignment of sensuality and rationality—freedom non-dualistically conceived. The resonance with Hegel’s earliest remarks on sacrifice is remarkable and not accidental. The “spirit” and “fate” Hegel finds in Abraham are elaborations of propitiatory practices. Abraham attempts to elevate himself above the sphere of natural necessity and filiation, and in so doing becomes a slave to the ideal that dominates both nature and human beings, according to Hegel. “The first act which made Abraham the progenitor of a nation is the separation [*Trennung*] which snaps the bonds of communal life and love [*Liebe*]...these beautiful relationships [*diese schönen Beziehungen*] he spurned.”³ This is an expression of Abraham’s will to absolute freedom, autarchic self-mastery, and self-reliance conceived in the reflective terms with which, as I described above, Hegel now believes a sufficient account of a truly liberating *Volksreligion* must suspend. Abraham conceives his freedom as maintaining the identity of the self as free against, and in spite of, the constraints placed on the subject by its concrete existence within nature, among “objects.” Abraham’s religiosity is, for Hegel, the antithesis of non-dualistic freedom as evinced in *Dankbarkeit* and self-sacrificial love. “This was the spirit of self-maintenance in strict opposition to everything—the product of his thought raised to be the unity

³ Ibid., 185; 245-6 (Translation modified). NB: Hegel again adduces Hellenic figures here as a contrast: “Cadmus, Danaus, etc., had forsaken their fatherland too, but they forsook it in battle; they went in quest of a soil where they would be free and they sought it that they might love. Abraham wanted *not* to love, to be free by *not* loving.”

dominant over the nature which he regarded as infinite and hostile (for the only relationship possible between hostile enemies is mastery of one over the other).”⁴ The “fate” to which Abraham succumbs is what Hegel describes as the inevitable self-defeat or self-frustration of freedom conceived as self-mastery. In seeking absolute autarchic self-maintenance and mastery, Abraham opposes the ideal of his own freedom to all of nature. But unable to realize such a rigorous and complete self-mastery in actuality, Abraham turns to a product of his thought, externalizing and apotheosizing his ideal: God as “The Lord.”

Abraham’s spirit recapitulates the motive force of economic sacrifice as a will to mastery, and fate as submission to an alien authority, within a single world-historical figure, in Hegel’s view. In other words, Hegel seems to here be recalibrating the project of *Volkserziehung* by applying the insights of Hölderlin’s critique of reflection in Fichte. Abraham—and through him Judaism as such—becomes emblematic of the self-defeating, dualistic character of reflective syntheses, based on the finite categories and inferential relations of *Verstand*. Further, and of central importance detailing Hegel’s development going forward, we glimpse here the very first instances of distinctly *dialectical* thinking: the spirit and fate of Judaism evince a structure that is self-defeating—in attempting to achieve mastery, one becomes a slave; through one’s subterfuge of servitude to the deity, one in fact is only surreptitiously asserting one’s will through a system of exchanges, a transmission of indebtedness between terms of the opposition. As long as Jewish religion remains at the level of reflective syntheses, Hegel holds, each attempt at an objective synthesis (or, eventually, with Christianity, a subjective one) leads to the self-subversion of its own aims, a reversal of fate. In other words, the Jewish Spirit and fate provide a sketch of

⁴ Ibid., 186; 246.

religious imagination that corresponds to what Hegel's mature logic will identify as the "dialectical" moment of the speculative syllogism: finite determinations of thought "pass over" into their "opposites."

In addition to this point, the parallel between Hegel's account of Abraham and his reading of Kant is striking, and further ties the dialectical approach developing here to the critique of Kantian sacrifice Hegel offers in Bern. Abraham's spirit of "self-maintenance" results in his eventual "submission" to an alien power, as if anticipating the way in which Kantian sacrifice finally relies on practical postulates to compliment the deficiency of its subjective synthesis. "Mastery [*Beherrschung*] was the only possible relationship in which Abraham could stand to the infinite world opposed to him; but he was unable to make his mastery actual, and therefore he ceded it to his Ideal."⁵ Repeating familiar anti-Semitic tropes, Hegel characterizes this opposition between Abraham, nature, and God as the source of Jewish exclusivism, melancholy, mechanicity, and legalism. The ethos of self-mastery inevitably fails and produces an ethos of complete submission to a transcendent deity. The religious life of the Jewish people exhibits interminable dialectical inversion: struggle against forces that compromise self-mastery become impediments to self-mastery. The idea of self-mastery, to invoke a later Hegelian gesture, "passes over" into its opposite, submission to some absolute Lord. This is the perpetual fate of the Jewish "Spirit," according to Hegel. The will to mastery of nature and self-mastery becomes a will to submission to a remote, transcendent authority. Jacob employs this relation of absolute opposition and submission to authority as the basis for a political theology in Egypt: "As Joseph gained power in Egypt, he introduced the political hierarchy whereby all Egyptians

⁵ Ibid., 187-188; 247.

were brought into the same relation to the king as that in which, in Joseph's idea everything stood to his god—i.e. he made his Deity 'real.'"⁶ During this sedentary period in Egypt, Hegel suggests that Jewish culture became more differentiated, complex, and less distinctively Abrahamic. Moses's call to liberation was an attempt to consolidate Jewish identity by a retrieval of the ethos of absolute and exclusive submission to the God of Abraham and, by extension, to reject the extant political authority within which the Israelites, at the time, found themselves. Given the more complex composition of Jewish society, the appeal to the ethos of absolute submission to the transcendent deity of the Abrahamic covenant had to take an accordingly complex and more formally determined shape: the Mosaic covenant involved the keeping of a broader and more specific set of formal norms than did either the Noahic or Abrahamic covenants, i.e., the "Law."

In other words, the absolutely transcendent God of Abraham is thus invoked as the principle of an increasingly more complex form of social organization, but one to which the Jewish people "remain passive," according to Hegel. "[Moses' God] is the sole synthesis; the antitheses are the Jewish nation on the one hand and, on the other, the world and the rest of the human race."⁷ As antitheses to the putatively "infinite object,"⁸ Israel and the rest of humanity and nature were "without intrinsic worth and empty, without life; they are not even something dead—a nullity—yet they are something only insofar as the infinite Object makes them something."⁹

⁶ Ibid., 188; 248.

⁷ Ibid., 191; 250.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

“The nullity of man and the littleness of his existence were to be recalled in every enjoyment, every human activity [...]”¹⁰ Every property, every enjoyment, even the human body itself was seen to be the fief of the Lord, and the responsibility of the Jewish people to these finite entities was solely a matter of their responsibility to fulfill the laws of their deity. The imagined nullity of the Jewish people vis-à-vis their transcendent God shaped the form and application of these laws. Hegel draws a contrast to Greek republics once again:

In Greek republics, the source of [similar] laws lay in the fact that, owing to the inequality which would otherwise have arisen, the freedom of the impoverished might have been jeopardized... among the Jews, [the source of the law] was in the fact that they had no freedom and no rights, since they held their possessions only on loan and not as property, since as citizens they were all nothing. The Greeks were to be equal because they were all equally free, self-subsistent; the Jews because all were incapable of self-subsistence.¹¹

The exodus from Egypt thus seems to correspond to Abraham’s Nimrodic spirit (to overcome, in actuality, any conditions of servitude, to assert one’s self-mastery). The institution of the Law repeats the Noahic gesture of submission to the divine as an aspect of a covenant, an idealization of the initial ethos of economic sacrifice. Thus, Moses’s “liberation” was, just like Abraham’s flight from all relations of mutual dependence and filiation, not a genuinely self-liberatory act. Moses’s covenant still functions as a form of absolute subjection: “The liberator of this nation was also its lawgiver; this could only mean that the man who had freed it from one yoke had laid on it another.”¹² I do not know whether Hegel was aware that Kant’s father had been a harness maker, but parallel between the Mosaic and Kantian law—giving up one master

¹⁰ Ibid., 192; 251.

¹¹ Ibid., 197-8; 255.

¹² Ibid., 191; 250.

only to submit oneself to another—is too apt not to mention, in light of Hegel’s (and Schelling’s) reading of Kant. Much like Moses, Kant could only conceive of freedom as the expression of legislation: while Moses cast off subjugation of a foreign nation in favor of subjugation to an “invisible” and “infinite” sovereign, Kant cast off subjugation to any authority not grounded in the subject’s own epistemic and moral autonomy. But submission of one’s sensual particularity to the vigilant control of one’s moral reason is still a form of just that—submission. The difference: the Kantian moral agent submits to an “internal” authority, Hegel claims, and then to the practical postulates. In each case, the yoke of moral subjugation is removed and simply traded for another.

There is a direct line of development from the gift-economy of propitiatory sacrifice to the covenant and its increasingly transcendent deity, contempt for everything excluded from that covenant, and finally to the development of law as such. The unity established through law is grounded in a transcendent principle of a supernatural agency that commands it. But the unity forged through this principle could not withstand the fragmentation of Israelite society with the advent of expanded political and economic enfranchisement during the United Monarchy. The exilic period and post-exilic periods bore witness to an effusion of prophetic literature that on Hegel’s telling sought to “[kindle] the flame from the torch of a languishing genius...to restore its old vigor and, by destroying the many-sided interests of the time, its old dread sublime unity.”¹³ During the Second Temple period, the Jewish religious imagination was certainly still oriented toward the remote, transcendent principle of their God, the guarantor of the law, and the

¹³ Ibid., 203; 259.

guarantor of returns from sacrifices demanded by that law. However, this orientation now takes a range of variegated forms, Hegel claims.

This mixture of passions [which now characterized the Jewish people] could never again turn into a uniform passivity...to flee from this grim reality, men sought consolation in ideas: the ordinary Jew, who was ready enough to sacrifice himself, but not his Object, sought it in the hope of a coming Messiah; the Pharisees sought it in the business of serving and doing the will of the objective Being...The Sadducees sought it in the entire multiplicity of their existence and of a variable life filled with nothing but fixed details...the Essenes sought it in an eternal entity, in a fraternity that would ban all property...and make them into a living unity without multiplicity...¹⁴

To iterate the point: Abraham is emblematic of the putative self-defeat of Judaism. The Abrahamic religious imagination necessitates that the Jewish peoples will continually fall victim to this fate: to struggle against all fetters on their absolute independence, and in so doing produce a culture of moral passivity, subjection, and servility.

According to Hegel then, Kantianism and Judaism struggle to realize a vision of freedom as autarky, as perfect self-sufficiency, but in so doing reproduce the relation of heteronomy they sought to overcome—just as in Hölderlin’s critique of theoretical philosophy, reflective syntheses of *Verstand* ultimately repeat and re-inscribe the oppositions they seek to transcend. These approaches to modern *Volksreligion* fail to meet the necessary conditions enumerated in the “Oldest System-Program” and further explored in Hegel’s subsequent redefinition of “positivity”—they attempt to achieve a synthesis that reconciles finite oppositions (human-nature, subject-object, etc.) in an infinite object. They do not fix the religious imagination on unity of *Schönheit*, but on alien commands, “laws,” that issue from this object. They do not

¹⁴ Ibid.

foster acts of sacrificial love, but legalism and servitude; they do not express unified, moral freedom, but suppressive sacrifices to an abstract “duty.”

The Spirit of Christianity

It is into this milieu that Jesus appears, and it is against “the whole” of this spirit and fate that Jesus arrays his teachings. The analysis of Jesus’s life and legacy differs significantly from the account Hegel offers some three years earlier in “The Life of Jesus” (1795). As in that text, Hegel here understands Jesus’s teachings, in a way, as anticipations of his own task, i.e., the development of new forms of religion capable of supporting a political order constituted through, and facilitative of, moral autonomy. But by this time, for reasons I’ve detailed above, Hegel sees this task as a matter of directing the religious aspiration toward beauty and reconceiving sacrifice as arising from love that suspends the formal opposition of subject and object, expressing their shared, unified “life.” Like *Dankbarkeit*, this suspension occurs as a reversal of the quid-pro-quo gift-economy. The sacrificer gives, negating her claim to what she gives, out of good will [*Wohlwollen*], not begrudgingly. She is not impoverished by the act of giving, she does not seek to recuperate the negation as the deferred satisfaction of investment, but rather experiences the act of giving or self-negation as a restoration of unity: “‘The more I give to thee, the more I have’.”

Hegel casts Jesus’s struggle against the religious positivity and the self-defeating spirit of Judaism as a parallel to his and Hölderlin’s struggle against the formalism and subjectivism of Kant and Fichte. Despite the fact that Kantian moralism does mark an advance on supernatural *Fetischglauben*, in Hegel’s view, it still maintains a dynamic of heteronomy and economic sacrifice—*Sühnopfer*. The *a priori* dualism leveraged by Kant to preserve autonomy comes to undermine it. Kantian sacrifice, the suppression of sensual particularity as a means to actualize

ideality or universality, can never be the expression of the integrally whole, unified moral life of the agent. Viewed from the perspective of “the particular—impulses, inclinations, pathological love, sensuous experience, or whatever it is called,” the idea of universally rational moral duty “is necessarily and always something alien and objective.”¹⁵ Hegel now spells out quite explicitly his dissatisfaction with Kantian moral philosophy, which he has been developing since his first critical ruminations on the nature of Kantian sacrifice in Bern, in a biting riff on Kant’s own words in the *Religion* (6:176). The “moralist” of Königsberg is as mired in heteronomy as the Shaman he decries, in Hegel’s view:

Between the Shaman of Tungus, and the European prelate who rules church and state, the Voguls, and the Puritans on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own command of duty [*Pflichtgebot*], on the other, the difference is not that the former makes themselves slaves [*Knechten*], while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves [*den Herren außer sich*], while the latter carries his lord in himself [*den Herren in sich trägt*], yet at the same time is still his own slave.¹⁶

Kant’s conception of moral reason echoes the self-alienated Abrahamic spirit and, in its unavoidable resonance with propitiatory sacrifices to a heteronomous idea, base superstition.¹⁷ Kantian sacrifice, as the alignment of the subjective maxim to the objective moral law, does not escape the form of opposition and coercion that it seeks to overcome. It simply takes it up in an

¹⁵ Ibid., 211; 266.

¹⁶ Ibid., 211; 265-266.

¹⁷ The place of the Siberian Tungus or Evenki shaman in the religious and cultural imagination of Western Europe during this period is itself an interesting story. Such figures served as a sort of limit case of European identity. Through a steady stream of anthropological studies beginning in the 18th century, Siberian shaman became coded as emblems of various forms of degeneration: e.g., of religion into superstition, and in the same connection as the influence of “Oriental” spirituality on western sensibilities. Hence, both Kant who employs the figure of the Siberian Shaman for polemical purposes in his *Religion*, and Hegel who more or less rejoins “*tu quo que!*” would have almost certainly expected their readers to grasp the implications of this rhetorical gesture. Thanks to Marisa Karyl Franz, doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto Department of Religion, for drawing my attention to this phenomenon and relevant literature. For more on the role of Siberian shamanic religion in the writings of Enlightenment and Romantic writers. Cf. Andrei A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

abstracted, idealized form. By maintaining this dualistic conception of human agency vis-à-vis nature, and requiring an economic conception of sacrifice to overcome it, Kantian moral and religious thought cannot live up to the very spirit of freedom they purport to espouse. The opposition of subject and object, wherein *only* relations of mastery and/or submission are conceivable according to Hegel, must be overcome. With this opposition, the very idea of morality as a matter of obedience to commands must also be dispensed with. Given this background, Hegel claims that Jesus's teachings are not the attempt to provide the proper objective interpretation of the laws as ultimately grounded in practical reason. Rather, they are a polemic against moral lawfulness as such, that emerges from within the vocabulary of that very system of laws, to overcome the oppositions of reflective understanding, and thus to transcend the conception of morality as command [*Gebot*] and obedience [*Achtung*]. Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is emblematic of the general thrust of his moral, civil, and religious vision, beginning with Jesus's call to love as *pleroma* of law, and ending in a vision of a new form of religious and political community, reflective of a shared life which is restored through acts of love.

“The Sermon on the Mount does not teach reverence [*Achtung*] for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfills the law but annuls it as law [*als Gesetz aufhebt*] and so is something higher than obedience and makes the law superfluous.”¹⁸ Any action done out of love cannot be understood as a duty. Duty provides the formal sketch of moral life, as a kind of overcoming of the self—much like *Dankbarkeit*, it seeks to interrupt and subvert the basic suppositions of a logic of agency constituted, fundamentally, by investment and self-satisfaction. But where it is taken to exhaust the meaning of moral life, it becomes a kind of arid discipline

¹⁸ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 212; *Theologische Jugendschriften*, 266.

that negates all sensual particularity and struggles against historical contingency and individual interests. It discovers in the “other” a constraint on its innate tendency for self-seeking and satisfaction. And in its pursuit of a re-unification with the world, it turns to the idea of a third term, beyond the antithesis that can reunify it, but to which it now turns in supplication and servility. Without a new way of seeing, a new “aesthetic intuition,” the mere idea of moral duty reverts to the dualism and heteronomy of *Sühnopfer*. Jesus’s teachings are an attempt to fulfill and transcend this arid discipline of alien “law” or duty, Hegel believes. His teaching is “a righteousness of a new kind” that “supplements the deficiency of the laws.”¹⁹ Such a supplement is love, the unification of inclination and duty that is the *pleroma* of the law.²⁰ Much as the logic of self-sacrificial love Hegel adduces from *Romeo and Juliet*, this *pleroma* of law marks a suspension of finite, reflective oppositions—here of universality and particularity.

The inclination [to act as the law may command], a virtue is a synthesis in which the law (which, because it is universal, Kant always calls something “objective”) loses its universality and the subject its particularity; both lose their opposition, while in the Kantian conception of virtue this opposition remains, and the universal becomes the master [*Herrschenden*], and the particular the mastered [*Beherrschten*].²¹

As intimated in the “Oldest System-Program,” the reorientation of religious imagination toward the beautiful implies a revision of moral and religious concepts—not least the relation of deity to human, and the relation of the human being to her own inclinations, sensuality, and particularity: in other words, the essential oppositions that Kant’s formalistic interpretation of sacrifice construed as a matter of self-mastery and suppression. Kant had perhaps proven, but needed “to

¹⁹ Ibid., 214; 267.

²⁰ Ibid., 214; 268 Cf. Matthew 5:17.

²¹ Ibid., 214; 268.

learn to feel” the truth toward which his system gestured, and the extent to which a break with a religion of transcendence would be ultimately required to actualize modern freedom.²² Mastery and mastered must be dispensed with as the basic touchstones of morality. Hegel revisits the issue in his remarks on the *pleroma* of the law. The correspondence [*Übereinstimmung*] of inclination to duty that characterizes love as this *pleroma* does indeed overcome the opposition between universality and particularity, objective constraint and subjective impulse. But even speaking about the unity of love in this way seems to concede the point to *Verstand*: conceptualizing love as “correspondence” makes use of the very opposition it attempts to transcend. In order to describe the unity of moral character retrieved through sacrificial love without succumbing to a reflective falsification of this unity, it is necessary to articulate some way of grasping the whole that displaces opposition as the conceptual basis of freedom, which contextualizes opposition as a modification of a higher unity. Hegel seems to have found a candidate concept in the idea of “life” [*Leben*]:

In the “fulfillment” of both the laws and duty, their concomitant, however, the moral disposition, etc., ceases to be the universal, opposed to inclination, and inclination ceases to be particular, opposed to law, and therefore this correspondence of law and inclination is life [*Leben*], and, as the relation of differentials to one another, love [*Liebe*].²³

As Hegel stated in a fragment roughly a year earlier, “Love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man’s opposite of all foreign character...In love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate; life senses life.”²⁴ What occurs in acts of sacrificial love, giving that is not losing or investing, is

²² Cf. Hegel, Letter to Schelling (April 16, 1795), in *Letters*, 35-36.

²³ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 215; *Theologisches Jugendschriften*, 268.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 305; 379.

the attempt to restore the unity of life, a way of being that is not sundered by the operations of the finite understanding. The upshot is a grasp of one's agency prior to the oppositions that eventuate in relations of domination or servitude. Abraham's spirit and fate demonstrate, in Hegel's view, the dialectical interrelation of domination and servitude in the religious imagination. As long as religion represents the essence of human agency from within this reflective, representational standpoint, the religious imagination will oscillate interminably between these two poles of objective relation. Where Jesus arrays his teaching against the "entire" spirit and fate of Judaism then, he is offering a new doctrine of sacrificial love that seeks to restore the Jewish people to a unified life, within which the oppositions of the understanding are properly contextualized and within which they may be continually reconciled, when necessary, through appeals to a shared religious imagination and religious gestures. Where love is active, laws are not understood as injunctions from some alien source (e.g., moral reason, or a transcendent being), but as expressions of a shared, unified life. "Love itself pronounces no imperative. It is no universal opposed to a particular, no unity of the concept, but a unity of spirit, divinity. To love God is to feel one's self in the 'all' of life, with no restrictions, in the infinite."²⁵ *Prima facie* this position smacks of a sort of love mysticism, wherein through love, individuals shed the determinants of their individuality and are integrated into an infinite divine life—something akin to Hölderlin's "absolute Being" or Spinoza's notion of substance. But freedom, it would seem, also requires the *persistence* of difference within identity. The monistic impulse is tempered by the fact that in Hegel's view, "differents" do not disappear, but are recontextualized in a new, more comprehensive unity, and the absoluteness of their theoretical

²⁵ Ibid., 247; 296.

and formal distinctiveness is negated. In other words, love appears in a distinctive way. It *presents* itself in experience, but its very phenomenalization is marked by its departure from the limits of representation. It is not an object, and where it is objectified in some gesture—such as sacrifice—it appears in such a way as to point beyond the limits of representation as such. Love cannot be reduced to the reflection oppositions of the representation or understanding without ceasing to be what, in Hegel’s estimation it is, namely, a suspension of the opposition of subject and object.

The metaphysical dimension of Hegel’s analyses during this period can be expressed in rather more definite terms: a human agent can only be truly free through *love*. It is through love that various dualisms, self-opposition, indeed opposition as such, are overcome; this includes not only the opposition of an agent to the source of normative authority as such, but also the normative claim made upon the agent by an “other.” But finite human understanding is not constituted as to grasp such a unity without attributing its ultimate ground to one of the terms it sought to overcome, hence reproducing the opposition, Hegel believes. To put the matter rather bluntly, love is not known, but *lived*. To love is to restore the unity of life that made the oppositions possible in the first place.

In other words, love effects a reconciliation of the elements of a shared, unified life that have been forced apart through enmity, alienation, and analysis. Hegel offers an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount along these lines. Not unlike the logic of sacrifice Hegel detects in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Sermon on the Mount seems a staging ground *within* the standpoint of the reflective oppositions of the understanding (here those that constitute the objectivity of the “law”), as an *exit* from reflection as such, and for the achievement a non-reflective, non-representationally constituted unity of life through love. For each precept of law he describes in

the Sermon, Jesus then enjoins supererogatory virtue, acts of love that outstrip the relation of command and obedience, a fulfillment of the law whereby the formal opposition of inclination and duty, object and subject, is suspended. This is, roughly speaking, a call to a revolution or conversion within the subject, a turn to “the subjective in general”²⁶ whereby the coercive form of the law can be overcome and something more akin to Hegel’s ideal of Hellenic harmony with nature and with fellow citizens can be achieved. With respect to the prohibition of murder, Jesus enjoins forgiveness (Matthew 5:22; 23-26);²⁷ against the prohibition of adultery and most forms of divorce, Jesus condemns not only the act but the lust that animates it (Matthew 5:27-32).²⁸ Against the injunction to keep sworn oaths, Jesus rejects the swearing of oaths altogether, teaching rather to simply keep one’s own word without some alien guarantor (Matthew 5:33-37).²⁹ With respect to retributive justice, Jesus enjoins his followers to a surrender of their right of retribution, and to love not only their neighbors, but also their enemies (Matthew 5:38-48).³⁰ By these and other examples, Hegel argues, Jesus teaches the supererogation of legality through subjective virtues which express the seemingly miraculous conciliatory power of love, its ability to “heal” and reunify a sundered and self-alienated form of life. The virtues that issue from love: forgiveness, fidelity, honesty, etc., are generally understood as aspects of subjective inclination. Such virtuous expressions fulfill the conditions of duty, but in such a way as the form of legality itself falls away, since in love duty is willingly fulfilled with no need of coercion or command,

²⁶ Ibid., 209; 264.

²⁷ Ibid., 215-216; 268-269.

²⁸ Ibid., 216-217; 270.

²⁹ Ibid., 218; 271.

³⁰ Ibid., 218; 271.

and with no enmity existing between the subject and the object, inclination and law. The active virtues effected through love are, for the subject, a “forgetting of itself” [*sich selbst vergessend*] and everything in it opposed to the objectivity of the law. In forgetting itself, the subject ultimately “finds itself” [*sich selbst findet*] in the form of a new, inner life. It is from out of this inner, spiritual unity of “love” that a religious and ethico-political revolution will be mounted. A community that is an expression of shared life, and that restores its enmities and oppositions itself through the unity of love, is the new social vision which Hegel’s Jesus has in mind. Indeed, by the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is no longer describing the supererogatory virtues whereby love proves itself the *pleroma* of law. Now he is describing the entirely new community wherein autonomy is realized in a community of free agents who are reconciled to nature and who “sense” in one another their “shared life.” “The whole Sermon ends with the attempt to show a picture of man entirely outside of the sphere in which it had been sketched earlier, where we had a picture of man in opposition to determinate prescriptions with the result that the purity of life appeared in its modifications, in particular virtues.” Jesus no longer posits active virtues vis-à-vis the passively obeyed commands of the law. Rather, he describes something akin to Hegel’s Hellenic ideal: “[The Sermon’s conclusion] exhibits certain expressions of life in its beautiful free region as the unification of all men in asking, giving, and receiving.”³¹ The more that subjects forget their formal opposition to objects, the more they receive back in a non-reflective, shared form of “life.” Sacrifice is still a matter of intercourse with some metaphysical reality greater than the individual—but it is neither the sacrifice of propitiation to an alien deity, nor, in its other aspect, a sacrifice for the maintenance of the autarchic agent. It is rather a

³¹ Ibid., 223; 275.

sacrifice that seemingly restores human communities to unity with nature, that reconciles the enmities within a community, that achieves the self-reparation of the life of the community.

Much as Hegel's project of reforming or revolutionizing *Volksreligion*, Jesus's ethic of self-sacrificial love, sacrifice as the reparation of the integral unity of "life," seeks to articulate the necessary conditions for a community grounded in moral freedom. The analysis of Jesus's life and teachings in Frankfurt is an application of Hegel's new insights about the nature of reflection, beauty, and love: sacrifice cannot sustain a community of moral freedom where it is conceived as submission to an authority—either external (as in the case of Abraham) or internal (as in the case of Kant). Jesus's intervention in the Hegelian discourse on sacrifice is thus to claim, implicitly, that sacrifice can only be an expression of freedom if it is an expression of love.

This is well and good in theory. But how can this reunification of subject and object in their shared "life" maintain a real community? Indeed, in attempting to maintain the unity of feeling offered by "love," Jesus's ethic prescribes a sort of withdrawal from any concrete relationships (e.g., filiation, property, etc.) whose demands would threaten to sully that unity, to introduce some new division or enmity, Hegel argues. In order to preserve the "beauty of soul" evinced by the unified disposition of love, it is necessary that "If any side of him is touched, he withdraws himself therefrom and simply lets go into the other's hands a thing which in the moment of the attack he has alienated. To renounce his relationships in this way is to abstract from himself, but this process has no fixed limits."³² Hegel puts the matter even more starkly in a

³² Ibid., 235, 285.

passage that follows: “To save himself, the man kills himself.”³³ To avoid allowing life to become an object of “contempt” as in the case of Abraham, Jesus teaches his followers to flee from those aspects of life that threaten to compromise the unified freedom attained in self-sacrificial love. “Like a sensitive plant, he withdraws himself when touched.”³⁴ This withdrawal from the determinate forms of life makes the beautiful, loving individual “open to reconciliation”—both to be forgiven and to forgive—for, having withdrawn himself from determinate forms of life, there is no pride to restore, no injury to recompense, Hegel believes.

Does not such a process of withdrawal mean that love opposes itself to all that is excluded from the unity of love, thus reintroducing opposition? And would not this quickly be turned into contempt for all forms of life which are beyond the community of love? Love is not known but lived, not cognized but felt—“Of course it is ‘pathological, an inclination.’”³⁵ And the unity that it achieves is such that by the very definition Hegel provides it transcends the reflective determinations of the finite understanding; it is “a miracle, that we cannot grasp.”³⁶ Indeed, as Hegel claims, “A living unity...is much different from unity of the concept; it does not set up a determinate virtue for determinate circumstances but appears, even in the most variegate of relations, untorn and unitary...Its expression will never be able to afford a rule.”³⁷ And what of the realms of human activity that are not, as yet, permeated by this living spirit of love? “What [love] has not yet united with itself is not objective to it” (since love is not a matter

³³ Ibid., 235, 286.

³⁴ Ibid., 236; 286.

³⁵ Ibid., 247; 295-296.

³⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, Text 50, “So Wie Mehrere Gattungen...,” 97; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 120.

³⁷ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 246; *Theologisches Jugendschriften*, 295.

of reflection and representation), does not apprehend in terms of the structures of consciousness that affects such oppositions. Rather, Hegel claims “love has overlooked it or not yet developed it; it is not yet confronted by it.”³⁸

Crucially: is it possible to foster and develop love without relying upon a reflectively constituted framework of “objective” norms that guide the development of selfless love in novel situations that are necessitated by increasingly large and complex forms of community? If the sacrifices of love (e.g., forgiveness, reconciliation, abdication of retribution, unconditional giving, taking, and receiving, etc.) are to effectively sustain a *Volksreligion*, it would seem that they must somehow become *reflexive*: we must be able to grasp the conditions within which love arises and those practices and institutions that stymie its development so as to foster these acts of love in ever widening spheres of community.³⁹ How can appeal to the subjective feeling of unity through love become objective for the religious imagination and so sustain a *Volksreligion* of modern freedom? The way to make a community of love sustainable is not, in Hegel’s view, only the provision of “imperfect parables” that point beyond the letter of the law to supererogatory acts of virtue. Such sustainability—as is suggested throughout all of Hegel’s early writings and especially in the “Oldest System-Program” (1797)—requires a transformation of the religious imagination. The liberating power of sacrificial love, a forgetting of self that is a restoration of self, a giving that is a receiving—this “miracle” must become reflexive through an aesthetic representation of the shared life that sacrificial love seeks to restore, or more precisely, the process of that restoration. In other words, sacrificial love must become mythopoetic in the

³⁸ Ibid., 247; 296.

³⁹ Cf. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 305-308.

sense described in the “Program.” Finally, it must do so in such a way that does not leave it opposed, and potentially hostile to all that which is “excluded” from the subjective unity of love. As intimated in the “Oldest System-Program” and in the remarks of Hölderlin, Hegel believes that elevation of self-sacrificial, supererogatory love to religion proper requires the *representation* of the gestures that actualize this conciliatory, non-dualistic form of freedom. It is necessary to “objectify” love in such a way as to stimulate the imagination, and to provide occasions for an “aesthetic intuition” of the whole.

The Eucharist or “love feast” [*Liebesmahl*] is Jesus’s gesture in the direction of answering such challenges inherent in the ideal of integral, self-sacrificial love, Hegel argues. As the above analysis of Hegel’s fragments on love has shown, reflective self-consciousness is always constituted, even where it takes its own activity as its principle theme, as a division of subject and object. Such a division presupposes an antecedent *unity* of subject and object, the Absolute, whereby their distinction is tenable and intelligible, but that cannot be directly thematized by the reflective understanding. To the extent that the essence of a given religion is expressed in reflective terms, the unity of human life with divine life is sullied, and agents become self-estranged and seek reconciliation in some supernatural being. To a certain extent this is, of course, unavoidable. But unless religion offers a way to continually overcome this opposition, such reflection all results in opposition and, concomitantly, moral passivity and self-objectification. As we have seen, these are incompatible with a *Volksreligion* conducive to the rational self-determination and moral freedom necessary for a modern political order. It is only through acts of sacrificial love, Hegel’s fragments show, that the pre-theoretical unity of life, unsullied by objectifying or “positive” institutions and rites, can be retrieved. These gestures of love have a structure, a logic of sacrifice, that seeks to forget subjectivity as opposition to the

object and to thus suspend the formal opposition between them. Forgetting one's self [*sich selbst vergessend*] in the beloved allows one to retrieve the unity lost through the operations of reflective understanding, and hence to find oneself [*sich selbst findet*]. The deeper one's self-forgetfulness, the more perfect a glimpse of this Absolute unity one stands to gain: "The more I give to thee, the more I have."⁴⁰ This is all to say that self-sacrificial love functions as the means by which finite agents can bring themselves into relation with this non-phenomenalizable ground of being, hence a freedom beyond the oppositions of *Verstand* and the struggles of domination and submission that such conceptions of freedom engender. The acts of virtuous supererogation listed in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount are the first step beyond such oppositions—the subject holds back nothing from the law (for indeed, the subject desires to do the law) and in so doing overcomes the formal objectivity of law as such—the opposition between object and subject is suspended. But as noted above, these only take place with respect to previously instituted laws. How can love continue to develop in novel forms? How can love resist a flight into pure subjectivity? It must become reflexive in a way that does not rely on the oppositions it seeks to overcome. This leads us back to the task outlined in the "Oldest System-Program" (1797). Just as love is the *pleroma* of law, religion is the *pleroma* of love that completes and supersedes its subjective form in the beautiful religious imagination. Ideally, religion enacts or "shows" what discursive thought cannot demonstrate or "say" about love.

Jesus must thus become, in Hegel's view, a sort of romantic religious genius. He must produce aesthetic forms, images, or objects, suitable to render the unity of subject and object through self-sacrificial love reflexive, thus making love deployable in various novel contexts,

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* II, Text 49, "Welchem Zwecke...", 90; *Early Theological Writings*, 307.

and obviating the withdrawal from objectivity. But he does so in a way that, ultimately, sustains the oppositions of the understanding. Thus, much like Kant, Jesus reinstitutes a self-defeating, dualistic conception of freedom. In other words, Hegel argues at this point in his development, that Jesus's moral genius falls short of a genuine religion of love objectified, remaining at the level of affect. Where Hegel had earlier claimed that "Religion is one with love" it is made clear in the "Spirit" essay (1798) that religion must *surpass* the mere feeling of love and represent it in objective forms but that allow for the suspension and passing beyond the limits of representational thought. Such "love objectified" would provide an institutional expression of the ideal of a community unified by love, in shared gestures and shared religious imaginaries. Perhaps owing to the general suspicion of objectivity evinced by Jesus's ideal of love, Hegel suggests, he fixes only on the most fleeting objective instantiation of the ideal of love—the commensality of the "Last Supper" shared by Jesus and the Apostles, the model for the sacramental meal of the Eucharist. The objective elements, bread and wine, express the subjective unity of duty and inclination as love. Then, through the act of eating and internalizing the objectification, is reassimilated to the subject. The feeling of love is objectified in the sacrament and just as quickly disappears.

"Love is less than religion, and this meal, too, is thus not strictly a religious action, for only a unification in love, made objective in the imagination, can be the object of religious veneration."⁴¹ The objectification of love in the shared meal is too fleeting to rise to the level of religion. It aims to express the beautiful union of subject and object. What it in fact achieves is a

⁴¹ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 248; *Theologisches Jungendschriften*, 297.

confusion or mix-up [*Vermischung*]. In his description of the meal,⁴² Jesus aims to represent the shared life of which self-sacrificial love is a restoration, rather than a promise of expiation in any juridical sense.⁴³ The feeling of this unified life, the feeling of love, becomes objective in the form of bread and wine, and is then reintegrated into the subject in the act of eating. “The love made objective, this subjective element becomes a *thing*, reverts once more to its nature, becomes subjective again in the eating.”⁴⁴ Here is the rub, for Hegel. According to Hegel, that to which religious devotion aims should be beautiful, should be love objectified, love itself. Such love must, as I’ve shown throughout the current chapter, unite ideal and real. Objectified love must express this unity aesthetically and in so doing provide a relatively durable occasion for love as self-forgetfulness [*Selbstvergessenheit*], and a reversal of the calculative economy of propitiation initially sketched out as the notion of thanksgiving [*Dankbarkeit*] in Hegel’s *Stift* fragments. Such self-forgetfulness occurs where the subject *as* subject is forgotten in the beloved, but in the same gesture discovers itself in the beloved. Devotion to love objectified elicits a unification of life: thought and emotion, reason and sense, are at one.

Again, Hegel detects this form of beautiful unity in ancient Greek religion. “When lovers sacrifice [*opfern*] before the altar of the goddess of love,” the image of the life unified through love endures in the form of the statue of the Goddess. The lovers feel an emotional unity with the deity to which they are devoted, and to one another. The feeling of love, itself, may be fleeting, but an enduring object remains, an emblem of that higher form of unity—between human

⁴² 1 Cor. 11:17-34.

⁴³ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 250; *Theologisches Jugendschriften*, 299.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251; 299.

individuals and their fellows, sensuality and reason, inclination and duty. Nearly the opposite is true with Jesus's attempt to render his teaching "objective" for the imagination. In the Eucharist or "love feast," the corporeal form of love objectified "vanishes and only the living feeling is present."⁴⁵ Hegel compares the failure of the shared meal to provide an enduring image of love to the economy of reading: thought becomes a written word, and is transformed back again to thought in the act of reading—the comparison would only be more apt if the written letter itself disappeared after it was comprehended.⁴⁶ The problem is that the objectivity of the object—subjective love made objective in an image—is annulled as such, rather than merely suspended. The annulment of the object itself, rather than of the objectivity of the object through love, means that the necessary imaginative synthesis of feeling and intellect, inclination and rationality, has not been achieved:

Fancy [*Phantasie*] cannot bring them together in a beautiful image. The bread and the wine...can never rouse the feeling of love [*Liebe*]; this feeling can never be found in them as seen objects since there is a contradiction between it and the sensation of actually absorbing the food and drink, of their becoming subjective. There is no unification of the two. The intellect contradicts feeling and vice versa...Something divine was promised and it melted away in the mouth.⁴⁷

Reflection destroys the unity of love, sunders its moments into subject and object. Instead of being left with a feeling of unity and love, Christians conclude the Eucharist with a feeling of melancholy and bafflement, Hegel claims. This gesture makes of Christianity an expression of infinite longing, rather than integral freedom. The "love feast" is a deficient gesture for giving sacrificial love a concrete form in the imagination. They are left with a kind of abstract "faith" in

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 252-253; 300-301.

a reconciliation that has been promised, but not attained. Where the moments of the Eucharist fall apart, reflective understanding is re-engaged, and “[t]he infinite cannot be carried in this vessel.”⁴⁸

The need to express self-sacrificial love in some product of the imagination is only answered in the aftermath of Jesus’s death. Jesus’s body, like the bread of the “love feast,” disappears. In the figure of the “risen” Christ, the early Christian community finds a representation of sacrificial love in the person of Jesus that can both stimulate the religious imagination and elicit the response of love. “In the risen Jesus, lifted up heavenward, the image found life again, and love found the objectification of its oneness.”⁴⁹ This provides an objectification of the shared love and life of the early Christians, but also reinforced their opposition to nature, to the objective. Jesus’s apotheosis in the shared religious imagination of the Apostles is the objectification of their shared life, expressed through self-sacrificial love. In order to support a modern *Volksreligion*, the idea of the risen Jesus must achieve the two conditions I mentioned above: it must render love reflexive and, by that same token, obviate the tendency of Jesus and his followers to retreat into subjectivity. The Eucharist and Jesus’s apotheosis are both attempts to achieve something along such lines that, *eo ipso*, fail. As the Christian community spreads, Hegel claims, the criterion of faith in the risen Jesus makes the ideal of love itself something *positive*.

Since the love of the group had overreached itself by being spread out over a whole assembly of people and therefore was now filled with an ideal content but was deficient in life, the bare ideal of love was something “positive” for it. It recognized [its ideal,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 253; 302.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 292; 334.

Jesus] as set over against itself and itself as dependent on it. In its spirit lay the consciousness of discipleship and of a lord and master.⁵⁰

Jesus's doctrine of self-sacrificial love can, as I've argued, be understood in Hegel's texts as a corrective to suppressive and economic conceptions of sacrifice. This corrective to the theory of the meaning of sacrificial actions constituted a new understanding of subjectivity constituted and renewed through love. Ultimately, Jesus hoped his teachings would militate against the religious dualism, heteronomous authority, and an ethos of submission. But apparently "Christianity" reproduces these features as it expands into a "world religion." Like the transcendent deity of Abraham, Jesus, the apotheosis of integral, self-sacrificial love, becomes a heteronomous, alien being. The "spiritual" unity becomes the distant aspiration of the community.

"This is the point at which the group is caught in the toils of fate, even though, on the strength of the love that maintained itself in its purity outside every tie and with the world, it seemed to have evaded fate altogether."⁵¹ According to Hegel then, the apotheosis of Jesus fails to render love reflexive in a shared religious imagination in such a way as to obviate the opposition of the individual to God and the world, and the ethos of withdrawal as a means to preserve "beauty of soul" evinced in love. Why did the ethos of Christian love fail to sustain a *Volksreligion*? Since the ideal of love was, for the followers of Jesus, primarily something *felt*, it was necessary to render love reflexive through the imaginary forms and performances of religion, to have a store of shared representations that could continue to "show" what could not be "said" by way of discursive rationality. An "objectification" of love was needed to make the way of life and form of community enjoined by Jesus to be sustainable and concrete.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 294; 336.

⁵¹ Ibid., 295; 336.

The first deliberate attempt at such “objectification” of love was the shared meal. But the commensality of Jesus and his followers, which would become the model of the Eucharist, failed to provide a representation which could effectively sustain the syntheses present in the feeling of love. This was because, as a merely fleeting representation, the bread and wine passed away almost immediately in the act of eating. The meal thus gave rise, Hegel claims, to a dissatisfied confusion [*Vermischung*] of subject and object, rather than their unity in something beautiful, an occasion for devotion, for renewed self-sacrifice. The next attempt to objectify the synthesis of self-sacrificial love was the interpretation of Jesus’s death as followed by resurrection as Spirit [*Geist*]. The idea of the *risen* Jesus, alive and present within the community that bore kerygmatic witness to his teachings, provided a criterion to which the various forms of Christian community could appeal as the basis of their shared life. Like the bread and wine, both the power and the limitations of the figure of the resurrected, spiritual Christ are a matter of the disappearance of the empirical. It was only through the complete negation of the person of Jesus that his “spiritual” significance as Christ became plain. While this was a more enduring symbol in Hegel’s reckoning, it too eventuated in a sort of confusion of the terms of the opposition, rather than their stable synthesis, Hegel claims. This confusion is particularly apparent in the dissatisfactory account of the way in which the self-sacrificial love of God and the self-sacrificial response of the human are correlated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In other words, Hegel’s dissatisfaction with Christianity centers on its inability to properly cognize the negativity as expressive of unity. The kenotic dynamic of Jesus’s death—the disappropriation of his putatively divine nature, and its reappropriation in the resurrection leads the religious imagination to oscillate between terms. This attack on the kenotic model of sacrifice—taken along with Hegel’s remarks from the “*Glauben is die Art...*” fragments—

indicates a conceptual clarification of what is ultimately at stake in the question of sacrificial negativity as early as the *Stift* fragments. The oscillation of the terms means that one gains its identity in the other, and thus reopening the gap that propitiative or economic sacrifices, decried by Hegel as self-defeating reproductions of heteronomy as early as his time at the *Stift*, aim to overcome. Kenotic sacrifice, in Hegel's view, attempts to raise the slippage or *Vermischung* of the oppositions of the understanding, into the realm of the religious imaginary. In its kenotic emphasis on the intractable paradox of the relation of finite human and infinite God, Christianity takes up the self-defeat and slippage of representation as a moment of religious representation as such. Indeed, it seems perhaps even to form the core of its religious consciousness. Clearly this does not accord with Hegel's desire to articulate the necessary conditions of a stable synthesis which produces a sort of "beautiful" spiritual equanimity in persons and institutions.

Could Christianity have amended its kenotic account of the self-divestment of divinity in such a way as to avoid this fate? Hegel's response to the question verges on Nestorian.⁵² "The form of the servant, the humiliation in itself, as the veil of the divine nature, would present no obstacle to the urge for religion if only the real human form had been satisfied to be a mere veil and pass away." This is manifestly *not* what occurs in the story of resurrection, however, Hegel contends. "But this real human form is supposed to remain fixed and permanent in God, belonging to His essence, and it is to the individual that prayer is to be offered. The veil stripped

⁵² Chapter Five will treat Hegel's revaluation of kenotic sacrifice in the context of the speculative project. At this point, however, it is helpful simply to bear in mind how radically Hegel reverses course with respect to kenosis and, in that connection, Christology, by the time the contours of the mature project have come into focus for him. Hegel's later position on these issues, by way of contrast with the passages above, is stated with clarity in Cyril O'Regan's excellent *The Heterodox Hegel* (1994): "The overall context of Hegelian kenosis can be labelled Monophysite [...] It is...Hegel's view that the human *is* the alienated form of the divine and that suffering and death are nothing but the extreme of such alienation." O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 220.

off in the grave, the real human form, has risen again out of the grave and attached itself to the one who is risen.”⁵³

Such an attempt to render self-sacrifice reflexive in religion ultimately leads Christianity, like the Abrahamic fate to which it opposed itself, to become a religion based on a transcendent, alien power. The Apostles’ visions of miracles after Jesus’s death are understood to answer the “need” of religion to present sacrificial love in an “objectified” form. But because of the paradoxical character of kenosis and resurrection—an infinite which negates itself to become finite, a finitude which negates its negativity in order to ascend to the infinite—a lasting synthesis in the imagination cannot be established. Rather, in this event, the ideal, principle, or criterion whereby sacrificial love is imagined and rendered reflexive merely “hovers” between infinite and finite.⁵⁴ As in the case of the Eucharist, the idea of a risen Christ oscillates between divine and human, alive and dead, celestial and terrestrial. “By conjoining the man Jesus with the glorified and deified Jesus, this vagueness pointed to a satisfaction of the deepest urge for religion, but it did not provide this satisfaction, and the urge was thus turned into an endless, unquenchable and unappeased longing.”⁵⁵ Jesus resurrected can only be grasped through faith, clung to, pined for. His, and subsequently his followers’, attempts to overcome the limits of reflectively constituted, “positive” religion failed. God’s goodness, power, and life fall on the one side, the world and its vicissitudes on the other. “In all the forms of Christian religion which

⁵³ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 293; *Theologisches Jugendschriften*, 335.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 293; 335.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 300; 341.

have been developed in advancing the fate of ages, there lies this fundamental characteristic of opposition in the divine which is supposed to be present in consciousness only, never in life.”⁵⁶

How then to understand the frustrated potential of Jesus’s message of love? Though his message anticipates what Hegel has come to understand as the integral freedom of sacrificial love, Jesus historically fails to achieve the mythopoetic standard articulated in the “Oldest System-Program” (1797), or to maintain the counter-economic, non-dualistic sacrificial gesture of *Dankbarkeit*. The idea of love is meant to provide a form of unification and self-reparation of life, a transcendence of its finitude and an overcoming of its enmities. But it leads, as I’ve shown in my treatment of the Hegelian text, to a withdrawal from all concretion and objectivity. Anywhere that a commitment might sully its inner unity of duty and inclination, love recoils. From any entanglement that threatens to turn its non-economic sacrifices into deferrals, into occasions of “holding something back,” love withdraws. Jesus attempts to overcome the opposition of subject and object through appeal to the integral ideal of love and *eo ipso* reproduces it, now as an opposition of the living Spirit of the community and the dead, objective world excluded from the fullness of love, Hegel believes. In order to surmount this difficulty, Jesus’s ethos of sacrificial love must become “reflexive,” i.e., it must develop an imaginative shape that allows it durability and flexibility, that allows it to insinuate itself into novel situations. According to Hegel, however, Jesus’s *Liebesmahl* merely confuses the subject and object, the unity conceived now as expression of the former, now the latter, and through eating and drinking, the former once again. The same disappointment is occasioned by the “miraculous” events of the Resurrection that also seem to oscillate between finite and infinity, as

⁵⁶ Ibid., 301; 341.

opposed to offering a stable synthesis of the two. The infinite only becomes manifest as its self-negation in the finite, the finite only expressive of the infinite by passing through death. No stable mythopoetic synthesis is achieved, the opposition between the divine spirit and the world is reintroduced, and Christianity comes to present a positive religion whose major characteristics are oscillation, longing, and dissatisfaction. Rather than becoming a religion of life unified through love, Christianity expresses a kind of infinite grief, oscillation—a path of despair [*Verzweiflung*].⁵⁷

Given Hegel's account of "positive" religion in 1796, it is clear his understanding of Christianity's spiritual "grief" and its imaginative oscillation between subject and object, God and human, death and life, is traceable to the structure of "understanding" [*Verstand*] itself. Already we saw that positivity was a matter of religion providing the wrong kind of synthesis, one forged through reflection, that sought unity in an object of theoretical knowledge or a subject of practical rationality. For Hegel, much as fidelity to Abraham's ideal of self-mastery led to its self-subversion, so also did fidelity to Jesus's ideal of love. The attempt to overcome the ethos of withdrawal in the latter only produced confused representations that oscillated between the oppositions they sought to overcome. Kenotic sacrifice, the divestment of the divine nature in death and its reappropriation in the resurrection and Holy Spirit was particularly egregious in this regard, Hegel notes.

⁵⁷ The idea of "despair" [*Verzweiflung*] will, of course, get its most famous Hegelian treatment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, I offer something like a pre-history of the concept in Hegel's works, linked to the problem of difference or duality, hence sacrifice. In addition to having a rich and fascinating story in the development of the characteristically Hegelian position, the concept has a career that spans a wide range of post-Hegelian sources which self-consciously adopt and transform this Hegelian concept in radical ways. For selective analyses of the transcendental, religious, and political after-lives of Hegelian *Verzweiflung*, Cf. Robyn Marasco, *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory After Hegel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

It is necessary then to attempt a reconstruction of the questions that must have animated Hegel moving forward. In my view, such questions must have looked something akin to these:

(1) What form should a successful religion of sacrificial love take? It must be rendered reflexive in such a way as not to reproduce the oppositions of the understanding that divide “life” against itself. Crucially then, (2) how can any religion achieve such a feat, if the realm of religion is essentially the expression of the practical structure of sacrificial love in some object for the imagination? Is not the task of mythopoesis destined to reproduce these oppositions, since the very oppositions of love to duty, life to death—indeed of unity to opposition *as such*, is implied in its theoretical underpinnings? If so, (3) is a new strategy necessary—one that does not rely upon the finite understanding and that, rather than seeking a third term that is ready to hand, would rather radicalize the tension between such oppositions as a means to grasp their inner unity? (4) To that end, might Christianity’s putative “confusion” of subject and object in Eucharistic and especially kenotic sacrifice mark a new point of departure for passing beyond the finitude of the understanding?

Hegel poses the third and fourth questions to himself, after a fashion, in two rather obscure fragments written in Frankfurt in 1800. Here, I surmise, we find Hegel’s last stab at understanding the necessary conditions of the mythopoetic task of “founding” a religion capable of expressing a “monotheism of reason and heart” and a “polytheism of imagination and art,”⁵⁸ now by turning to the concept of “Life.” It is also the first text in which Hegel offers a speculative justification for a rehabilitation of Christianity, specifically its kenotic and incarnational valence. This rehabilitation, I will argue in Chapter Four, is the single most

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 617; “Earliest System-Program of German Idealism” in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 111.

dramatic about-face in Hegel's development, which is otherwise largely a patient and methodical articulation and interrogation of the theoretical frameworks and suppositions required of this practical project. Furthermore, the retrieval of kenotic sacrifice as the template for a logic of speculative unity or *coincidentia oppositum* forms the basis both for Hegel's critical appropriation, and eventually rejection, of Schelling's identity philosophy.

Through the idea of kenotic self-emptying, Hegel finds an avenue to transform Schelling's intuitive approach to the *Indifferenzpunkt* of the real and the ideal into a method of phenomenological description and conceptual demonstration. The sacrificial imaginary of Christianity, with its focus on the kenotic incarnation, death, and resurrection, provides the imaginative template of a Speculative Idea realized through the power of its own immanent negativity. The System arises from Hegel's reflexive account of the conceptual significance of kenotic sacrifice.

CHAPTER FIVE

The conceptual significance that kenotic sacrifice takes on in the transition from the project of critical mythopoetics of *Volksreligion* to speculative philosophy as such first appears in Hegelian philosophy where the problem of “death” is insinuated in the context of the essential unity of ontotheology, the comprehensive conceptual determination of the infinite and finite as integral, mutually necessary moments of the Absolute.¹ At this stage, Hegel nominates the notion of “Life” [*Leben*] as capable of holding these two moments together, and the role of religion as to “represent” this unity. But within this “infinite life,” death appears as the most potent expression of the paradoxical relation between infinite and finite. In other words, the radical negativity of death expresses the central *aporia* of an attempt at an *absolute* idealism—the opposition between finite and infinite, difference as such, or the problem of “the negative” itself. During the Jena period, Hegel retrieves and deploys the language of kenotic sacrifice in a revaluation of negativity and in the development of a method of conceptual demonstration, both of which militate against what he takes to be shortcomings in the Schellingian approach to the Absolute. Textually speaking, we can trace this shift to Hegel’s final days in Frankfurt.

Hegel’s dissatisfaction with the kenotic representation of sacrificial love as a practical structure of reconciliation to the Absolute was, in the end, a short-lived affair. In a little more than a year, Hegel apparently reverses his assessment of the kenotic model of sacrifice. As I will

¹ In this I depart somewhat from the recent attempt by Alex Dubilet in *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern* (2018) to recast Hegel as a thinker of “letting go.” While I agree with Dubilet’s emphasis on *Entäußerung* as the central phenomenon of Hegelian thought, I fundamentally disagree with the accuracy (if not the spirit) of Dubilet’s assertion that Hegel’s kenotic dimension uncouples his thought from ontotheo-logy. On the contrary, it is precisely the onto-theo-logical question toward which Hegelian *Entäußerung* is the solution, as is evident in the problems surrounding the representation of “Life” in the 1800 System. Resistance to this tendency in Hegel’s works then—as Dubilet convincingly and correctly indicates—ought to be mounted on this point.

argue in the following chapter, Hegel comes to believe that in fact, the radicalization of difference that occurs in the representation of kenotic sacrifice marks the path forward for speculative philosophy, and does so in several ways. Decisively, it allows Hegel to formulate a logic that he believes comprehends the dissolution of the *aporia* above—not merely “represents” but *conceptually expresses* the “identity of identity and non-identity [*Identität und Nichtidentität*].”²

The first intimations of a rehabilitation of kenosis in Hegel’s work are found in the fragments of the 1800 System. It is in that text that Hegel for the first time realizes that an attempt to grasp the infinite organically, i.e., as infinite “life,” must necessarily include “death” and “the dead.” The finite actualizes itself as a moment of the infinite only through its self-negation and simultaneous self-preservation. The infinite self-negates while remaining itself and thus expresses itself in the finite. Hegel’s famous “power of the negative” finds its initial expressions in this retrieval of kenotic sacrifice as uniting finite and infinite as mutually expressive moments. Via the retrieval of kenotic sacrifice, Hegel comes to see infinite and the finite, the identity of their identity and difference, constituted only through these mutual self-negations. These negations are the immanent expression of a single, integral totality becoming reflexive. In elaborating this line of thought, Hegel situates religion on the terrain of a transcendental antinomy or *aporia*. Thinking of religion in these terms, Hegel immediately turns to the incarnational, Trinitarian, and Paschal language which he previously found so problematic. It is this kenotic sacrificial imagination that Hegel deploys as way of sketching his new approach in occasional (but always decisive) remarks in his Jena writings. Hegel’s retrieval of kenotic

² Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*. Bd. 4.,64; *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System*, 156.

sacrifice ultimately sets him on a different course than Schelling, as I will show below. To understand how this kenotic turn features in the emergence of Hegel's distinctive idealism, we need must reconstructing Hegel's shift toward this interpretation of sacrifice, in relation to death, representation, and cognition. And, as I will broach in the conclusion, it is through resistance to Hegel's formulation that these tendencies might be rejected while retaining, transforming, and subverting Hegelian mediation.

The kenotic turn culminates in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* aspires to be a kenotic act. In Christianity, *Entäußerung* or "kenosis" is presented in its representational form, according to Hegel. In the *Phenomenology*, it is deployed as a way of mapping out the immanent dialectical self-subversions of phenomena as they are elevated into reflexive self-comprehension through experience [*Erfahrung*]. This plays out in the *Phenomenology* in at least three critical ways: First, we find in Hegel's conception of kenotic self-sacrifice a representational template for what Hyppolite identifies as that text's "double task: to drive [*conduire*] naïve consciousness to philosophical knowledge and, on the other hand, to make individual consciousness emerge from its supposed isolation, its exclusive being-for-self [*êtres-pour-soi*], in order to elevate it to Spirit [*pour l'élever à l'esprit*]." ³ Kenosis provides an immanent model of critical rationality wherein finite, abstract identities reveal themselves to be constituted vis-à-vis their negation and recuperated in more fully specified and concrete conceptual determinations. This immanent model of rationality pushes the individual

³ Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, tome 2, 311.

consciousness out of its “supposed isolation”⁴ into the “indiscrete continuity”⁵ of Spirit as intersubjective through acts of kenotic sacrifice in confession and forgiveness.⁶ Kenosis, as confession and forgiveness, thus actualizes a community of mutually recognizant subjects. Kenotic sacrifice serves as the representational template of a model of subjectivation we find in the *Phenomenology* and that persists throughout Hegel’s works—the negation of immediacy and the internalization of this negation. The Spirit grasps here for the first time its own concept, and “steps out” [*aus...einschreitet*] from the abstract opposition of reflective determinations. Understood as absolute, such oppositions appeared as the basic presuppositions and enabling conditions of “positive” religion in his earlier writings. Such religions attempted to “unite what cannot be united” through a “bad infinite” of propitiatory sacrifices that serve to reproduce the oppositions they are leveraged to overcome.⁷ By virtue of the kenotic model of sacrifice, whereby the “supposed isolation” of morally and epistemically normative individuals is overcome, Spirit leaves behind the abstract opposition of the “the colorful appearances of the sensible here-and-now [*Diesseits*] and the empty night of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual day of the present.”⁸ But emergence from “isolation” into this kenotically constituted, inter-subjectively mediated, self-consciousness is the “turning-point”

⁴ Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, tome 2, 311.

⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 494; *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by AV Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 409.

⁶ See the chapter on “Morality” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. For a lucid, in-depth analysis of the role of confession and forgiveness in that work, Cf. Molly Farneth, *Hegel’s Social Ethics: Religion, Conflict, and Rituals of Reconciliation* (2017).

⁷ Cf., e.g., Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, Text 42, “Glauben ist die art...” 12; Text 50, “So Wie Mehrere Gattungen...,” 97; *Gesammelte Werke*. 4., 12-13; *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, 89-91.

⁸ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 145; *Phenomenology*, 110-111 (Translation modified).

[*Wendungspunkt*] of the Spirit's kenotic self-expression. It is *not* its final result.⁹ This kenotically constituted, mediate identity must be rendered reflexive. This means passing from the representational apprehension of the absolute realizing itself in the kenotic gestures of this community (in the dialectic of religion that culminates in Christianity) to the conceptual sublation of this kenotic process as conceptual necessity (in the passage from religion to speculative philosophy). In other words, the kenotic community of recognition is the necessary but insufficient condition of a speculative science. This science can only be realized where the self-conception of this community vis-à-vis the Absolute is realized in *cognition*. Through the dialectic of religion, the sacrificial imagination of Spirit sublates itself, passing from a seemingly contingent relation between discrete representations (Father, Son, Spirit) into conceptual necessity, then as the "eternal" kenosis [*ein ewig Entäußerung*] of nature, and finally as a return-to-self as the Idea of Absolute Spirit. Absolute Spirit is—in varying degrees, according to its configuration—the reflexive comprehension of kenosis—the logos which externalizes itself and returns to itself as thought. All this is to insist that the language of kenotic sacrifice as Hegel deploys it in the *Phenomenology* is not accidental to the development of the system, is not mere rhetorical flourish. The kenotic self-negation recuperated as "Spirit" is not merely an item in Hegel's methodological imaginary or a discrete, if pivotal, performative moment within the emergence of the system. Rather, kenosis is the representational expression of the Idea's concretization and recuperation as thought. Per Hegel, the kenosis of the self-sacrificing God presents the basic conceptual features of the Speculative Idea in an antecedent, religious form, and the *Phenomenology* responds to that kenotic outpouring in kind. The result of Hegel's

⁹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 145; *Phenomenology*, 110.

kenotic phenomenology is the achievement of the task he sets for speculative thought in 1802 in *Glauben und Wissen* where Hegel explicitly and unequivocally links the sublation of abstraction both in religion and transcendental philosophy with the speculative interpretation of kenotic sacrifice. The passage is worth quoting at length:

The pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness [*Abgrund des Nichts*], in which all being [*Seyn*] sinks, must signify the infinite grief [*unendlichen Schmerz*] which previously existed historically in culture and in feeling, and on which the religion of the new era [*Zeit*] is based, the feeling: God himself is dead. By marking this purely as a moment of the highest Idea, but merely as a moment, the pure concept gives philosophical existence [*eine philosophische Existenz gegeben*] to what was once either the moral prescription of a self-sacrifice of the empirical being [*einer Aufopferung des empirischen Wesen*] or the concept of formal abstraction. It must thus retrieve for philosophy the idea of absolute freedom and with it, the idea of absolute suffering [*Leiden*], or the speculative Good Friday [*speculativen Charfreitag*] which was formerly only historical.¹⁰

In the elevation of the “historical” Good Friday to the “speculative Good Friday,” the God which died *in* representation now dies *as* representation. The negation of immediacy, or here the “empirical being,” the correlate of representational thinking, is grasped as a moment of the essence of speculative identity as such. The kenotic gesture Hegel once interpreted as “confusion” [*Vermischung*] is now revalued as nothing less than the *via regia* from narrative representation of the Absolute to its conceptual self-expression as thought, from abstract finitude to concrete infinity. In other words, by expressing identity in difference, the kenotic imaginary of Christianity provides the template for a logic of Becoming [*Werden*] and displays the power of Spirit [*die Kraft des Geistes*] “in remaining the selfsame Spirit in its kenosis [*Entäußerung*].”¹¹

¹⁰ Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen, als Kantische, Jacobische, und Fichesche Philosophie in Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977) 190-191 (Translation modified).

¹¹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 588; *Phenomenology*, 490.

In what follows, I will trace how Hegel comes to this decisive turning point in his development. First, I will look to a series of fragments written in his latter days in Frankfurt, to show how Hegel's consideration of destructive, substitutionary sacrifice in the maintenance of "infinite life" leads him to a reconsideration of the speculative valence of Christianity and a reappropriation of its "sad" affects. I will show how these deployments of kenotic language shape Hegel's critical appropriation and transformation of Schelling's intuitive approach to the Absolute in his Jena period works leading up to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Finally, I will offer a reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a kenotic act which tracks, for Hegel, the transition from *Vorstellung* to *Darstellung*, from a religious representation of the Absolute, to its philosophical comprehension. In particular, I will attend to the ways in which kenotic sacrifice serves in Hegel's *Phenomenology* to establish the basic features of the Hegelian "method" and the way in which this addresses the problem of death as the quasi-transcendental condition of onto-theo-logical unity in the Concept.

Life, Death, and Sacrifice in the 1800 System

There are two major steps that occasion the transition from the early Frankfurt models of sacrifice to those deployed and developed in Jena. The first is Hegel's recognition of the paradoxical relation of death to the absolute, and the problem and promise this held for post-Kantian idealisms. Second is the insistence on Hegel's part that the respective self-negations of the infinite and the finite mark their point of absolute identity. Taken together, these set the stage for the rehabilitation of Christianity within Hegel's system. The different critical, social, and metaphysical valences of this retrieval are unified under the theological figure of kenotic sacrifice. Kenosis or 'self-emptying' serves as the imaginative sketch of a reconciliation of finite and infinite, subject and substance. Kenosis takes its final, 'logical' form in Hegel's Speculative

Idea, a “logos” that expresses itself through its self-negation, that actualizes identity through exposure of the self-identical “gathering” logos to self-dispersal and rupture. Hegel’s rehabilitation of these dogmatic features of Christianity, as I have suggested, do not stem from a rejection of his initial understanding of the discursive, psychological, and metaphysical upshot of *kenosis*, but rather through a reappraisal of them. Hegel maintains the view that *kenosis* leads to *Vermischung* of understanding, *Schmerz* in affect, and to the inclusion of “death” as moment of divine life. But in 1800, Hegel completely revalues this instability and reverses his thinking about the role that these effects of the kenotic imagination could play within contemporary philosophy and in the constitution of a religion adequate to supporting a non-dualistic conception of human freedom.

These two steps noted above also mark a shift in Hegel’s task toward more decidedly theoretical issues. This shift parallels the rehabilitation of kenotic sacrifice and the abandonment of the goal of retrieving a Hellenic past. The set of problems to which “sacrifice” is, in various forms, an answer (e.g., the relation of the human to the divine, of the individual to community, of sensible inclination to rational duty) all slowly coalesce in Hegel’s early writings toward the problem of the relation of subjectivity and objectivity vis-à-vis the Absolute, as treated especially in the Frankfurt fragments. There, I argued, Hegel begins to associate the problems plaguing the practical structure of sacrifice with the theoretical problem of the finite oppositions of *Verstand*. In the fragments of the 1800 System, composed toward the end of Hegel’s time in Frankfurt, Hegel argues that the most radical expression of such oppositions is to be found in the dialectical opposition of “infinite life” on one side, vis-à-vis “death” and “the dead” on the other. The absolute as “infinite life” must, if it is to be “absolute” in the sense of existing *in se* and cognized *per se*, include opposition to death and the dead. Here the kernel of the problem of uniting the

subject and object, ideal and real, appears in its most radical form: the requirement for a conceptual framework that can comprehend dialectical opposites—presented here in no less dramatic terms than an infinite unity of “life” and “death” themselves.

Thus, for the true Absolute to emerge, this opposition must be overcome at least in the aesthetic and representational forms that populate the religious imagination. For Hegel, acts of sacrifice, we shall see, fulfill such a function by allowing the subject to imagine its disappearance while yet remaining, to negate itself while simultaneously conserving itself. Destructive sacrifice represents the irreducible non-presence of the disappearance of the subject absent which the infinite cannot be represented. This marks a decisive step for Hegel’s development, on my reading. It carries the significance of the practical structure of sacrifice and its meaning within the religious imagination into closer proximity with the theoretical problems with which Schelling had been grappling for the better part of the decade. Developed to their conclusions, Schelling argues, both dogmatism and criticism seek to appropriate “death” or “destruction” [*Zerstörung*]: for the former the self is nothing—only a moment of the objective state of things. To know itself as it in truth is would require resignation of itself to death and thus to passage into a purely objective configuration—to realize that one’s subjectivity is merely a play of objective realities is to rehearse in the imagination the fact that one’s subjectivity will, in death, disappear completely. For the latter, critical perspective, the transcendental self is the principle of everything, and to realize this truth systematically means to turn each object into an occasion for the expression of the activity of the subject, for the object to “die” before the subject, to submit itself as object to the subject.¹² That is to say, in seeking to integrate these two

¹² Cf. Schelling, “Neunter Brief” in *Philosophisches Briefe*, *Werke* 3.

a priori frameworks according to their respective methodological and metaphysical presuppositions, one can only end with the annihilation of one or the other, an exclusive disjunction between passivity and activity conceived now from this side, now from the other. But either form of such a gesture would not be a true unification of the perspectives, but only a reduction of one to the other, the reinstatement of opposition, and the reproduction of heteronomy. Does the “negative” unity implied in the opposition of the understanding, practically expressed as economies of sacrifice, point the way to a “positive” conception of the unity of subject and object? The question of a sacrificial economy in cognition of the subject or the object anticipates what ultimately distinguishes Hegel’s method of determinate negation from Schelling’s method of quantitative ‘potentiation’ and ‘de-potentiation,’ namely, an answer to the following question: how can the infinite express itself in the finite while remaining identical to itself? A retrieval of kenotic sacrifice, interpreted as the mutual “emptying” of the finite and the infinite, provides the representational anticipation of this infinite logical *Idea* that contains the negative within itself, articulated as self-negation and recuperation.

It is in the fragments of the 1800 System that Hegel articulates the problem of death as the impetus for his retrieval of a kenotic interpretation of sacrifice via Christianity. The text represents, in my view, the definitive point of transition from Hegel’s project. Here, the mythopoetics of love set the stage for a project of retrieval in the context of speculative philosophy as such. An analysis of the metaphysical meaning of sacrificial gestures in the context of a metaphysics of “infinite Life,” once again, seems to form the crux of the argument. For the mediating function of sacrifice as a practical structure to be taken up in the religious imagination of a community and to be stable and deployable in various contexts, the oppositional character of the reflective standpoint itself must be overcome. In pursuit of this, Hegel’s

language in the 1800 fragments suggest that a rehabilitation of Christian sacrifice, specifically the idea of incarnation and death as *kenosis* are adequate to this task. This realization marks, as Stephen Crites notes, a “point of no return” for Hegel.¹³ And this is not a passing phase or a rhetorical flourish. During his time in Jena, the idea of kenotically achieved self-identity—self-identity realized through self-negation—takes on a deeper and broader significance as it becomes directed toward a specifically theoretical task. As Hegel transitions into identity philosophy and eventually articulates his own system, kenotic sacrifice becomes the model of speculative cognition itself.

At the risk of understatement, these texts represent perhaps the single most significant and dramatic shift in Hegel’s thought.¹⁴ In the space of one or perhaps two years, Hegel does a complete about-face on the speculative meaning of kenotic sacrifice. In 1798/99, Hegel insists that the kenotic imaginary of the Eucharist, and the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus constitute a “confusion” or a “mix-up” [*Vermischung*] of subject and object. By 1800-1801 Hegel has revalued incarnation [*Menschenwerden*] as the privileged representation of negativity that solves the “problem” whereby sacrifice reproduces the oppositions it aims to overcome and, by extension, that it thus may provide a path whereby a speculative solution to antinomies of transcendental reflection is possible. By 1802, the theme of self-sacrifice, which conditions the genesis of Hegel’s shift to incarnational language, appears again in the explication of dogmatic Christianity’s speculative meaning. In *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel claims that kenosis is the form of sacrifice absent which no true speculative identity of subject and object, of identity and

¹³ Stephen Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel in the Development of Hegel’s Thinking* (Penn State Press, 2008), 124.

¹⁴ Cf. Catherine Malabou, *L’Avenir de Hegel: Plasticité, Temporalité, Dialectique* (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1996), 148.

difference, can be articulated, lest it fall into an abyss of abstraction. The central aim of speculative thought is to overcome the merely historical and moral interpretations of self-sacrifice, to grasp in them that the self-sacrifice of God and of humanity are contiguous, moments of the same immanent movement of the Absolute's self-articulation. This reaches its dramatic culmination in the Jena writings in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, written in 1806. There, the kenotic ideal is deployed constructively as the *via regia* to speculative philosophy, the necessary negative propaedeutic of constitutively auto-critical experience on its way to the Absolute Idea.

How are we to understand this radical change of heart? What occasions it? The stakes of such questions are high. Hegel's early writings are focused on a more or less stable constellation of problems and his developing positions on these problems is marked by slow, patient development. At no point does Hegel seem to give up the idea that a certain form of religion will be required to support a sustainable process of modernization in Europe (though his understanding of the conceptual priority of religion and philosophy does indeed change). Nor does he ever come to reject either the commitment to rational freedom on the one hand, or an integral, non-dualistic conception of reality on the other (though the understanding of how a unity of these two ideals is possible also undergoes changes, as we have seen throughout this dissertation). These are the touchstones of Hegel's position from his earliest works until the end, and are the crucible of his idealism, reflected in various models of sacrifice that Hegel adopts over the course of his early career. By comparison, the reversal on the status of kenotic sacrifice, where this implies for Hegel the inclusion of finitude as a moment of the infinite, appears somewhat abrupt. Textually, the inflection point for this change in the metaphysical status of kenotic sacrifice can be more or less precisely located when juxtaposed with later Christological

features of the Jena accounts of Absolute Spirit. This reversal on the metaphysical status of kenotic self-dispossession as a model for the mediated unity of divine and human antedates, and, I believe, conditions the shift from a somewhat romantic conception of religion in the context of post-Kantian idealism on Hegel's part, to a fully and absolutely idealist one. The inflection point is where Hegel begins to appreciate death as an intractable transcendental problem, and begins to interpret religious sacrifice as the religious representation of this problem, as well as an attempt to respond to it. His gesture of a retrieval of Christian kenosis accords precisely to the *aporia* of death in representing the infinite, which Hegel understands during this period of his career as "Life". To grasp the infinite would mean passing beyond the limits of one's finitude. But to pass beyond one's finitude is, in a sense, also to affirm it as a limit that has thus been transcended. To transcend one's own finitude, what is required is a passing through, and making sense, of death as a "moment" of the integral whole of the infinite "Life." The passivity of idealist subjectivity before death must be accounted for. Looking to the fragments of the 1800 System, it is clear that Hegel now sees sacrifice as the religious response to a transcendental antinomy that is more radically expressed in the problematic status of death as it figures in this idealism. A logic of sacrifice appears as a response to the quasi-transcendental status of death for speculative cognition, and thus forms the beating heart of Hegel's emerging idealist synthesis.

Philosophy, Hegel claims, can indicate the rational necessity for an absolute synthesis, but never achieve it because of its character as "reflection" [*Reflexion*]. In this text, not unlike Hölderlin's fragment "*Über Urheil und Seyn*," thinking indicates the regulative ideal of the *ens realissimum*, but cannot cognize it. The identity of any content in the reflective understanding is constituted through exclusion or negation. Ergo "[r]eflection is thus driven on without a place to

rest [*Fortgetriebenwerden ohne Ruhepunkt*]].¹⁵ This restlessness is checked by a “being exterior to reflection [*ein Seyn ausser der Reflexion*]”¹⁶ in which reflective opposition and identity are united, Hegel claims. The fragments of this “system” can indicate the necessity of reconciliation to the infinite, but unlike in his later works, Hegel does not purport that the reconciliation of ideality and reality occurs within the system itself. The rites of religion, rather, must *enact* a unity that cannot be grasped by the understanding in as much as it presents the dialectical oppositions sketched above.

Both unity and opposition must themselves be held together: the true Absolute, “infinite life” must be expressed as “the union [*Verbindung*] of union and non-union [*Nichtverbindung*].”¹⁷ In other words, the problem is not the inadequacy of some specific finite determination of the understanding [*Verstand*] to grasp the Absolute, but of the interpretation of the standpoint of understanding as such—for understanding functions only through the positing of such distinctions. Its essential structure seems to prohibit the realization of such a speculative unity, at least where those distinctions or negations are themselves taken as absolute—again we are reminded of Hölderlin’s *Über Urtheil und Seyn*. Hegel’s earlier critical positions on religion (as found in writings from 1793-1797) are perhaps also implicated in this reproduction of

¹⁵ Hegel, “Über Religion” in *Gesammelte Werke 2, Frühe Schriften II; Miscellaneous Writings*, 154 (Translation modified).

¹⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 344; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154 (Translation modified).

¹⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werk 2*, 343-344; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154; This phrase anticipates Hegel’s later formulation, in the context of Identity Philosophy: “*Das Absolute selbst aber ist darum die Identität der Identität und Nichtidentität; Entgegensetzen und Einsseyn ist zugleich in ihm.*” Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie* in *Gesammelte Werke*. Bd. 4. “Jenaer Kritische Schriften.” Hrsg. von Hartmut Buchner und Otto Pöggeler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968) 64; G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy: An English Translation of G. W. F. Hegel’s Differenz Des Fichte’schen Und Schelling’schen Systems Der Philosophie*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris, First Edition edition (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 156.

opposition. Such an approach—like that of Kant—inevitably conceptualizes religion in terms of the *opposition* of opposition and non-opposition, the non-union of union and non-union, the unthinkability of the union of thinking and non-thinking, and, finally, life and death.

The only way to grasp the Absolute as the “union of union and non-union,” Hegel writes, is to overcome the limitations of the finite understanding, i.e., of reflective consciousness as such. This occurs in the recognition of the Absolute or infinite Life as Spirit [*Geist*], which takes place in religion. “This elevation [*Erhebung*] of man, not from the finite to the infinite (for these terms are only products of reflection, and as such their separation is absolute), but from finite life to infinite life, is religion. We may call infinite life a spirit [*Geist*] in contrast with the abstract multiplicity [*Vielheit*], for spirit is the living unity of the manifold...”¹⁸ Religion, Hegel continues, is “[t]he elevation [*Erhebung*] of human beings to infinite life.” The spatial metaphor of exteriority here is remarkable, and ties back to Hegel’s earlier Frankfurt writings on mythopoesis as the objectification of love. Love was described as the feeling of alienated-life’s self-reparation, a unity established between individuals and within the divided subject. Religion objectifies this for the imagination, *externalizes* this feeling in a representation, to which it attaches a moral and metaphysical significance. “When he takes the infinite life as the spirit of the whole and at the same time as a living being outside of himself [*zugleich ausser sich*] (since he himself is restricted), and when he puts himself at the same time outside his restricted self [*sich selbst zugleich ausser sich*] in rising toward the living being and intimately uniting himself with it, then he worships [*betet*] God.”¹⁹ Religious cognition and action are thus seen to be

¹⁸ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 153.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154 (Translation modified).

situated, for Hegel, at the very limits of transcendental reflection. They are expressive of the *a priori* structure of representational consciousness while, at the same time, they seem to point beyond it to something “exterior” to reflection. This exteriority is, increasingly, itself at issue for Hegel. The language of “externality” [*Äusserlichkeit*] clearly echoes the mythopoesis of love in the earlier Frankfurt writings and also anticipates the revaluation of kenosis [*Entäußerung*, or “externalization”], that are absolutely central to the speculative rendition of Christianity in the later Jena period. What sense can it make, however, to speak of infinite and the finite as alienated or exterior to one another? How can the metaphors of spatiality adduced by Hegel in this idealist reinterpretation of religious imagination and action be consonant with the object of religion, that is to say “infinite life”? What is negated cannot simply be left behind, lest it reproduce abstract, reflective opposition. That is to say, the negative cannot be excluded from the Absolute.

Although the manifold is here no longer regarded as isolated but is rather explicitly conceived as related to the living spirit, as animated, as organ, still something remains excluded, namely the dead, so that a certain opposition persists. In other words, when the manifold is conceived as an organ only, opposition to itself is excluded; but life cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as this opposition as well.²⁰

The problem is stated in its most radical form when posed with respect to the relationship of infinite life to death. How is it possible to represent the apparently absolute negativity of death within the horizon of the infinite life of Spirit? “Within the living whole there are posited at the same time death, opposition, and understanding...”²¹ Hegel has suggested that the reality of this absolute or infinite unity is, as such, “external” to reflection. But it can be intimated indirectly

²⁰ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 343; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154.

²¹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 344; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154.

through representation, Hegel suggests. In “religious life,” which Hegel has identified as the elevation of finite life (human beings) to its place within an infinite life, a spiritual movement that outstrips it, “both man’s relation to objects and also his action were interpreted as a preservation of objects in life or as an animation of them, but man was also reminded of his destiny, which demands of him that he...make of the living being an object.”²² In other words, the finite human can only imperfectly grasp the absolute as an “infinite Life” to which she belongs by means of the representation of her own disappearance, of the reduction of the subject to constituent objective elements—“abstract” negativity. It is only possible to imagine an absolute horizon, an infinite totality that outstrips and includes me if, as a finite being, I can represent the reality of my death, and in so doing intimate the reality of infinite life prior to my emergence as a subject and after my disappearance as a subject. In order to ascend to “infinite Life,” one must be exposed to absolute self-loss in death. Without recognizing the reality of death, it is not possible to represent a horizon that outstrips and outlasts what is present to the *I* that I am. Sacrificial offerings represent the self-loss of death—they remind humanity of its “destiny”—that must be included within “infinite Life” which, as we see above, Hegel has now begun to describe as *Geist*. “It is necessary that life should also put itself into a permanent relation [*bleibendes Verhältnis*] with objects and thus maintain their objectivity up to the point of their destruction [*Vernichtung*].”²³ Sacrifice contains a certain dual aspect, a destruction that is a conservation. The destruction of the object guarantees its objectivity vis-à-vis the subject that remains. The self-loss of the subject is intimated in the destruction of the object with which the

²² Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 345; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 155.

²³ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 346; 155 (Translation modified).

subject identifies, and hence is reminded of his “destiny.” This seems to repeat what we might understand as the opposed logics of sacrifice found in Schelling’s *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. There, Schelling claims that dogmatic rationalism is, as in the case of Spinoza, characterized by a logic of self-sacrifice: the subject’s disappearance into the infinite substance.²⁴ Critical thought, by contrast, implies the reduction of all objects to modifications of the self-positing subject, as in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.²⁵ The same question is implied in the interpretative dilemma of sacrifice as an economic or aneconomic movement, as *Sühnopfer* or *Dankbarkeit*. Is sacrifice primarily a matter of giving something away, or of receiving something in return? Or must it be conceived in a way that recollects the negation and internalizes it, such that the act of dispossession and recuperation are part of one and the same movement? In the young Hegel’s case, the logical dilemma of dogmatism and criticism can be overcome through religion, by appeal to an action that is both passivity and activity, a giving away that is also a receiving, the negation of the subject and the object, as well as their preservation in “infinite Life.”

The first instance of this impulse in Hegel’s work appears in his protodialectical approach to *Dankbarkeit* (1793) as a counter-gesture to economic sacrifice that suspends and preserves difference. Here however, Hegel turns his gaze forcefully toward the negativity implicit in the act of giving, relinquishing, self-impoverishment, or destruction, in order to bring to light the infinite presence intimated in disappearance. The turn toward an interrogation of the negative as

²⁴ Schelling, *Werke* 3, 84; *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, 178.

²⁵ Schelling, *Werke* 3, 96-97; *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, 186.

such begins with a rumination on substitutionary sacrifice.²⁶ Something—another person or an object—dies, is destroyed in one’s place, so that one might reflect on death, the absolute loss of self in death. In order to represent “infinite Life” or “Spirit” in religious imagination, it is necessary also to represent these acts of loss, and to do so in a way that grasps them, simultaneously and paradoxically, as acts of self-actualization. Acts of substitutionary sacrificial destruction thus address the transcendental problem of death as it inflects Hegel’s attempt to represent, at this period, the infinite whole or totality. It is essential to compare what occurs in sacrifice in these fragments with a later passage from the *Phenomenology*: “Self-consciousness...does not actually die, as the particular self-consciousness is *pictured* as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e., in its knowledge, which is essential Being reconciling itself with itself.”²⁷ As Hegel puts matters in 1800: “The infinite being, filling the immeasurability of space, exists at the same time in a definite space.”²⁸

The model for such productive self-negation of the infinite is incarnation. Hegel expresses this in terms of one of Luther’s hymns, slightly amended: “He whom all the heavens’ heaven ne’er contained / Lies now in Mary’s womb.”²⁹ The problem of death as a moment of “infinite Life” leads to a recuperation of Christian dogma, providing Hegel with “the general,

²⁶ In *Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice* (1951), Georges Bataille articulates a profoundly similar interpretation of sacrifice. That the quasi-transcendental or aporetic role of death appears so clearly articulated in this early model of speculative cognition, precisely in the attempt to unify the antinomy of finitude and the infinite seems to further confirm Bataille’s thesis, that “In truth, Hegel’s problem is given in the action of sacrifice.”

²⁷ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 570; *Phenomenology*, 475.

²⁸ Hegel situates this as the “objective” antinomy alongside the “subjective” antinomy of time, the latter having apparently been described in the missing sheets of the manuscript. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 344-345; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 155.

²⁹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 345; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 155. The original third stanza, from which Hegel’s gloss is taken, reads: “*Den aller Welt Kreis nie beschloß / Der liegt in Marien Schoß*” Cf. Martin Luther, *Luthers geistliche Lieder und Kirchengesänge* (Köln: Böhlau, 1985), 165.

final formula of the relationship between God and the world,”³⁰ and thus the revelation of the Speculative Idea in representation—a representation pointing beyond representation as such. Thus the “disappearance” of the wine and bread in the Eucharist takes on a new, positive significance, as does Jesus’s death and the disappearance of his body from the tomb. In these moments, the Christian community is capable of representing the unity of the finite and the infinite as the infinite’s self-expression in the finite, the death of the finite, and its return to the infinite.

However, in his late days in Frankfurt and his early days in Jena, Hegel’s approach to a sort of non-reflective reflexivity is grounded in an aesthetic approach that tacitly accepts the limits of Kantian critique even as it struggles against them. By the time he moves to Jena in 1801 and takes up work with Schelling on the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, this task has been refined. Hegel comes to see that the theoretical problems that have occupied Schelling since their shared days at the Stift, and that have been intimated to Hegel via Hölderlin’s critique of Fichte, *must* be answered if Hegel’s vision of moral and political transformation and unification through *Volksreligion* is to be realized. The problem of *Volksreligion*, specifically the status of its sacrificial imaginary, precedes and prefigures—indeed, in some sense leads directly to—Hegel’s confrontation with the logico-metaphysical challenges of post-Kantian idealism. An integral account of sacrificial action—one which affirms non-dualistic, rational freedom—relies on a conception of the infinite whole, that which encompasses all and excludes nothing. What is implicit in the demand of such an account is a re-examination of the role and function of reason since Kant. Reason [*Vernunft*], which on Kant’s account aims at the unconditioned totality, must

³⁰ Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. 5. Trans. Brian McNeil, John Riches, and Oliver Davis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) 583-4.

be rendered reflexive, but in such a way as not to rely on the reflective dualisms that cast it again and again into practical heteronomy, moral servitude, and skepticism. As long as reason's employment is merely regulative—i.e., can provide general “rules of thumb” for thinking, but cannot be given in any objective, experiential presentation—then actually *knowing* this infinite whole seems out of the question. To show the necessary unity of ideality and reality, antecedent to any particular act of consciousness which determines particulars by way of the application of universal, *a priori* categories, would require a different way of understanding rationality in its essentially synthetic function. That is to say, it would be necessary to account for reason as an intuitive, essentially synthetic activity.

In Chapter Three, I discussed in some detail the first gestures of Hölderlin in this direction, with theory of aesthetic intuition. Schelling, of course, had his own ideas about how to go about this, having been occupied with the problem since his days in the *Stift*.³¹ What began as a tentative endorsement of Fichte on the basis of shared Kantian commitments eventually led Schelling to reject Fichte's account of the self-positing ego as an insufficient basis for establishing the unity of freedom and nature since, for Fichte, the subject and object were only unified in the case of the I. Schelling proposed a parallel *Naturphilosophie* to counterpoise

³¹ FWJ Schelling, "Vom Ich Als Prinzip Der Philosophie..."(1795) in *Werke*, Band 2. Edited by Thomas Buchheim, Hartmut Buchner, Jochem Hennigfeld, Wilhelm G Jacobs, Jorg Jantzen, Siegbert Peetz: Gateway," (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980) 67-175; "On the I..." in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, 63-128.

Transcendental or Critical philosophy³² that would demonstrate the emergence of the I from Nature.³³

The metaphysical question that had to be solved in order to unify transcendental and natural philosophy was this: how can the infinite finitize itself while remaining identical to itself? This holds good whether this sets out from the standpoint of infinite substance or infinite subject. This is the general form of the basic metaphysical problem that both critical and dogmatic philosophies share, on Schelling's account—but neither can reconcile the antithesis without effectively begging the question in one direction or the other—freedom or nature, activity or passivity, subject or object.³⁴ In *The System of Transcendental Philosophy* (1800), Schelling busied himself with developing a theory of “intellectual intuition” as the “universal mediating factor in our knowledge.”³⁵ Schelling's theory of intellectual intuition extends Hölderlin's view of “aesthetic intuition” whereby one could catch glimpses of the fugitive Absolute in great works of art. The intuition of the unity of conscious and non-conscious processes, the emergence of freedom from nature, Schelling notes, is “objectified” in the productions of artistic genius. Artistic production, grasped through intellectual intuition, mirrors the process of the Absolute coming out of itself, expressing itself in and as the finite, and resounding to itself as

³² FWJ Schelling, *System Des Transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800) in *Werke*, Band 9,1, (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005) ; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter L. Heath (University of Virginia Press, 1993).

³³ FWJ Schelling, *Ideen Zu Einer Philosophie Der Natur* (1797) in *Werke*, Band 5: Edited by Thomas Buchheim, et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann- Holzboog, 1994); *Erster Entwurf Eines Systems Der Naturphilosophie* (1799) in *Werke*, Band 7. Edited by Thomas Buchheim, et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001).

³⁴ FWJ Schelling, *Philosophisches Briefe Über Dogmatismus und Kirticismus* in *Werke*, Band 3 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982).

³⁵ Schelling, *Werke* 9,1, 43, 59-60; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 15, 27-28.

consciousness.³⁶ The infinite unity thus intuited, however, remains a regulative ideal from a theoretical standpoint: “the opposition between conscious and unconscious activity” presented to intellectual intuition “is necessarily an unending one.”³⁷

But by the time Schelling composes his *Darstellung meines System* (1801), however, he has come to see the necessity of a general principle of indifference or identity, an *Indifferenzpunkt*, which encompasses and grounds the two parallel systems of freedom and nature. This could only be established by abstracting from, or “de-potentiating” the subject as the site of intuition, in order to indicate a unity of subject and object that is not a modification of *either*. This would be, rather than a self-positing intellectual intuition, an “intuitive understanding” that grasps the whole as the whole.³⁸

Hegel’s Kenotic Turn

Hegel was sympathetic to Schelling’s questions, if not his answers. The problem of how the infinite could express itself in the finite while remaining identical to itself, after all, clearly animates his view of sacrifice in the fragments from 1800, as well the incarnational language that he begins to use in that period. Despite the many instances in which he sought to inhabit Schelling’s formulation of the problem and to make Schellingian terminology his own, Hegel had misgivings both about the result and the method of Schelling’s prospective system. Hegel no doubt understood himself as a partner to Schelling, and was keen to join him in articulating an “Absolute” account of the infinite in which it contains and is expressed in the finite. But from the

³⁶ Schelling, *Werke* 9,1, 321-329; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 220-233.

³⁷ Schelling, *Werke* 9,1, 300; *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 210.

³⁸ Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, 249.

first, he seems to have been wary of what he took to be Schelling's tendency toward a suppression of difference and concretion, much as he had been wary of Kant's formal suppression of sensual and historical particularity in moral theory. If the latter went too far in the direction of dualism as the condition of freedom, the former went perhaps too far in the direction of monism as the condition of a system of integral metaphysical identity.

Hegel's new interest in the kenotic imagination of Christianity, which I have charted above in relation to the transcendental antinomy of the finite and the infinite—most radically expressed in the problem of an idealist account of death—becomes central to his efforts to find his own path through the thickets of Schelling's protean approaches to *Identitätsphilosophie*. The kenotic gesture eventually forms the representational paradigm for the self-expression of the Speculative Idea in Hegel's view. This corresponds precisely to the methodological and metaphysical tasks of the *Phenomenology*: to lead naïve experience to the philosophic standpoint, to lift the subject from its abstract isolation into a spiritual community, and to grasp the Absolute if, and only if, it is accounted for as the mutual logical necessity of infinite and finite, ideal and real subject and substance. Even before Hegel has come to his mature position on the logical unity of substance and subject, kenotic language features heavily in his Jena writings—particularly where he pushes at the limits of the nascent Schellingian position.³⁹ This is anticipated, of course, in the 1800 fragments. In the introductory essay to the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, we find, curiously, rhetorical connections of the kenotic self-sacrifice of God to the possibility of a speculative method that capable of demonstrating the absolute unity of ideal and real. The essay is technically without authorial attribution—designed to give the

³⁹ Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 274 n24.

statement the appearance of a unified intellectual front—but clear fault lines already appear.⁴⁰

Schelling's system answers the above metaphysical question (as to the relation between the finite and the infinite) as a matter of “potencies” whereby “absolute identity” [*absolute Identität*]⁴¹—the being of the absolute totality [*absolute Totalität*]⁴²—is understood to express itself in the finite while still maintaining its infinity. In abstracting from the subject as the site of this transcendental intuition, it is possible to represent this identity as an indifference point [*Indifferenzpunkt*] of all finitude wherein, conceptually speaking, all difference disappears:

Expressed in the clearest way possible, our assertion is *this*, that if we could view everything that is in the totality, we would perceive in it a perfect quantitative balance [*quantitative Gleichgewicht*] of subjectivity and objectivity, hence nothing else but a pure identity in which nothing is distinguishable [*unterscheidbar*], despite the fact that in regard to individual elements the preponderance may fall to the one side or the other side, and thus that such qualitative differences, too, are by no means posited *in themselves* but only in appearance [*in der Erscheinung gesetzt ist*].⁴¹

But the remarks in the introduction to the *Kritisches Journal* suggest, at the same time, an approach that pushes back against this intuitive monistic program with demands of a thoroughgoing conceptual demonstration of this unity, and a concomitant revaluation of negativity. This was already anticipated in the 1800 invocation of an interpretation of dogmatic Christianity as containing a representational expression of this integral, self-differentiated infinite. As Eckhart Förster has indicated, Schelling's claim constitutes a stipulated solution to the problem of the identity of identity and non-identity, but not a method of demonstration.⁴² But

⁴⁰ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 66.

⁴¹ FWJ Schelling, *Darstellung Meines Systems Der Philosophie in Werke*, Band 10: Schriften 1801. Edited by Thomas Buchheim, et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2009), 128-129; J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence*, trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 153.

⁴² Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, 284.

in these texts, we detect a momentum toward the radicalization of the oppositions of the understanding as the path to overcoming them, a passage *through* the “abyss” of the infinite, and through the experience of spiritual despair that accompanies it. Given the emphasis on sacrifice and negativity, we can be fairly certain Hegel wrote these passages. And they are not mere rhetorical flourishes. Significantly, they signal the upshot of Hegel’s rehabilitation of kenosis, its *Vermischung* at the level of understanding, its grief [*Schmerz*] at the level of affect, and its introduction of “death” into the life of the Absolute. Hegel still maintains the demand of an integral, non-dualistic conception of human autonomy as the litmus for true and politically expedient religion, but his understanding of Hellenic and Christian religions’ respective value in this vein has changed. This represents a move away from Hegel’s earlier understanding that the religion of modernity must be modeled on a kind of Hellenistic theological aesthetics of beauty and self-satisfaction, as well as a move back toward a kind of Christian despair or “grief.” While “unhappiness” is a spiritual state to be overcome, it is also the *means* to its own overcoming. Much like Luther’s *Anfechtung*, Hegel’s speculative path beyond dialectical opposition is one that must pass through despair of one’s freedom and unity with the infinite before such freedom and unity can be realized. While at Tübingen, Hegel had found this sort of spiritual struggle to be the *symptom* of the hopelessly alienated European spirit, laboring under the weight of an oppressive religious imaginary, ultimately reproductive of the opposition it attempted to overcome. Now matters are different. This negativity is revalued, and recalibrating the response to this symptomatic negativity becomes the aim, rather than its abolition or transcendence in a

“beyond” such as those identified in the works of Hölderlin or Schelling. For Hegel, the symptom begins to appear as if it is, itself, the cure.⁴³

If the pure Idea of philosophy is expressed with Spirit, but naïvely and without scientific range—it if does not arrive at the objectivity of a systematic consciousness—we must still greet it with joy and delight; it is the mark of a beautiful soul, whose inertia guards it against the original sin [*Sündenfall*] of thinking, but which also lacks the grit [*Muths*] to plunge itself [*sich in ihn zu stürzen*] into that sin and to follow the path of its guilt, until the guilt is dissolved [*und seine Schuld bis zu ihrer Auflösung durchzuführen*]...⁴⁴

The cognitive and affective states Hegel associates with Christian kenosis in his earlier remarks on the subject is unmistakable. During the composition of the “Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” Hegel claimed that kenosis is inadequate as a representation of the practical structure of reconciliation to the absolute due to its ill-suitedness to facilitate the experience of beauty and a relation of the finite to the infinite through love. That is to say, conceptually, it leaves understanding and sensibility *opposed*. It marks an experience of heightened opposition, even anguish, rather than rational unity and affective poise and placidity.

The 1800 fragments’ remarks on sacrifice as the religious emblem of a transcendental problem illuminate this retrieval of agonistic spirituality. The “cunning of reason” has struck, in other words: Hegel’s rumination of the question of death and sacrifice in the context of a unified representation of the self-differentiating infinite in 1800 prepares the ground for this shift in his conceptual topography *prior* to his articulation of this position. Indeed, as Hegel will claim in the *Phenomenology*, “the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what *Spirit*

⁴³ For a sustained psychoanalytic reading of Hegel (and a Hegelian reading of psychoanalysis) see Slavoj Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan* by Slavoj Žižek (Polity Press, 2014).

⁴⁴ GWF Hegel, *Einleitung zu Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, Band I, Stuck I in *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 119; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 211.

is.”⁴⁵ The path to grasping the Absolute does not *suppress* differentiation, disunity, difference, and death, in Hegel’s nascent view. It must pass through them and appropriate them as “moments” of its unity. Hence, the Hellenic flavor of Hölderlin’s romanticism, along with its counterpart the Kantian concept of beauty as pleasure experienced in the harmonious operation of the sensible and rational faculties, are no longer understood by Hegel as appropriate to the religious imagination capable of truly overcoming these oppositions. The experience of traversing the path of “guilt” here clearly prefigures the experience of *Verzweiflung*—despair, division, splitting—that Hegel so famously invokes to characterize the path of the phenomenologist in 1806.

The fragments of the 1800 System, along with the introduction to the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, thus offer clear points of reference for understanding how the language of kenotic sacrifice will be deployed throughout the Jena writings. This new view of kenotic sacrifice is, for Hegel, not a question of dogmatic theology as such, so much as means for the *revaluation of negativity and opposition itself*. Hegel’s invocation of kenotic imagery and language signals the eventual rejection of the intuitive approach to an abyssal transcendence in Schelling and his insistence on an ultimately logical account of the infinite through the entire panoply of its concrete determinations. The shift from a ‘horizontal’ rather than a ‘vertical’ model of transcendence, to use Hyppolite’s apt characterization,⁴⁶ is only possible through a retrieval of the kenotic sacrificial imagination. And this should come as little surprise for one who has attended closely to Hegel’s intimate concern with the religious imaginary. As shown

⁴⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 585-586; *Phenomenology*, 488.

⁴⁶ Hyppolite, *Génèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’esprit de Hegel* (Aubier éditions Montaigne, 1978), 525 (1).

with respect to the “Oldest System-Program,” Hegel’s thinking on the role of religious representations in philosophical reflection had changed over time. The religious imagination was not necessary for “the mob” alone. The philosopher had need of it, too.⁴⁷ Only when mythology became rational and reason became mythological could the dialectical oppositions of the understanding be overcome. Now, in the context of a philosophy of absolute identity, the imbrication of reason and religion is still a central demand of the Hegelian project—but it no longer terminates in a theorizing of the production of beautiful objects and gestures in cultic and liturgical activity, but with the conceptual truth at which, Hegel takes it, such acts and symbols gesture. It is a matter of accounting for the possibility of grasping the Absolute unity of subject and object as *thought itself*.

Hegel hints throughout the Jena period, with respect to both theoretical and practical topics, that the abstract identity of the *Indifferenzpunkt*, as established via an appeal to “intuitive understanding” or “transcendental intuition,” is a merely stipulative solution to the problem of post-Kantian dualism. Like other philosophies of reflection, it indicates a “need” [*Bedürfnis*]—for instance, in the ideal of Reason to offer a fully systematic account of the infinite totality of conditions, the *ens realissimum*—but it does not provide a genuine solution. To “know” the absolute, would be to offer an actual demonstration of it in its absoluteness.⁴⁸ And even if a religious representation were to give it sensual shape, or if it were to be figured forth in a great work of art, its identity as the reflexive presentation of this unity would still require that those who engage with it in some sense *know* what it is. In other words, if religion or art present the

⁴⁷ Hegel, “*Eine Ethik*” in *Frühe Schriften II*, ed. Friedhelm Nicolini et al., *Gesammelte Werke 2* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2014).

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 12-13; *Phenomenology*, 2-3.

“impassible” finitude of the understanding, then those limits have, in some sense, already been transcended. If it is to be a truly “living” unity, it must *include*, not suppress, the oppositions that it would simultaneously surmount. That is to say, “life,” “infinity,” and “unity” must include “death,” “finitude,” and “disunity” —since this infinite whole can have nothing “outside” of itself, but must also express itself via the finite. The religious representation of this dynamic, as shown above, is intimated in the relation of life, death, and sacrifice in the 1800 fragments. If the Absolute as the “whole,” is to include the whole of the finite—in the forms of both subjective freedom and objective necessity—it must be capable of being revealed through an immanent critique of experience. It must be possible to track the way in which the infinite is expressed via the finite while remaining itself, to show the finite as disappearing into it and as being delivered back out of it. Said otherwise, the infinite must be shown to be self-negating as well as self-recuperating. The structure of the Absolute must be akin to that which is announced in sacrifice as *Dankbarkeit*, and *Liebe*, i.e., a suspension and preservation of its own immanent difference or negativity.

That is to say, sacrifice, particularly in an acts of willing self-divestment such as thanksgiving, love, and ritual destruction, has already provided Hegel with various representational templates for this idea. What remains for Hegel, at least from the developmental standpoint I take in the present study, is to translate the finite, historical specificity of the sacrificial imagination into a purely logical standpoint. This involves the surmounting of the abyssal dimension of Schellingian intuition—but also passage through it. “The original identity must now unite both in the self-intuition of the Absolute, which is a becoming objective to itself

in a completed totality. It must unite them in the intuition of God's eternal human incarnation [*der ewigen Menschwerden Gottes*]."⁴⁹

As we have seen in the case of the 1800 System fragments, *pace* HS Harris and Walter Cerf, the *Kritisches Journal* is not the location of Hegel's first approving references to an incarnational model of divine-human relationship.⁵⁰ In those earlier fragments, Hegel explicitly adopts an incarnational model of the divine-human relationship to address what he refers to as "antinomies" of time and space. But the basic conceptual problem that underlays both antinomies is that of cognizing the union of union and non-union [*Verbindung und Nichtverbindung*]. The infinite cannot exclude division and difference, but must include it. Practically, this antinomy is expressed and addressed in the action of sacrifice. Voluntary renunciation through sacrifice [*Opfer*] stages an "elevation" [*Erhebung*] of human to God, but a proper interpretation of this process is necessary: one which identifies the negativity of human and god as conceptually contiguous, or as moments of the same immanent movement. For Hegel, it is in the 1800 fragments that the incarnational model, where the infinite appears now in "Mary's womb" [*Schoß*], is first adduced in the context of a speculative revaluation. The self-negation and self-recuperation of God must be given a speculative interpretation. In so doing, the pure concept will "retrieve for philosophy the idea of absolute freedom and with it, the idea of absolute suffering [*Leiden*], or the speculative Good Friday [*speculativen Charfreitag*] which was formerly only historical."⁵¹ Speculation turns in on itself, takes the synthetic activity of rationality as its theme,

⁴⁹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 75; *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System*, 171.

⁵⁰ Cf. Harris and Cerf's remarks on their jointly prepared and edited translation of the *Differenzschrift* (1977), 171 n24.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191 (Translation modified).

in order to show the necessary unity of the two view-points that have structured the entire foregoing analysis: a commitment to non-dualism as well as to autonomy, to natural necessity as well as freedom, to objectivity as well as subjectivity. One might be tempted, as Hegel thought Schelling was, to consider this Absolute whole in terms of abstraction, as the abstract negation of the finite, an unfathomable night of pure identity. The Absolute would thus be, for cognition, an abyss. But this would, it seems, reproduce the opposition of what is to what is not. This abyss must be contained, Hegel believes, within and as expressive of Absolute identity, and the way in which such a concept can be realized is through the provision of “philosophical existence” to the kenotic sacrificial imagination as a means of reconciling finite and infinite. The pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness [*Abgrund des Nichts*], in which all being [*Seyn*] sinks, must signify the infinite grief [*unendlichen Schmerz*] that previously existed historically in culture and in feeling, and on which the religion of the new era [*Zeit*] is based, the feeling: God himself is dead [*Gott selbst ist todt*].”⁵² What must be shown then is that this moment of the infinite as self-limitation and self-recuperation, the putting to death of the infinite in the finite and its resurrection from the abyss is a moment of the Speculative Idea. It is only this moment that gives the true infinite expression, in Hegel’s view, in as much as it is capable of calling forth a representation of the infinite that includes finitude and death within it—an infinite that becomes-other in death, yet remains self-identical. It is elevated from its spatio-temporally bound, representational form in Christian narrative. Dogma must be translated into a pure logic. (This process in fact begins in Christianity itself in Hegel’s view—particularly in the Gospel of John, to which I will return below).

⁵² Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 414; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190.

By marking this purely as a moment of the highest Idea, but merely as a moment, the pure concept gives philosophical existence [*eine philosophische Existenz gegeben*] to what was once either the moral prescription of a self-sacrifice of the empirical being [*einer Aufopferung des empirischen Wesen*] or the concept of formal abstraction. It must thus retrieve for philosophy the idea of absolute freedom and with it, the idea of absolute suffering [*Leiden*], or the speculative Good Friday [*speculativen Charfreitag*] which was formerly only historical.⁵³

That is to say, where we have Hegel's development on the question of sacrifice as a practical structure of reconciliation in view, we can see that the retrieval of this element of dogmatic Christianity is the very basis of Hegel's unique solution to the speculative-dialectical problem. He identifies self-negation (and the self-negation *of* self-negation) with the self-expression of the absolute, and tracks the way in which this self-negation is memorialized and grasped reflexively in "Spirit." Clearly this recapitulates a certain way of understanding Christian supersessionism with respect to the religious and moral significance of sacrifice—though here it takes on also a decidedly theoretical meaning, apart from its potential moral and religious meanings. Sacrificing one's rational freedom for the sake of empirical being, and sacrificing empirical being in the name of rational freedom, are both gestures of *Sühnopfer*—whether offered up by the "Shaman of Tungus" to a spirit with which he can barter or by the philosopher of Königsberg who holds out hope for his conversion to the moral law—in Hegel's view. All of these sacrifices are, ultimately, sacrifices under heteronomous conditions and as investments, surreptitious self-assertions, that—where self-sacrifice was taken to be of primarily soteriological or moral significance—produced a spurious freedom and a spurious infinite of repeated negations, a compulsion to offer repeated sacrifices.

⁵³ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191 (Translation modified).

“Absolute freedom” would establish where the absolute itself bears the burden of finitude—just as in the case of the Crucifixion. This, Hegel describes, is a matter of giving religious and moral self-sacrifice its proper, speculative interpretation. Not unlike the *Christus Victor* of Luther’s theology of the cross, Hegel’s infinite concept delivers humanity to its freedom from “unhappiness” and the spurious transcendence that, in Hegel’s view, is its counterpart. The Absolute’s self-expression in the finite occurs not at a single point in time, on Golgotha, but eternally.

The pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness [*Abgrund des Nichts*] [...] gives philosophical existence [*eine philosophische Existenz gegeben*] to what was once either the moral prescription of a self-sacrifice of the empirical being [*einer Aufopferung des empirischen Wesen*] or the concept of formal abstraction. It must thus retrieve for philosophy the idea of absolute freedom and with it, the idea of absolute suffering [*Leiden*], or the speculative Good Friday [*speculativen Charfreitag*] which was formerly only historical. Good Friday itself must be retrieved in the whole truth and harshness of its godlessness [*Gottlosigkeit*]...the highest totality can and must achieve its resurrection solely from out of this harshness encompassing everything, and ascending in all its earnestness and out of its deepest ground to the most serene freedom of its shape.⁵⁴

Hegel’s emphasis on sacrificial love as the practical structure of reconciliation (1797), followed by a kenotic qualification of this practical structure (1800 and forward), is obviously not sufficient to understand the *logical* break with the tentatively Schellingian approach Hegel experimented with, but never fully adopted, in Jena. Schelling was, as Hegel had been in Frankfurt, convinced that the infinite was essentially beyond *Verstand* and practical *Vernunft*, (or as Hegel had put matters in 1800, unity with the infinite constituted “a being exterior to reflection”), thus necessitating that “philosophy must stop short of religion [*mit der Religion aufhören*]”⁵⁵ Philosophy must stop [*aufhören*] and hearken [*hört*] to religion’s call to

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414.; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191 (Translation modified).

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 344; *Miscellaneous Writings*, 154 (Translation modified).

reconciliation in a “higher” form of unity than that which is possible in self-diremptive reflection [*Reflexion*]. Why? At this period, Hegel believes, philosophy can indicate the need [*Bedürfnis*] for an absolute principle, but cannot cognize it. Transcendental reflection [*Reflexion*] remains, Hegel believes in 1800, implicated in the intractable dialectical opposition of substance and subject. Schelling’s contemporaneous arguments likely shaped this position, at least in part. The relation of the infinite to the finite, Schelling claimed, could be schematized as a succession of “potencies” [*Potenzen*] whereby the infinite organized itself into various degrees of complexity. Religion, and especially art, could represent the process of how the infinite expressed itself in the finite, but this process could not be fully articulated in cognition. These representational forms had to *show* what philosophy could only attempt, in an essentially inadequate, finite form, to say. Such representations pointed beyond the limits of reflection set in place by Kant but, properly understood, did not constitute a transcendent over-extension of reason in what Kant understood as its “dialectical” deployments.

Keeping this in view, how then must we understand the way in which the kenotic interpretation of Christianity becomes for Hegel the model of a purely conceptual, logically intelligible unity? What is the relationship between the transformation of Hegel’s sacrificial imagination and his understanding of the essence of logic and the identity of ideality and reality? The logico-metaphysical dimension of this transformation in Hegel’s view should be understood as subtext; it forms the basis for an exercise in so-called “immanent” critique. Much like the move against Kantian moral and religious philosophy wherein Hegel compares Kant to the “Shaman of the Tunguses” (upon whom Kant himself had heaped derision for their moral servitude and religious heteronomy), Hegel seems to levy an earlier—and essential—Schellingian claim against Schelling himself.

By Schelling's own lights, the very recognition of distinction is to postulate an implicit, antecedent unity that makes that distinction possible for thought. This decisive insight emerges for Schelling from a reading of Kant's third Critique.⁵⁶ There, Kant deals with the necessary features of cognizing "organic" nature, i.e., living beings. In so doing, he encounters an antinomy within teleological judgment, that is, of the discursive irreconcilability, and at the same time mutual necessity, of "teleology" and "mechanism" in our theoretical descriptions of living beings. Any time we attempt to think about an *organism*, Kant argues, we must think of it in terms of a rationally comprehensible "whole" within which its particular parts are organized, and in which those particular parts enjoy a certain functional significance. Hence, the mutual relations of these parts within the whole of the organism is determined by reference to the functional processes of the organism's behavior in and interaction with its environment, its "life." Finally, such functions and processes can only be understood from the finite, human standpoint, as teleologically oriented, that is, as aiming at certain ends. For example: a hermit-crab's shell protects it from predators, while its claws allow it to grasp particles of carrion and grasses that constitute its diet. It is capable of finding a new shell to facilitate growth, and so forth. Each of the aforementioned determinations of the organism is a matter of its being oriented to certain natural ends, and this rests upon the understanding of the organism as a whole, in the concerted actions of its parts toward such ends. But now Kant draws our attention to how we are to help ourselves to the use of the concept of the "whole." What justifies its employment? Apparently through reference to those particular parts which constitute it, that is to say, in terms of "mechanism." In other words, Kant shows how teleological judgments that organize parts into

⁵⁶ Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, § 76ff in *Gesammelte Werke* 5; Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* § 76ff.

concerted organic wholes rest upon a prior understanding of mechanism or the parts which make up those wholes; simultaneously, the mechanistic interactions of the discrete parts is only understood in light of some prior teleological conception. Kant's solution to this apparent contradiction is, characteristically, to claim that the contradiction is itself an effect of our merely "discursive" understanding. Thus we must assume that, were our discursive mode of understanding suspended, there would be no such opposition between parts and whole, mechanistic and teleological causality. But to say that this contradiction is merely a feature of our discursive understanding, and that the supersensible reality does not contain such a contradiction, is to make a claim that transcends the limits on experience that Kant had fought so hard to establish in the first *Critique*. Decisively, it indicates to Schelling the possibility of an "intuitive" foundation for a philosophical system that would affirm an integral, non-dualistic account of the infinite and the finite, as well as maintain the reality of rational freedom.

That is to say, for Schelling, to posit an opposition or a limit means, simultaneously, to have transcended that limit and to have indicated its necessary unity in a more comprehensive form of intuition. In Hegel's mind, this same insight can clearly be leveraged against Schelling's attempt to intuitively ground a philosophy of absolute identity. Art represents the irreducibly non-present, non-representable process of the infinite "going out of itself" in finite determinations and returning to itself. But in Schelling's estimation, we must stop short of saying we *know* the identity of subject and object. We can merely represent the process whereby this unity resounds in affect and thought. This occurs especially in the form of great art. Art can, according to Schelling, show what philosophy cannot say. Teleological and aesthetic judgments can be mined as a source for immediate and non-discursive access to the Absolute in the form of an "intuitive understanding" of the whole. But if we can oppose the infinite and the finite in

discursive terms, such that one is thinkable on the basis of the other and vice versa, this would seem to reproduce the same problem Schelling found in Kant via the nascent philosophy of identity, and to locate the solution in an abstract unity. For Schelling, to “behold” the infinite “totality” from the *Indifferenzpunkt* of these reflective distinctions means the grasping of a whole in which “nothing is distinguishable.”⁵⁷

This apparently goes little distance in accomplishing Schelling’s assumed task of uniting Spinozistic, substantial necessity and Kantian freedom. It apparently leaves the Kantian opposition, with which Schelling’s reading of Kant began, intact. If the abyssal absolute is expressed only as $A=A$, as a pure self-identity, then the relation between the finite and the infinite has been gestured at, rather than exhaustively demonstrated. To account for the comprehensive unity that makes the abyss of the infinite unity and its particular manifestations in the finite world possible would mean, as intimated above, to trace how it is that the infinite expresses itself in the finite, to grasp its determinations as its becoming-other, self-limitation, or negation. Unless it takes on a kenotic form, however, the rational identity that it establishes will remain purely abstract—it will, as in Hegel’s earlier estimations of philosophy, indicate only a “need” [*Bedürfnis*] of Reason, not its consummation. The Idea is the pure identity of thought achieved through its own self-negation, knowing the immanent negativity or “limit” of its determinations and simultaneously transcending them. To know one’s limit is to know how to sacrifice one’s self, Hegel tells us.⁵⁸ This is the “power of Spirit” and the starting point of

⁵⁷ FWJ Schelling, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Walter Jaeschke, *Gesammelte Werke, Bd.18, Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816 - 1831)*. (Hamburg: Meiner, Hbg., 1994), 18; J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Rupture*, 153.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 590; *Phenomenology*, 492.

speculative philosophy in giving a *logical* account of the absolute identity. Kenosis sketches a logic that maintains identity in difference. Such a logical construction cannot be a matter of opposed systems of syllogisms striving toward a point of contact with an un-thought or unthinkable, that is to say, non-conceptual, reality. Rather, if such a logic presents itself, it must do so by tracing the process whereby that which is implicitly true, implicitly conceptual, becomes explicitly so. The implicit identity of ideality and reality must be made *explicit*, the absoluteness of the absolute rendered *concrete*.

This logico-metaphysical demand expresses itself in three ways which must be noted here, as they are determinative of the Hegelian trajectory and the development of Hegelian kenosis and phenomenological vision. First, it implies that the opposition of reality and ideality must be overcome, and not only stipulatively. Second, methodologically speaking, this opposition cannot be overcome from within an *a priori* framework. It must be developed—in an exoteric form—as already implicit *within* finite experience. Third, the transformation of this implicit unity into explicit self-comprehension thus requires a logic which can articulate processes of becoming, i.e., it must grasp the expression of the Absolute in time. The opposition of ideality and reality must be transcended completely, and this transcendence and reconceptualization of their opposition within a more comprehensive level of conceptual unity must thus occur as the negation of immediacy—of “absolute Being” or the “abyss” of identity. This demand dovetails with the account of kenotic action in Hegel’s account of religious representation of the Absolute—but deployed in a way that would point beyond the problematic of representation itself. The truly speculative logical Idea will express the movement of the infinite through the finite in terms developed from within what Hegel understands as the central kenotic scenes of Christian narrative.

Johannine language marks for Hegel the paradigmatic movement from the representational account of divine-human kenosis, bound in time and space, to thinking about it “infinitely,” that is to say, thinking of an eternal process of self-diremption of the infinite which produces the finite and, paradoxically, the filiation of the infinite and the finite through their shared Negativity. The dogmatic novelty of John is to forgo framing the Christ-event in terms of historical or biographical narrative. Instead, John’s Gospel begins by identifying the *logos* or *Wort* with the *arche*, *Amfang*, or the “beginning.” The pre-existent, eternal *Logos* that both “was with God [*war bei Gott*]” and “was God” [*war Gott*] and is expressed in the begetting of the incarnate *Logos*, Jesus [*das Wort ist Fleisch geworden*].⁵⁹ The infinite *logos* expresses itself finitely, emptying itself into the finite created order, becoming “flesh.” Its entrance into the created order in a perishable form is enacted through its withdrawal from that order as transcendent Lord. The recognition of this relationship clears the way for a new understanding of reflexive, self-actualizing human freedom for Hegel.

The Johannine gloss on the incarnation of the infinite *Logos* is at first understood by Hegel (1798) to be a reflection of the same *Vermischung* of subject and object that characterizes the kenotic confusion of sacramental and narrative elements of Christian *Vorstellungen*, generally. It aims at overcoming opposition in a lasting synthesis but remains, in its way, “Jewish.” It fails to overcome what Hegel understands as residual Judaic heteronomy.⁶⁰ By virtue of this Abrahamic residue, even John, Hegel writes, is forced to think of the Absolute or infinite as some transcendent other. The *Logos*, the divine activity through which “everything is

⁵⁹ *Evangelium nach Johannes 1:1-18* in *The Luther Bible of 1534*.

⁶⁰ For comments on Hegel’s anti-Judaism during the Frankfurt period, see Chapter Four.

made” exists in the beginning, as *arche*. Its activity is “with” God, the absolutely-transcendent other, and yet is also *identified* with God. The incarnation links the infinite and the finite orders. But the attempt to think through the unity of Jesus and the finite in the context of a pre-existent *Logos*, like “reflective” philosophy in general, can identify the “need” [*Bedürfnis*] to transcend this heteronomy, but cannot achieve such transcendence insofar as it formulates its claims in judgments [*Ur-theilen*] that sunders [*trennt*] the object from the subject, and provides what, for the understanding, is a finite, external relation.

By 1801, the developments with respect to death, finitude, and the representation of infinite “Life” have changed Hegel’s thinking on the potential value of a kenotic understanding of the infinite. This, of course, impacts his understanding of Trinitarian theology. It is only a robustly incarnational understanding of the relation of the infinite to the finite that can sufficiently represent the *Mittelpunkt* of genuinely speculative philosophy. Again, looking back to the early signs of Hegel’s rehabilitation of kenosis and ahead to his critique of the “abstract” character of Schelling’s vision of the Absolute, we can see that this incarnational perspective is levied as a less-than-surreptitious corrective to Schelling, though couched within a text with the putative intention of lending support to Schelling’s project.

“The indifference point [*Indifferenzpunkt*] towards which the two sciences [*Naturphilosophie* and Critical philosophy]...the middle term through which identity constructing itself as nature passes over to identity constructing itself as intelligence...is Reason, the turning point of both sciences; and it is the ultimate apex of Nature’s pyramid.”⁶¹ But, as Schelling has said, to view the Absolute from the standpoint of this *Indifferenzpunkt* is to dissolve

⁶¹ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 74-75; *Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System*, 170.

all difference into an abyss of pure identity. This abyss is not the last word: “This view is only immediately negative.” But where we understand this identity as a form of *a priori* transcendental unity established via immediate, non-conceptual intuition (as Schelling seems to do), it will necessarily remain without content [*Inhalt*], Hegel thinks. He continues: “It simply suspends the separation of the two sciences and of the forms in which the Absolute has posited itself. It is not a *real* synthesis, it is not the absolute *Indifferenzpunkt* where these forms are nullified *in that they both subsist, united*.”⁶² The metaphysical interpretation of *logos* as kenotic self-expression of the infinite is the key to suspending, though not eliminating, the differences that would allow the *Indifferenz* of subject and object to appear as the concretely articulated “life” of the infinite whole. The re-presentation [*Vorstellung*] of kenotic sacrifices moves in the Gospel of John toward the logical presentation [*Darstellung*] of its conceptual content [*Inhalt*]. “The original identity must now unite both in the self-intuition of the Absolute, which is becoming objective to itself in completed totality. It must unite them in intuition of God’s eternal human Incarnation, the begetting of the Word from the beginning.”⁶³

The meaning of the immediate is only realized in its self-negation, self-loss, a knowing how “to sacrifice oneself” [*sich aufzuopfern wissen*], as Hegel will later put matters, a knowing through which it is simultaneously preserved or recollected [*erinnerte*].⁶⁴ The way in which the eternal relates to the temporal, the infinite to the finite, is kenosis. It is thus that Hegel thinks we may effectively re-contextualize the idea of absolutely-other, transcendent, “bad” infinite, and

⁶² Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 75.; *Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System*, 171. (emphasis added)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenologie*, 590-591; Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 492-493.

reconfigure our understanding of the infinite as that which expresses itself via the finite, hence its own negation. The essence of the infinite is such that it sacrifices its infinity and becomes expressed in the finite. The essence of the finite is that it negates itself and hence returns into the infinite. Mutual negation, the “power” of negativity, marks their fundamental unity: if we attempt to make sense of the *difference* between the infinite and the finite, Hegel thinks, we must demonstrate how this difference is a species of conceptual or logical identity. In other words, the self-negation that establishes their opposed, differential identities is an expression of identity in the concept, i.e., by a fundamental logical commensurability or unity, a speculative logical quality over and above affirmation and negation, but one that is not merely regulative. Thus, the logico-metaphysical problem of the expression of the infinite via the finite leads Hegel to a doubling down on his earlier conception of “life” as implying the “union of union and non-union” [*die Verbindung der Verbindung und Nicht-Verbindung*]. “Death,” as unthinkable, is emblematic of the “bad” infinite—infinite and insurmountable difference. Resurrection represents its sublation in a higher form of logical description. To pass through death and yet live, the function of sacrificial imagination for Hegel by the year 1800, is to become other while remaining the same. In other words, resurrection is the passage of the sacrificial imagination into the speculative unity of the Concept. It is the religious representation that represents “the union of union and non-union” as the “identity of identity and difference,” in time, the representation of a conceptual truth. The essence of the infinite is pressed to the limits of representational consciousness in the depiction of kenosis, self-divestment of infinity, and its self-recuperation. The essence of the finite is likewise divestment of its desire to itself be infinite, and an acquiescence to the reality of its own finitude, which thus delivers it to the infinite as infinite.

This all to say that kenotic sacrifice, as deployed in the early Jena works, sketches out the central structure of mediation as it appears in Hegel's idealist synthesis. It is a representation of a kenotic logos, the negation of negation, that regulates the circulation of its elements: the highest being is an expression of general truths about the being of finite beings, and finite beings exist in virtue of their resemblance to the highest being, the ground of their being. The being of ground and the ground of being form a unity of mutually logical necessity mediated by self-negation and expressed, in the mature system, as *Idea*. We might say, with just a bit of rhetorical slight-of-hand, that Hegel thereby rejoins Fichte's polemic against an "infinitely" mediate Absolute. Fichte, in his *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* defended the circular character of his subjective-foundationalism, decrying non-foundationalism as incoherent: to claim "that there is no immediate, but only mediated truth" is also to claim that truth "is without something whereby it is mediated" [*ohne etwas, wodurch sie vermittelt wird*]. Hegel's thought on the self-sacrificial character of the infinite seems to accede to Fichte's characterization up to a point, but also to amend it: indeed, the truth of Being is fully mediated, and nothing mediates it. Said otherwise, it is nothingness, determinate negativity, nothingness of the immediate, *the* nothing, that mediates it. Without the inclusion of this negativity as a moment of the infinite, no mediation would be thinkable. The representation of *kenosis* as the simultaneous overcoming and preserving of the antithesis between finite and infinite brings this heightened, necessary opposition into focus, and lays the ground for Hegel's mature project, as noted above. The retrieval or rehabilitation of the kenotic Christianity marks the decisive shift in Hegel's sacrificial imagination toward a "concretized" account of the synthetic activity of reason that Schelling locates in an immediate and abstract intuition, in Hegel's view.

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, Hegel is keen to overcome the merely stipulative character of Schelling's intuitive and esoteric account of the Absolute. Hegel's kenotic sacrificial imagination is put to work in such a way as to overcome the abstract immediacy of intuition, transforming the basic logico-metaphysical stipulation of Identity Philosophy into a method of demonstration [*Darstellung*]. This would require the construction of the Absolute, implicit in immediacy, to its highest and most complete and explicit mediation—infinite mediation, and a turning away from any and all exteriority or logical incommensurability as nonsense: the overcoming of the bad infinite. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* pursues this task.

Phenomenology as Kenosis

If the reflective standpoint is the *only* standpoint, the final and *absolute* standpoint, then the Absolute unity must remain abyssal, as it seems to remain in Schelling's view. "Intuition" would remain a statement of reflective rationality's failure, rather than its overcoming. It reveals only what cannot be revealed *as* un-reveal-able. For finite cognition, this unity would be an indeterminate, abstract negativity. Hegel wishes to use negativity in a different way entirely. The logico-metaphysical problem confronting the establishment of infinite, or Absolute knowledge is, as I have argued above, a problem of an implicitly onto-theological conception of Being. How does the infinite, whether conceived as subject or substance, "go out of itself" and "return to itself"? How can the finite express itself in the finite while remaining identical to itself? How can the "ground of being" and the "being of ground" be grasped in their essential unity? Hegel's path to this question began with practical concerns within the context of highly technical debates, which as a young man he seems to have believed would eventually be resolved by Fichte or Schelling. But as the previous chapters have shown, his efforts over time slowly steered him in

the direction of “Science.” If the infinite is to be *known*, to be actual in and for cognition, then it would be necessary that the above question be answered in such a way as does not suppress the differentiations of understanding, but negates and conserves them, sets them in their proper context as an expression of the infinite returning to itself in cognition. Hegel already grasped the centrality of *Opfer* or *Aufopferung* as structures of religious action that aimed, through various forms of negation, to reconcile sacrificers to God. By 1800, he had seen that the necessary logical feature of a successful sacrifice must be one in which the individual is both negated and preserved. Hegel identifies the function of substitutionary, destructive sacrifice in this way in the 1800 System. But obviously, such destructive sacrifices—like suppressive sacrifices for duty, and all economic sacrifices—do not achieve real reconciliation. Passage through death in this symbolic way allows us to represent the infinite, but not to *know* it. The individual remains to one side and the infinite on the other, in its spurious transcendence. Any negation of the individual is only an affirmation of this “bad” infinite. It does not reach the true, self-expressive infinite, in Hegel’s view. How could the negation of the negation that occurs in destructive acts of substitutionary sacrifice successfully unite infinite and finite in a way that nonetheless preserves their distinctness?

Kenosis or self-emptying marks an advance on this idea, from Hegel’s perspective. As we have seen, the central mysteries of Christianity seem to express this idea representationally, or more precisely, as a representation that points beyond its merely representational character toward a purely logical presentation of the sacrificial reconciliation of infinite and finite. Kenosis is, *par excellence*, the theological figure of becoming-other while remaining the same, dying and yet living. In order for the divine self-sacrifice to be efficacious, it must be *God* who dies. But in order to die, Jesus cannot be God. Jesus *empties* himself of his divinity in order to die an

ignominious death while, presumably, nonetheless remaining God and thus functioning as a genuine, gratuitous, and efficacious sacrifice, an act of forgiveness wherein God ceases to be God as implacable and transcendent Lord and thus becomes most truly God as Father by an outpouring of grace. The infinite expresses itself in the finite—even unto death—while remaining itself. The early Christian community that bears witness to this event is encouraged by Paul to seek to imitate this gesture: its members ought to have the same mindset as to their status within the community and in relation to God.⁶⁵ In emptying themselves of their desire to be equal to God, in accepting their finitude, they are exalted. *Entäußerung*, or kenosis, is the sacrificial model which anticipates *Aufhebung*—a negating, preserving, lifting-up, recontextualizing of difference. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* thus takes the form of a kenotic act.

In the *Phenomenology's* introduction, Hegel claims that the “violence” consciousness suffers “at its own hands [*von ihm selbst*]”⁶⁶ is a form of purely immanent critique.⁶⁷ In suspending the *a priori* assumption that the Absolute is unknowable⁶⁸ or infinitely distinct from consciousness, and merely attending to the way in which criteria are deployed and transformed in acts of judgment, we undertake a comparison and revision of consciousness’s immanent moments. Hence we come to the view, eventually, that “Substance is in itself implicitly subject; all content is its reflection into itself.”⁶⁹ While such exegetical points lead us to imagine that

⁶⁵ Philipians 2:5-11.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 74; Phenomenology, 51.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 76-79; 53-55.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69-70; 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 53; 33.

Hegel sat down, emptied his mind of metaphysical presuppositions, and began to trace all of the possible approaches to Absolute in their dialectical self-opposition and overcoming, we know that in Hegel's own mind this process of "emptying" had a direct antecedent in Christianity; Hegel tells us as much "But as regards the *existence* of this Notion, Science does not appear in Time and in the actual world before Spirit has attained this level of consciousness about itself" where it grasps that content is "comprehended" [*begriffen*] "only when the 'I' communes with itself in otherness. [*daß Ich in seinem Andersein bei sich selbst ist*]." ⁷⁰ If the possibility of a *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to be understood by way of what Hegel clearly avowed as the conceptual history of its production, then the prior historical emergence of Christianity and from within that tradition, a kenotic model of sacrifice as displaying [*darstellt*] the conceptually grasped [*begriffen*] relation of infinite and finite, is absolutely necessary. It is precisely the ability to remain at-home or with-one-self while dispossessing one's self of some essentiality that initiates Hegel's retrieval of kenotic language vis-à-vis the problem of death in the context of the essential unity of onto-theology, as I have intimated above. Indeed, "the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what *Spirit* is, but only Science is its true knowledge of itself." ⁷¹

If the *Phenomenology* is to reconstruct the emergence of the philosophical standpoint whereby Spirit becomes perfectly self-reflexive, then a certain provisional version of this synthesis is first necessary in representational thought, i.e., in religion. Kenosis represents, for Hegel, the possibility of a logic that resolves dialectical antitheses without suppressing their

⁷⁰ Ibid., 583; 486.

⁷¹ Ibid., 585-586; 488.

differentiation and concreteness. “The power of Spirit [*die Kraft des Geistes*] lies rather in remaining the selfsame Spirit in its kenosis [*Entäusserung*] and, as that which is both *in itself* and *for itself*, in making its *being-for-self* no less merely a moment than its in-itself; nor is Spirit a third term [*ein Drittes*] that casts the differences back into the abyss of the Absolute and declares that therein they are all the same...”⁷² Kenosis is the presentation of the conceptual content of religion, its transition point from *Vorstellung* to pure conceptual *Darstellung*. Kenosis is the concrete “power” [*die Kraft des Geistes*] of Spirit to maintain itself as itself in becoming other than itself. And as Hegel says some years later,⁷³ “Faith in the power of spirit [*der Glaube an die Macht des Geistes*] is the first condition of philosophy.”⁷⁴

Kenotic sacrifice, the power of spirit and first condition of philosophy, is deployed in several different ways in Hegel’s text.⁷⁵ First, we should note, is *kenosis* as the type of activity which *constitutes* phenomenological description. The passage from “natural” to “philosophical” self-consciousness is an act of kenotic sacrifice whereby Spirit radicalizes the finitude of its inner determinations, “tarry with the negative,” finally discovering its speculative unity in and through

⁷² Ibid., 588; 490.

⁷³ The terminological change here is not without significance. This difference indicates, upon my reading, the same self-relating negativity viewed from two different perspectives. The German “*Kraft*” tends to denote observable, corporeal force. “*Macht*” is characteristic of the principles of such deployments of force. If kenotic sacrifice is the practical *Kraft* of Spirit, *Macht* of Spirit would be this power grasped reflexively, its subsequent theoretical comprehension. In religion, we experience the highest form of human, i.e., rational, activity, through acceding to a certain form of passivity (e.g., through dialectical thinking and mutual recognition). In philosophy, we give this *Kraft* its presentation or demonstration [*Darstellung*] in a purely conceptual form. Hence, to hold fast to the possibility of theoretical comprehension of this *Kraft* would be best understood as the first condition of philosophical cognition. Christianity is the historical revelation [*Offenbarung*] of this condition.

⁷⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Rede zum Antritt Des Philosophischen Lehramtes an der Universität Berlin” in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd.18, Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816 - 1831)*. Edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, Hbg., 1994), 18.

⁷⁵ Paolo Diego Bubbio, *Sacrifice in the Post-Kantian Tradition*, 62.

its “utter dismemberment.”⁷⁶ Second, we find kenosis at work with respect to specific phenomenological problems, most specifically problems of misrecognition in the book’s second half. Finally, we see this whole sweep of kenotic language summarized as it emerges as the conceptual content of revealed religion, thus a community of mutual recognition, and finally the central mechanism of an onto-theology, the “eternal” [*ewig*] kenosis of the concept in its passage from logos, to nature, and finally Spirit.

Entäußerung, or *die Kraft des Geistes*, is now understood by Hegel as the model of sacrifice appropriate to a modern religion and thus to support the emergence of community of rational freedom, nondualistically conceived. What remains is to elevate it from its merely representational form and develop it into the presentation of a pure, logical Idea. Hegel’s project from 1793-1806 is guided by a singular focus on these themes—despite the various theoretical models he adopts and over time subsumes or sublates. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, we can see kenosis deployed as a means of approaching the basic logico-metaphysical problems noted above and their methodological corollaries. One can thus unpack Hegel’s responses to these problems as both a refinement of his early questions about the *practical* valence of nondualistically conceived freedom in religion and religious sacrifice, and as *theoretical* variations on the kenotic theme: first, kenosis as the basic structure of Hegel’s phenomenological method of self-negation and recuperation. That is to say, Hegel’s kenotic turn should be understood as the theoretical culmination (rather than repudiation) of his initial, practical vision. Second, the kenotic model of sacrifice is adopted as the fundamental, dialectical expression of social models of reconciliation that sublate the finite standpoint of the solitary subject and

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 36; *Phenomenology*, 19.

overcome the contradictions inherent in its attempt to establish a non-social, self-authorizing form of normativity. Third, Hegel's responses to these logico-metaphysical or onto-theo-logical problems dictate how, in his view, the social character of rationality becomes reflexive in the *Vorstellung* of religious communities, and finally the way in which Hegel's kenotic sacrificial imagination forms the religious antecedent to speculative logic as such.

As I have noted above, Hegel's sacrificial imagination has now turned to distinctly theoretical issues, though this does not imply an abandonment of his central practical concerns so much as a patient and methodical following through on them. Hegel's early works focused on the praxis of modern freedom that would be both rationally autonomous and nondualistic. As a matter of conveying and supporting these ideas within a shared imaginary, it was necessary to appeal to religion, in Hegel's view. The necessity of sacrificial action was central to a *Volksreligion* that could sustain a process of political modernization by supporting a nondualistic conception of autonomy. All religion involves sacrifice, Hegel believes. It is sacrifice which is the mode of communication and reconciliation between human beings and divine beings. But as a practical structure and as a feature of religious and moral imagination, sacrifice seems to contravene the features of a putatively rational *Volksreligion*: it would reproduce and reinforce the opposition it purports to overcome, and it would render potentially autonomous acts into acts of moral servitude. *Dankbarkeit* is the first candidate for such an integral standard, where the differences required for sacrificial action to be intelligible would be preserved in one sense, and suspended in another (1793). Kantian moralism was the diagnostic framework for accounting for this form of sacrifice (1792-1796), but Kant's own account of moral action and religious imagination could not live up to its own standards. For a time, then, Hegel turned to a more Hellenic model of self-sacrificial *love* as the fulfillment of Kant's formalism (ca. 1798). But this

needs a proper expression in the imagination to sustain a religion, and it seems Christianity's kenotic account of sacrifice fails to do so. The sharpest turn one will find in Hegel's work occurs on *this* point. That the matrix of Christic images associated with divine kenosis are not a deficient form of imagination for producing a new, modern synthesis of imagination and concept, but that indeed kenosis prefigures the possibility of such a synthesis, and thus Christianity is in a sense the historical antecedent to such a view taking shape at all. It is only by *including* death within the horizon of speculative identity that the Absolute can be meaningfully articulated at all (1800). Only thus can the self-identity of the infinite be maintained in its self-negation, and only thus can the finite conceptualize its own finitude. Kenotic sacrifice marks the practical structure of this inclusion—a logic of immanent negativity and its recuperation in a transfigured form, a more comprehensive level of conceptual presentation (1801). It is thus that Hegel begins to intervene, in often subtle ways, in his defenses of Schelling, to stake out his own position, as noted above (1801-1802).

The central problem for Schelling's system is the relationship between the infinite and the finite, and for Hegel this implied a series of interrelated methodological concerns grounded in the limits of an intuitive solution to this problem, represented by Hegel in terms drawn from Christian 'kenotic' imagery and narratives. In Hegel's introduction to the *Phenomenology*, it must be admitted, the kenotic themes are not as obvious as in the preface (the latter being drafted upon completion of the rest of the manuscript). But then neither is the critique of Schelling. The latter parts of the *Phenomenology*—the sections on "Religion," and "Absolute Knowing,"—seem to have had some profound effects on Hegel's framing of the project in general. They were written with great haste and under considerable duress. Hegel had failed to secure a paid position at Jena. His landlady was soon to give birth to his illegitimate child whom he felt a moral

obligation to support financially—and all this within the context of the imminent collapse of the Holy Roman Empire itself as Napoleon and his armies continued to press Eastward. Given the various professional, personal, and world-historical pressures of the moment, Hegel was, to put matters mildly, keen to have his long-promised book manuscript put to press. These last, most harried passages are also the portions of the text wherein the kenotic theme and its conceptual meaning are most prevalent and readily apparent. I do not at all think that this biographical information should lead us to take these passages as less authoritative in giving an account of Hegel's views and their relation to Christianity and Christian sacrifice, however. On the contrary, it would make sense that, under such pressures, Hegel was under a stronger compulsion to make the religious anticipations of idealism plain.

Attending to the theological and religious antecedents of Hegel's thinking is not meant to contravene the exegetical point—oft-made by “post-Kantian” readers of Hegel such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard—that Hegel's “Christianity” must ultimately be understood as an expression of his idealism.⁷⁷ This is, in a certain qualified sense, quite correct. Still, it ought to serve as a corrective to a certain anti-theological tendency in their readings. Pippin and Pinkard both risk distorting Hegel's philosophy where they insist that Hegel's Christianity is in the service of his idealism without also noting that, at the same time, Hegel understands his idealism as the conceptual clarification of Christianity. Hegel was, in good faith, interpreting Christian dogma *as* an idealist project, as depicting a logic of kenotic sacrifice that reshaped the space of reasons and made possible the emergence of the speculative system. In the passages where Hegel is most harried, this matter does not become less clear but, in fact, all the more so: for it is in

⁷⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 151, & 189 n14; Pinkard, *Hegel*, 700 n13.

these sections that the role of Hegel's sacrificial imagination in the very possibility of a *Phenomenology of Spirit* must be stated with as little ado as possible in addressing the limits Hegel perceived in the intuitive and esoteric approach of Schelling.

In the *Phenomenology's* "Introduction," Hegel is more circumspect about his relation to Schelling's identity philosophy as well as Christian kenosis, it must be admitted. There Hegel provides a basic sketch of determinate negativity, an immanently or auto-critical science of experience [*Erfahrung*], i.e., a new way of doing philosophical criticism that neither begins with an *a priori* critique of the faculties nor with an absolute principle from which corollaries must be derived. The points Hegel makes here about critique, the abyssal absolute, and negativity all correspond to remarks in earlier Jena writings with respect to Schelling's account of an intuitive self-grounding of the Absolute, and in terms drawn from Hegel's understanding of divine kenosis in Christian narrative. We might say that here Hegel is attempting to *present* at the level of a method of criticism as self-negation and recuperation what in the earlier Jena writings Christianity's kenotic images and narratives manage to merely *represent*. The nonstipulative character of Absolute identity would, in Hegel's mind, rule out positing such an identity as an *a priori* necessary condition. Rather, it would have to be developed immanently from within experience itself, i.e., to lift "naïve" consciousness into self-consciousness and finally the philosophical standpoint. This is precisely what the dialectical scheme of the introduction sets out to do through an immanent and self-recuperating negativity (again, anticipated in Hegel's remarks on kenosis dating back six years). The general picture of knowledge and knowing that a reflective standpoint would bring to bear in knowing the Absolute frustrates this possibility *a priori*, in that it understands the relation of knower, known, and knowing to be a purely external, contingent one. In attempting to offer a critique of knowledge by observing the "instrument" as

Kant does, we can get nowhere. For what we want to know is what things are like in truth, not merely as we represent them. Subtracting the “conditions” to which our faculties submit them gets us no further—we end up with a “thing in itself,” and indeterminate substance, or an empty abyss [*Abgrund*]. We are no better than we started. Hegel suggests we re-conceptualize experience and critique by noting that the skeptical doubts incurred by such *a prioristic* approaches to establishing Absolute knowledge (or its impossibility) are in fact self-defeating. If we have grounds to doubt the ability of cognition to map onto the way reality is independent of cognition, then we can just as well doubt the basis of our skeptical doubts, as these would be no less subject to skepticism than other kinds of knowledge. Further, we must recognize in Hegel’s view that the distinction between what exists “for” consciousness and what is real and true independent of consciousness, “in itself,” is in fact a distinction drawn by consciousness itself, and an essential constituent *of* reflective consciousness. That is to say, a critique of consciousness cannot proceed *a priori* after Kant’s fashion. In this case, Hegel says, the philosopher finds herself in a situation akin to someone who refuses to jump in the water until she has learned to swim.⁷⁸ Rather, consciousness is for Hegel auto-critical. It “suffers this violence at its own hands”⁷⁹ and embarks on a “pathway of doubt [*Zweifels*] or more precisely a pathway of despair [*Verzweiflung*].”⁸⁰ Consciousness in doubt, doubting the correspondence of its knowledge to the criterion of knowledge experiences a splitting in two [*zwei*], and despair [*Verzweiflung*] of its own capacity to know the truth that is in turn transformed in a moment of a

⁷⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, in *Werke in 20 Bänden und Register*, Bd.20. Edited by Eva Moldenhauer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996) 334.

⁷⁹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 74; *Phenomenology*, 51.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 72; 49.

new conception of the truth. In attempting to see whether our knowledge measures up to the thing as it is in-itself, we use a criterion [*Mäßstab*] that is provided in and through consciousness. When our claims to knowledge do not accord with this criterion, we do not merely adjust our claims in Hegel's view, but also the norm on which the claim was based. The criterion itself is transformed, since the negation of the previous way of judging the object is now a part of a more complete conceptual determination of the object. The new object "contains the nothingness of the first."⁸¹ Here, Hegel's supersessionist model for the "Science of Experience" is clear. Like the "Spirit" which arises in the absence of Christ's body and comprehends his death, contains it within itself, the new and more complete conceptual determination of the object includes the finitude of its previous form within itself. Like the "spurious" infinite represented in the sacrifices of the temple cult, fulfilled and overcome in the kenotic self-sacrifice that unites God with humanity, the "Spirit" that arises in experience comprehends and overcomes its alienation in the "letter" of experience.

Thus, the negativity of the previous moment is recollected within the horizon of a new shape of consciousness. Applying this criterion to knowledge itself can show the way to philosophical science, but only where the criterion for reflexive knowing and knowing itself are identical. Said otherwise, where consciousness can establish its normative authoritativeness for judgment without reliance on any alien standard—indeed only, and precisely, where consciousness "casts off" [*ableegen*] any and all sense of being beholden to "alien-ness" [*Fremdartigem*] as the authoritative ground of its judgments—does consciousness find that

⁸¹ Ibid., 78-79; 55-56.

authentic Science is possible.⁸² Thus, Hegel's *Phenomenology* will offer a systematic description of the auto-critical or dialectical character of *Erfahrung*, as a comparison of the moments of consciousness that results in their self-amendment, this "violence." In articulating a form of immanently self-negating and recuperating critique, Hegel obviates the problem of a purely stipulative solution to the onto-theo-logical question, provided he can *demonstrate* its truth for cognition.

That the *Phenomenology* will begin to present [*darstellen*] what kenotic Christianity only represents [*vorstellt*] is made clearer still in Hegel's preface, where he draws all of the threads of together. So, also, is his antipathy for the Schellingian line of thought. Schelling, in Hegel's view, has tacked from Fichte to Spinoza, and neither view is satisfying. Schelling's identity philosophy merely stipulates Absolute identity and does so in a purely formal, content-less way as "A=A." The principle of an Absolute unity, as stipulated by Schelling's Identity philosophy, is only the starting point, Hegel tells us. It can no more pass for a philosophical account to the Absolute as can saying "all animals" pass for a zoology. It is purely content-less, abyssal, and vacuous, in Hegel's view. The formal opposition of finite and infinite must be overcome and expressed in the form of mutual necessity. Schelling's principle of identity does not do this, but rather "denounces and despises [formalism], only to see it reappear in its midst."⁸³ The Absolute becomes an abyss into which all finitude is cast, "a night, as the saying goes, in which all cows are black."⁸⁴ It is, it would seem, too much akin to the "pure Being" of Hölderlin's *Über Urtheil*

⁸² Ibid., 80-81 ; 56-57.

⁸³ Ibid., 21-22; 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 22, 9.

und Seyn, what Hegel now calls “indeterminate immediacy.”⁸⁵ In Hegel’s view, the Absolute is not pure or abstract, is not untouched by its involvement with the finite. It *only* expresses itself *in* the finite. Hence, it is only expressed via its self-negation and, as we shall see, this occurs within the Subject itself in the form of a radical critique of all immediacy that eventually takes the form of Science.

That is to say, the Absolute must be expressed systematically, in the full course of “articulated cognition,”⁸⁶ and demonstrated, rather than merely stipulated. What is *demonstrated* and not merely assumed or intuited, is the unity of Substance and Subject, of being and thinking, of the in-itself and the for-itself. “In my view, which can only be justified by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns upon grasping the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.”⁸⁷ This can occur only where the “whole,” which alone is the “true,” is grasped not as an abstract substantial identity or as a self-positing principle but as “self-restoring sameness or reflection in otherness within itself [*wiederherstellende Gleichheit oder die Reflexion im Anderssein in sich selbst*].”⁸⁸ And this process begins precisely through the form of immanent critique which Hegel first articulated in the introduction—but now Hegel gives the account of this self-negation and recuperation in more dramatic terms: “The power of spirit is only as great

⁸⁵ We can also see how Hegel, in breaking with Schelling, sets himself up for a very different meditation on Being than that of Heidegger. For Hegel, Heidegger’s understanding of the epochal *Schickungen* of Being, the way that the presence of the presence presences, or withholds itself, could, it would seem, only ever fall within the category of “indeterminate immediacy.” Heidegger’s “step-back” [*Schritt-zurück*] into the un-thought essence of onto-theo-logic (which Heidegger contrasts with Hegelian *Aufhebung* which is, rather, the culmination of onto-theo-logic) thus ought perhaps be examined in relation to Schelling’s theory of intuition, and as a form of memory work distinct from Hegelian *Erinnerung*.

⁸⁶ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 22; *Phenomenology*, 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23; 9-10.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10, 23.

as its expression or externalization [*Die Kraft des Geistes ist nur so groß als ihre Äußerung*].”⁸⁹ Spirit is constituted in and through kenosis [*Entäußerung*]. Such a form of sacrifice radicalizes the oppositions of the understanding so as to point to their higher reconciliation, whereby the formerly immediate term negates itself and finds itself constituted in its dialectical other. “*Pure self-recognition in absolute otherness [das reine Selbsterkennen im absoluten Anderssein]*, this Aether as such, is the ground and soil of Science and *knowledge in general*. The beginning of philosophy presupposes or requires that consciousness should dwell in this element. But this element achieves its own fullness [*Vollendung*] and transparency only through its becoming [*Werdens*].”⁹⁰

In other words, the “power of Spirit” is its becoming-other while remaining self-identical, its articulation of its mediate identity through the surrender, self-negation, or out-pouring of its immediate identity, is the starting point and presupposition of true speculative thought that grasps the whole as an immanent totality, rather than as the spurious infinite of a an unending series of external, discrete particulars. The “indeterminate immediacy” of the intuitively grasped Absolute is merely the vestibule. Substance must negate itself to give birth to subject, and subject must negate itself and reconcile itself to substance.⁹¹ Of course, neither Substance nor Subject is, itself, the rationally comprehensible infinite. This is not a metaphysic which “inverts” Spinoza any more than it is Spinozism. Were that the case, we can plausibly assume Hegel would have been more content with Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* or with Schelling’s

⁸⁹ Ibid., 18; 6 (Translation modified).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 29; 14 (Translation modified).

⁹¹ Ibid., 23; 10.

Identitätsphilosophie. Rather, both subject and substance are part of an infinite whole, the principle of which has been indicated by an extended and tortuous transcendental deduction in the form of post-Kantian metaphysical and epistemological debates, but not yet given any *content*, not yet grounded in a way as to absolve it from the constitutive limits of *a priori* philosophizing. For Hegel, the infinite whole cannot be grasped meaningfully in intuition. Intuition only functions as a kind of stipulation of unity, as “Being” or indeterminate immediacy. This is the bare indication, the “police sketch” of the Absolute. The Absolute as such remains an outstanding task for reflexively comprehended, systematic demonstration.

Given that the Absolute or infinite must be known *in* and *through* itself, it can have no exteriority, no other term against which it is dialectically defined. And yet it thus threatens “vacuity,” nothing but negation of the finite world. How can the finite be included within it? The panoply of its finite determinations are *negations* of its infinity, but negations that must be immanent to it—this unity must be self-negating but also “self-restoring,” as Hegel has noted. Thus, as first sketched through his account of destructive, substitutionary sacrifice in 1800, Hegel holds that the self-restoring “Life” of the infinite, the horizon within which its finite determinations of the infinite are recuperated, must include death. A retrieval of central mysteries of dogmatic Christianity, centrally the kenotic dimension of Eucharistic, Incarnational, Paschal, and Trinitarian language, provided the religious outlines of such a self-relating negativity. In the *Einleitung*, Hegel describes this as the “violence” of auto-critical consciousness. After completing his sections on Christianity as *Offenbarung*, in chapter seven of the *Phenomenology*, however, he more freely draws on kenotic language to characterize this reconceptualization of the phenomenological field of vision, a transformation of Being revealed to intuition as abstract immediacy into a wealth of articulated forms traced through a

radicalization, rather than a suppression of the “power” of the Negative. “Death,” the most radical expression of the oppositions of *Verstand*, must be put to “work” [*Arbeit*] in breaking up the totality of any bare and abstract, immediate identity, thus allowing it to take determinations. In demonstrating or presenting [*darstellen*] how the “whole” is a self-negating and “self-restoring totality,” the appeal to intuitive understanding or the abstract immediacy of the pure givenness of substance and subject in their absolute unity is overcome and expressed in a wealth of differentiated forms. The dynamic of self-negation and self-recuperation, becoming-other while remaining identical, the *logical* content of kenotic sacrifice, is deployed in a critique of the basic approach to the Absolute provided by Schelling. The givenness of the Absolute *as given*, for Hegel, only gives itself in *what* is given. It is only revealed through its activity in the finite. The negation of the subject that constitutes the subjective grasp of substance, and the negation of substance that produces the substantial form of the subject are themselves negated.

[T]he Life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather life that endures [*erträgt*] and maintains itself in it [*in ihm sich erhält*]. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment [*Zerissenheit*], it finds itself... Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called Subject, which by giving determinateness an existence in its own element supersedes abstract immediacy, i.e., the immediacy which barely is, and thus is authentic substance: that being or immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but which is this mediation itself.⁹²

But the “tarrying” with the negativity of reflective “understanding” [*Verstand*], radically expressed in death, in bearing and holding fast to one’s self in the face of death, is not something that happens only on the side of subjectivity. This death does not *distinguish* subject from

⁹² Ibid., 36; 19.

substance. Reflexively grasping the reality of death is what facilitates recognition of their speculative identity.

The disparity which exists in consciousness between the ‘I’ and the substance which is its object is the distinction between them, the *negative* in general... Now although this negative appears at first as a disparity between the ‘I’ and its object, it is just as much the disparity of substance with itself. Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and substance shows itself to be essentially subject.⁹³

Where “Spirit,” has shown [*gezeigt*] this exhaustively, its existence [*Dasein*] and its essence [*Wesen*] are unified. Through the process of kenotic self-negation, which is for Hegel also a recuperation, Spirit is no longer alienated from its essence, no longer seeking it in some alien [*fremden*] term, but has realized and grasped it as its own self-relating negativity. It has transformed itself through this kenosis, has prepared itself for service in the continual *cultus* of philosophy, the purely conceptual expression of the Absolute that is the systematic science of the Speculative Idea.⁹⁴ With this, “the Phenomenology of Spirit is concluded.”⁹⁵ Reflexive kenotic sacrifice *is* Spirit, the unity of its essence and existence, its undertaking the sort of change that allows it to become and remain that which it essentially is. The division [*Trennung*] of knowledge [*Wissen*] and truth [*Wahrheit*] is overcome, and the difference between them is understood as a difference in various configurations of their content that may now be organized into a coherent, systematic whole: “*die Logik oder spekulative philosophie.*”⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid., 39; 21.

⁹⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, Band 3, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983) 334. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition - The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter Hodgson, One-Volume Ed (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) 194.

⁹⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 39; *Phenomenology*, 21.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 39; 22.

The model of kenotic sacrifice thus unites subject and substance, thinking and being, intuition and understanding, life and death, activity and passivity, part and whole, grounded and ground. In its conceptual expression, it is the unity of eternity and temporal appearances, the “arising and passing away which does not itself arise and pass away, but is ‘in itself’, and constitutes the actuality and the movement of the life of truth.”⁹⁷

Kenosis and Intersubjectivity

Kenosis, as the model for the expression of the Idea as the unity of Substance and Subject is also essential to the way in which these logico-metaphysical terms are deployed in Hegel’s account of intersubjectivity vis-à-vis the question of establishing the authoritativeness of norms of judgment. This problem appears where the kenotic critique of singular consciousness must pass over into a critique of self-consciousness. Kenosis is thus the template for socially mediate self-consciousness, the “I” that, famously, is also a “we.” The same logic of maintaining self in self-negation is essential here for establishing both the essential rational authoritativeness and accountability necessary for membership in an epistemic community. Recognition [*Anerkennung*] is the intersubjective expression of Hegelian kenotic phenomenology—it is only through kenotic gestures that socially authorized rationality can realize its authentic shape.⁹⁸

Where the kenotic approach to phenomenology begins with the onto-theological problem of relating infinite and finite in cognition via the epistemic vectors of contentfulness and exoteric demonstrability, the “social” deployment of kenosis focuses on the problem of the self-authorization of rationality. These kenotic procedures, and the problems they address, are

⁹⁷ Ibid., 46; 27.

⁹⁸ Cf. Molly Farneth, *Hegel’s Social Ethics* (2017).

connected. In a sense, the problem reflects the same basic problem that dogs *a priori* systems of nature or subjectivity generally, but here at the level of an epistemic and moral community. How is it possible that rational norms, conceived as activity of isolated subjects, can be anything other than a sort of tautological self-assertion? The same question can be extended to the status of the transcendental unity of apperception itself. As Robert Pippin has it, how can the normative authoritativeness of reason be established without recourse to question-begging or violence?⁹⁹ The viewpoint of transcendental philosophy implies a certain form of community that facilitates its emergence and is sustained by it. Here, where the kenotic imaginary is leveraged with respect to phenomenological status of intersubjectivity, we find the *Wendungspunkt* between the metaphysical questions that condition the emergence of German idealism, and the political questions that dogged the idealists in the wake of the French Revolution. In the kenotic act, which sustains the community of mutually recognizant subjects, the possibility of the transcendental standpoint appears, and the essential link between a certain interpretation of Christian dogma and the aspirations of Absolute idealism becomes clearer.

Hegel traverses the various candidates for cognition of the Absolute. Such attempts pass into contradiction and are sublated into more comprehensive conceptual frameworks.¹⁰⁰ Sense-certainty, for example, shows itself to be intelligible as a kind of knowledge only on the basis of conceptually mediate perception. Perception is likewise only intelligible by its mediation in the understanding. The analytical operations of the understanding are only intelligible on the basis of

⁹⁹ Cf. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* (1989).

¹⁰⁰ Some of the following passages are an amended reproduction of a previously published essay, "Selfhood and Sacrifice in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in *Self Or No-Self? The Debate About Selflessness and Sense of Self*, *Claremont Series on the Philosophy of Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck), 2017. Many thanks to Elizabeth Wener and the staff of Mohr-Siebeck for their kind permission to reprint portions of that work here.

some unified, universal principle that actively synthesizes their contents. When thought grasps that it is *itself* such a power of synthesis, it thematizes itself as item for knowledge as *self-consciousness*.¹⁰¹ Since self-consciousness has developed as the negation and appropriation of the content of all the preceding attempts at articulating truth “in itself,” it posits as its criterion the absolute validity of its normative status with regard to thought and action. This is what Hegel famously dubs *Begierde* or “Desire.”¹⁰²

Desire is a kind of absolute sympathy with itself—it accepts no normative constraints on its thinking and action save its own self-assertion and quest for satisfaction. That is to say, it takes itself to instantiate a condition of *Selbstständigkeit* or “independence.” It attempts to actualize this self-conception in satisfying its desires and pursuing purposive activities and affirming them as normatively absolute and unconditionally valid. An initial contradiction arises, however—Desire posits itself as being absolutely self-sufficient and self-enclosed, but comes to grasp that it relies on something external to it, namely the object, the point of resistance to Desire that, paradoxically, sustains it as such. It is apparent then that the essence of desire is not self-identical, but something grasped in and through a reflective relation to its object. Desire thus *negates* the object in order to support its implicit conceit that, as Desire, self-consciousness is the unconditional source of valid norms for thinking and acting. By destroying the other that opposes it, Desire itself remains and attests to its status as absolute. “Certain of the nothingness of this

¹⁰¹ Ibid. B. IV. *Selbstbewusstsein*, 137ff; B. IV. Self-Consciousness, 104ff.

¹⁰² Ibid., 138-139; 104-105.

other,” Hegel writes, “[Desire] explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object [...].”¹⁰³

However, in attesting to its status as the ultimate arbiter of truth and value by negating objects, Desire runs into a second, more vexing problem. In negating its object absolutely, Desire loses the medium of its reflective activity but *not* the mediated character of its identity. Thus the alienation of Desire within the world of transient, conditioned objects is not *overcome* by this abstract negation, but *intensified*. While the object itself has vanished, the mediation of Desire in its other has not—it is merely reaffirmed by the fact that the activity of negating the object was a necessary part of Desire’s attempt at self-assertion and self-integration. For without some other to sublate, the movement that characterizes Desire as the negation of otherness is itself impossible.¹⁰⁴ Only if it can relate itself to an object that can endure its negation and sustain the reflection of that negation, Hegel tells us, can Desire achieve true satisfaction. And this is possible only where the negation is met with a negation:

On account of the independence of the object, therefore, [Desire] can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself [...] But this universal independent nature in which negation is present as absolute negation, is the genus as such, or the genus as *self-consciousness*. *Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*¹⁰⁵

In order to actualize itself as transcendental *self-consciousness*, Desire needs an object that can actively assent to its claims to status *as* self-consciousness by negating *itself*, by recognizing its normative legitimacy and “making room” for it. In order for this recognition

¹⁰³ Ibid., 143; 109.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 143-144; 110.

[*Anerkennung*] to effectively establish the normative legitimacy of Desire, however, it must itself *be* normatively authoritative. Thus a problem emerges. Desire must negate *itself* to affirm the normative status of the other and thus to receive the self-constituting benefit of the other's self-negation. In the presence of a *self-negating* object, Desire can only become genuinely self-conscious by being *simultaneously self-negating*. That is to say, recognition has a kenotic structure. Desire must give up its desire to be "equal to God" in order to enter into the community. Desire gives itself up in order to preserve itself, it becomes-other while remaining identical. Desire must "die" to itself in the sense of an absolutely autarchic, self-sufficient criterion [*Mäßstab*] of truth and value, in order to realize itself as genuine self-consciousness in the other. This produces a new, social criterion for selfhood. In seeking recognition from another self-consciousness, I give up my initial criterion of selfhood (i.e., autarkic, self-identical, desirous). I contract or negate my own plenitude of will and self-assertion as a source of norms for thinking and acting in order to *recognize* the normative constraint of another self-consciousness upon me. The other self-consciousness *recognizes me recognizing it* and, at the same time, *I recognize it recognizing me*.¹⁰⁶ I am simultaneously subject and object—subject insofar as I see, object insofar as I am seen. In the kenotic moment of recognition, I am both passive and active, both determined and determining.¹⁰⁷

This is, of course, the *ideal* of the kenotically constituted community. But the reciprocal, recognitive grounding of the "I and the We is not always present in historical communities. In

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 147; 112 & *supra*.

¹⁰⁷ *Pace* Paolo Diego Bubbio. Cf. Bubbio, *Sacrifice in the Post-Kantian Tradition*, 63.

malformed relationships, in the mis-relations between subjects and objects,¹⁰⁸ we find relations of domination, or self-frustrating recognition that have not risen to the level of the kenotic model that would reconcile its discrete elements into an organic whole. The state of mutual recognition is the implicit aim of human interactions, but attempts to actualize it take concrete shapes that frustrate its attempts at satisfaction. Desire is not completely transformed into actual self-consciousness all at once. Rather, self-consciousness must be *achieved*.

And how can self-consciousness be achieved in a community of fully, mutually recognizant subjects? The sketch of recognition above points to the generally “self-negating” or “sacrificial” structure of the dialectic of self-consciousness as it emerges from *Begierde*. Where the process of establishing the normative legitimacy of a single subject is taken to be an activity *of* that subject, the normative legitimacy of “merely subjective” rationality can only be assumed—it relies on its own putative rationality to demonstrate its rationality. Much like Schelling’s formula of speculative identity $A=A$, it can be stipulated as true, but it has yet to be demonstrated. As in the case of speculative identity generally, kenotic sacrifice is the “power” [*Kraft*] that must be exerted by subjects who overcome moral injury and conflict in the relationship between the hard-hearted judge and the wicked consciousness. As I have argued elsewhere, Hegel’s argument effectively claims that the sacrificial legitimation of the normative authority of self-conscious rationality occurs socially—self-conscious rational authority is mere self-assertion unless it is *rerecognized* by another rational subject whom I also recognize.¹⁰⁹ In negating myself, my commitment to my own normative *Selbständigkeit*, I receive this rational

¹⁰⁸ I borrow this phrase from Robyn Marasco’s *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory After Hegel* (2015).

¹⁰⁹ W. Ezekiel Goggin, “Selfhood and Sacrifice in Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’” in *Self Or No-Self?* (2017).

authority in a new, transfigured form, marked by the wounds of finitude. The model for this sacrificial legitimation of normative authority as the reflexive comprehension of a community's Spirit is, unsurprisingly, kenotic, Hegel claims.

The sacrificial performances of confession and forgiveness that constitute a spiritual community of mutual recognition, an “‘I’ that is a we and a we that is an ‘I,’”¹¹⁰ are acts of kenosis, as we see in precisely what happens in the case of the ‘wicked’ consciousness and the ‘heart-hearted’ judge. The hard-hearted judge and the wicked consciousness emerge as antitheses within conscience. Conscience appears as the attempt on the part of the so-called ‘moral worldview,’ resonant with Kantian moralism, as we shall see, to reconcile its finitude by appeal to the ideal of individual conscience. The “moral worldview” is a shape of Spirit that believes a purely formal consideration of the idea of duty can give rise to a basic normative orientation through which specific, concrete duties can be deduced. But ultimately the “moral worldview” fails to give itself any concrete moral content, and cannot adjudicate between competing, rationally valid claims to duty as they arise in different contexts.¹¹¹ The need to make a form of moral decision arises at the limits of formal rationality to produce concrete normative content. Hegel calls this shape of Spirit ‘conscience’ [*Gewiss*] that acts on the basis of certainty [*gewissheit*] that it asserts as a matter of its “conviction” [*Überzeugung*].¹¹² Spirit as ‘conscience’ need only listen to itself. Indeed, it is “in itself its own divine worship [*Sie ist ebenso Gottesdienst in sich selbst*]; for its action [*Handlen*] is the contemplation of its own divinity

¹¹⁰ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 144; *Phenomenology*, 110.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 442-464; 365-382.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 469-471; 688-689.

[*Göttlichkeit*].”¹¹³ This shape of spirit takes its decision or conviction to be absolutely authoritative in adjudicating between competing, possible normative commitments. Hence, Hegel claims, it “lacks the power of externalization”—it refuses to accept “the burden of being a thing.” The acts it undertakes in the name of its conviction cannot, according to its self-understanding, be meaningfully judged by others with different commitments.¹¹⁴

In a community whose organizing value is subjective conviction as the ultimate justificatory ground of valuability, Hegel suggests, the authenticity and hypocrisy become the basic parameter of morally persuasive discourse. The provisional synthesis of opposing value spheres in form of ‘conviction’ thus falls into the antithesis of what Hegel calls the wicked consciousness and judge. The wicked consciousness, on the strength of the conviction-model of normative authority, claims that the normatively relevant content of its actions is exhausted by its conviction and intention, that no one, ultimately has the right to judge it save itself—and this produces for it a sort of free-ranging nihilism about duty (which it then passes off through duplicitous claims to act in accord with conviction). The judge accuses the wicked consciousness of acting out of its passing desires, rather than the conviction it attests—and most importantly, of refusing to take responsibility for the publicly relevant consequences of its actions by rejecting that its conduct is in fact open to the judgments of others at all. But the judge, Hegel writes, abstains from actions as a way to avoid this form of social conflict. It simply refuses to act and attempts to construct a ‘pure’ notion of duty as an ideal. In so doing, it commits an ‘evil’ that mirrors that of the wicked consciousness. The withdrawal of the judge from the world of action

¹¹³ Ibid., 481; 397.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Molly Farneth, *Hegel’s Social Ethics* (2017).

is, just as much as the radical subjectivism of the wicked consciousness, in essence a refusal to accept *guilt* before the other, to be called to account for transgressions vis-à-vis the claims to normative authoritativeness. It “lacks the power of kenosis [*Entäußerung*]” and refuses to suffer the “burden of being a thing.” But in witnessing the confession of the wicked, the judge’s hard heart eventually breaks as it comes to see that it, too is guilty of the same offense against Spirit. It mirrors the confession of the wicked and forgives it.¹¹⁵

The forgiveness that it extends to the other is the renunciation of itself, of its unreal essential being which put in on a level with that other which was a *real* action...the world of reconciliation is the *objective* existence of Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself *qua universal* essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself *qua* absolutely self-contained and exclusive individuality—a reciprocal recognition [*ein gegenseitiges Anerkennen*] which is *absolute* Spirit.¹¹⁶

Hence, as Molly Farneth has persuasively argued, *Anerkennung* (and reconciliation of competing normative commitments in general) emerges in Hegel’s normative social theory as a kenotic model of sacrifice legible in acts of confession and forgiveness. It is only through an exertion of a certain power [*Kraft*] of kenosis [*Entäußerung*] that the wicked consciousness and the judge can be reunited. Here, for the first time, *Absolute* Spirit, Spirit that grasps itself as Spirit in the ‘indiscrete continuity’ of subjects simultaneously normatively authoritative and accountable to and for one another, appears on the scene.¹¹⁷

Kenosis thus shapes both the auto-critical and concretizing thrust of the *Phenomenology*, its path of “Despair” [*Verzweiflung*], as well as the gestures that emerge to bring the abstract and

¹¹⁵ The preceding passages are adapted from a presentation delivered at the First Annual Summer Institute of the Humanities and Social Change International Foundation at Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2018. Warm thanks to Shaul Bassi, Barbara Del Mercato, and the rest of my Venetian colleagues for their support and feedback.

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 493; *Phenomenology*, 408.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

isolated self-consciousness into a community of mutual recognition. But as has already been made clear in the foregoing analysis of Hegel's earlier works in Jena and Frankfurt, this form of sacrifice ought also to unite the eternal and temporal, God and humanity, ideality and reality. The dialectic of religion develops the entire kenotic structure of phenomenological experience into the philosophic standpoint, that of Absolute knowing. Christianity, where according to Hegel the kenotic structure of the auto-critical and auto-concretizing phenomenological experience becomes a reflexive representation, opens the possibility a "Speculative Good Friday"¹¹⁸ and hence a Science of the Speculative Idea.

The dialectic of religion as presented in Chapter VII of the *Phenomenology* follows the path from finite to infinite Spirit or, said otherwise, the relation of human beings to the Absolute. Religion, Hegel claims, is the 'truth' of Spirit, spirit that *knows* itself as Spirit. Religion is the 'perfection' of Spirit, and the return of the individual moments of phenomenological 'despair' to their putatively integral and generative ground. The genesis of religion is thus, according to Hegel, the kenotic negation of immediacy and the appropriation of this process of negation in the imagination, the return of the finite to its ground. But each form of religion places its accent on a different 'moment' of the preceding phenomenological path, taking up a particular shape [*Gestalt*] of Spirit that it takes as the Absolute ground of its antithetical moments.¹¹⁹ The dialectic of religion, in its broadest strokes presents the movement of self-negating substance (Natural Religion) and self-negating subject (Religion of Art) coming to grasp their most conceptually comprehensive unity in the sacrificial imagination of Christian kenosis (Revealed

¹¹⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191 (Translation modified).

¹¹⁹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 499-500; *Phenomenology*, 413-414.

Religion). Natural Religion does not become fully self-conscious because it takes the conciliatory power of the Absolute to be alien to it, to be received passively. Religion of Art, found in ancient Greece in Hegel's view, finds the Absolute to be actualized only through human activity.

Christianity is "revelatory," Hegel claims, because it represents the entire problematic of overcoming the fixed antitheses of the understanding, and passage to the Idea or Absolute Knowledge in precisely this logic of kenotically articulated identity: a passivity that is the highest form of activity, an activity that only acts through its becoming-passive—a view of the Absolute, in other words, that unites Substance and Subject. The central mediating moment of this representation is negative.¹²⁰ It is the moment of kenotic sacrifice that unites Substance with Subject and, appropriated in the right way, marks an overcoming of the parallel construction of opposed but mutually necessary systems characteristic of Schelling's view of transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie*,¹²¹ as well as the abyssal account of Absolute identity Schelling suggests in the *Identitätsphilosophie*.

Spirit has two sides which are presented as two converse propositions: one is this, that substance alienates itself from itself and becomes self-consciousness; the other is the converse, that self-consciousness alienates itself from itself and gives itself the nature of a Thing, or makes itself a universal Self. Both sides have in this way encountered each other, and through this encounter their true union has come into being. The self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] of substance, its growth into self-consciousness, expresses the transition into the opposite...that substance is *in itself* self-consciousness. Conversely the self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] of self-consciousness expresses this, that it is *in itself* the

¹²⁰ The following passages contain amended selections from my previously published article: "Hegel and Bataille on Sacrifice" in *The Hegel Bulletin* of the Hegel Society of Great Britain. Special Issue 2018. Hegel and 20th Century French Philosophy. Many thanks to the editors and editorial officers of the Hegel Society of Great Britain for the opportunity to publish the essay, and to Cambridge University Press for kindly granting permission to republish selections of those materials here. Cf. W. Ezekiel Goggin, "Hegel and Bataille on Sacrifice," *Hegel Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (October 2018): 236—59.

¹²¹ Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*. Translated by Brady Bowman. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 223-249.

universal essence...two moments through whose reciprocal self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] each become the other, Spirit comes into existence as this their unity.¹²²

The above passage outlines kenotic self-sacrifice, ascribed to Jesus, as the model for addressing two central, interrelated logico-metaphysical concerns of post-Kantian (and post-Fichtean) idealism. First: how can two logically incompatible perspectives on the relation of ideality and reality be integrated into a single, synoptic account? Second, how can the infinite be expressed in the finite, hence through its self-finitization, while nonetheless remaining identical to itself as infinite? ¹²³ *Spirit* is realized historically through the representation of kenotic sacrifice and a kind of kenotic self-discipline that reveals the possibility of grasping each side of the opposition as articulated via immanent negativity in the *Vorstellung* of the revealed religion. These representations of kenotic sacrifice make the realization of the double requirement of the Speculative Idea historically possible, in Hegel's view. The language of self-emptying or *Entäußerung* in the context of Hegel's discussion of the philosophical meaning of Christianity must be understood as an echo of Luther's rendering of the Epistle to the Philippians. "[Jesus] emptied himself" [ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν] (Phil 2:7) becomes "*entäußerte sich selbst*."¹²⁴ God becomes human in all aspects, even to the point of divesting himself of his divinity and truly

¹²² Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 755 (Translation modified).

¹²³ Cf. Schelling, "Sechster Brief" and "Sibeter Brief," *Philosophisches Brief...* in *Werke* 3; Sixth and Seventh Letter in *Philosophical Letters...* in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*.

¹²⁴ This same Greek verb appears, in various forms, five times throughout the New Testament. Phil 2:7 in particular has served historically as the seminal passage for kenotic theologies that attempt to resolve paradoxes surrounding incarnation by appeal to the idea of a voluntary self-divestment by Jesus of his divinity, and pursuit of a kenotic theological ethic that mirrors this self-emptying movement.

dying, the divinity of whom we must say “God is Dead,” according to Hegel.¹²⁵ God must become human, and die, to be “arisen *in the Spirit*.”¹²⁶

“In the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be absolute Being the immediacy receives its negative moment; Spirit remains the immediate Self of actuality, but as the *universal self-consciousness* of the community...not the individual by himself, but together with the consciousness of the community and what he is for the community...”¹²⁷ In its becoming-human and taking on death, and being resurrected in the “Spirit” of the community, the finitude of the particular subject is overcome and contextualized as a historical individual within a community that outstrips and outlasts her. “Death loses its natural meaning in spiritual self-conscious, i.e., it comes to be just its stated Notion; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz., the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected.”¹²⁸

In other words, death takes on an “ideal” meaning over and above its abstract, material significance. It is only in imagining death and resurrection in Spirit that we can grasp the unity of finite and infinite, here and beyond, that, as we saw above, must be described in their integral and mutual self-expression, as *moments* of the Absolute. And this can only occur where “this self-consciousness...does not actually die, as the particular self-consciousness is pictured as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e. in its knowledge, which

¹²⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 570-571; *Phenomenology*, 785.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 555-556; 462.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 570-571; 775.

is essential Being reconciling itself with itself.”¹²⁹ Since the religious community thinks in representations, however, Absolute knowledge is not yet complete. “The mediation” Hegel writes, “is still incomplete,” inasmuch Christian religion is burdened with the representational form of “picture-thinking” [*Vorstellung*]. Only when these elements are grasped as integral, mutually necessary moments of a single, infinite process, will the representational content of Christianity be expressed in its proper, conceptual form.¹³⁰ This occurs through the immanent development of the representation of divine self-sacrifice in Christianity. “The death of the picture thought contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as Self. That death is the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God Himself is dead*.”¹³¹ Representing the kenotic self-sacrifice of God, the death of God points the way to a sacrifice of God *as* representation, to the negation of the absoluteness of the reflective, representational standpoint itself. In the context of Christianity’s “picture-thinking,” the kenotic sacrifice of God in the person of Jesus, ideally, marks the death of God as something “beyond” humanity. Jesus is resurrected in “Spirit” amongst his followers. But the representational form of religious thought means that the elements of the narrative are understood as discrete events that are only “externally,” and not immanently, related. In other words, Christianity represents for Hegel, in a finite, representational form, the content of the Absolute Idea that expresses itself through self-finitization and then recuperates itself as “Spirit.” Christianity presents in the religious imagination the idea of an infinite life in which all finite

¹²⁹ Ibid., 571; 475.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 556-557; 463.

¹³¹ Ibid., 571; 475.

beings partake, a horizon of identity as the identity of identity and difference. Where Spirit finally learns to make this movement on its own, to undertake a kind of phenomenological *imitatio Christi*, the potential of Christianity to overcome representational consciousness as such is realized: “The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one’s limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself [*sich aufzuopfern wissen*]. This sacrifice [*Aufopferung*] is the externalization [*Entäußerung*] in which Spirit displays [*darstellt*] the process of its becoming Spirit...”¹³²

The sections that trace the transition from Revealed Religion to “Absolute Knowing” have often enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the most enigmatic of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. There are several reasons why these passages appear so difficult to interpret. First and foremost of course, is the complexity and comprehensiveness of the speculative standpoint itself. The dramatic conditions under which the text was composed, to which I alluded above, compound the inherent difficulties. However, where proper attention is paid to the shifting conceptualizations of *Opfer* as a structure of reconciliation in Hegel’s early works and to the precise, systematic role of kenotic sacrifice in the nascent speculative system in the late Frankfurt and Jena writings, these apparently oracular passages suddenly come into focus. Absolute Knowing is *explicitly* presented in the *Phenomenology* as the conceptual formalization of kenosis. By way of the transformation of the apparently contingent kenotic gift of Christianity’s Trinitarian tradition into the form of conceptual *necessity*, kenosis is set to work in an immanently critical account of consciousness whereby the standpoint of Speculative *Wissenschaft* emerges. These are hardly rhetorical flourishes, but rather speak to the beating

¹³² Ibid., 590; 492.

heart of speculative thought itself. To get a grip on the profound systematic meaning of these passages, it is thus necessary to review the valences of kenotic sacrifice that have appeared throughout the preceding passages in the *Phenomenology*. First, as noted, the idea of kenosis as the representation of an infinite life that encompasses and comprehends death is essential for a return of ossified and ‘abstract’ identities of naïve consciousness to their ‘fluidity’ in Hegel’s dialectical mode of phenomenological description. Thus kenosis functions both as a figure of the phenomenological experience of the individual consciousness (as I showed with respect to the introduction and preface of the *Phenomenology*), as well as its emergence from abstraction or isolation and its becoming self-consciousness by means of kenotic sacrifices that constitute mutual recognition (as I showed with respect to the relations of misrecognition arising from the putative absoluteness of individual consciousness, its struggle in the dialectic of master and slave, and finally in the achievement of recognition through confession and forgiveness). Finally, religion appeared as the attempt to render reflexive this mode of recognitive reconciliation via kenotic sacrifice by appeal to various modes of abstraction from the previous phenomenological moments of Spirit’s self-emergence. That is to say, each element of the dialectic of religion recapitulates the movement of the *Phenomenology* and abstracts from the whole at some premature moment. Only in Christianity, according to Hegel, does the kenotic dynamic of the whole structure of the Absolute rise to the level of representation as such. But even then, as Hegel notes, the moments of the absolute are presented as contingent moments, external to one another in the form of a narrative of re-unification of God and humanity, a sequence of soteriological events. The community will only be ‘perfected’ where it can overcome the element

of otherness in which it represents the Absolute.¹³³ The abstract negations of representational thought frustrate this. Where kenotic self-expression of the Absolute is understood from the vantage of *Vorstellung* or representation, “it is not yet perfected [*Vollendet*]...its content exists in the form of *picture-thinking*, and the duality in this thinking still attaches even to the actual *spirituality* of the community.” The community remains in a state of ‘devotional’ consciousness because it does not understand that the *kenosis* of substance is also its *own* act: “The action of the Self retains toward [the picture-thought of the Absolute] this negative meaning, because the kenosis [*Entäußerung der Substanz*] of substance is taken by the Self to be an action implicit in the nature of substance; the Self does not grasp and truly comprehend it, or does not find in its *own* action as such.”¹³⁴

Revealed Religion, Christianity, is allied with idealism. It is not yet Absolute knowing, however, since there remains a distinction between kenosis of the subject and kenosis of substance. The self-negating subject takes the self-negating substance to be its ‘object’ and to point to a reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] that exists for it in a distant future [*ein Fernes der Zukunft*].¹³⁵ This final opposition between substance and subject, real and ideal, must be “surmounted” by Spirit. What remains, then, is for consciousness that has grasped the essential content of the kenotic figure of Christian drama—the self-sacrificing God that incarnates itself, dies, and is resurrected daily in the life of the community—to elevate this content to philosophical, that is to say conceptual, existence. Such a “surmounting” of the otherness of

¹³³ Ibid., 497-498; 412.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 573; 477 (Translation modified).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 573-574; 478.

divine kenosis is, Hegel claims, a matter of grasping that the act of self-sacrifice is not a matter of merely showing that the object is a determination of the subject, or vice-versa.

This surmounting [*Überwindung*] the object of consciousness is not to be taken one-sidedly to mean that the object showed itself as returning into the Self, but is to be taken more specifically to mean not only that the object as such presented itself to the Self as vanishing, but rather that it is the kenosis [*Entäußerrung*] of self-consciousness that posits the thinghood [of the object] and that this kenosis [*Entäußerrung*] has not only a negative but also a positive meaning which is not only for us [*für uns*] or in itself [*an sich*] but rather is for-itself [*für es selbst*].¹³⁶

Hegel then presents a whirlwind history of modern philosophy from Descartes to Schelling,¹³⁷ characterized as a series of attempts to surmount this opposition—first, as the immediate unity of thought, then extension, then, eventually, in transcendental subjectivity and will in Kant and Fichte. Schelling grasps the *problem* of uniting substance and subject well enough, but he leans too far toward Spinozist or Eleatic thought, according to Hegel. “Substance would pass for Absolute only in so far as it was thought or intuited as *absolute unity*; all content would, as regards its content, fall outside of it into Reflection [...] If a content were to be spoken of anyway it would, on the one hand, only be spoken of in order to cast it into the empty abyss [*Abgrund*] of the Absolute...”¹³⁸ In the earlier Jena writings, Hegel consistently identifies kenosis, incarnation, and death of God as the necessary imaginal propaedeutic to a truly speculative philosophy that will overcome the abstract limits of Schelling’s monism. Substance is not a reduction of subject to substance (as Hegel suspects of Schelling’s supposed Spinozism), nor is it a reduction of substance to a modification of the subject that posits it in its thinkability

¹³⁶ Ibid., 575; 479 (Translation modified).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 586-587; 488-489.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 587; 489.

(as in Fichte). Rather, it is an identification of kenotic self-negation of substance and the subject as different moments of one and the same movement of self-manifestation, Spirit.

Spirit, however, has shown itself to us to be neither merely the withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere submergence of self-consciousness into substance, and the non-being of its difference; but spirit *is* this movement which empties itself of itself and sinks into substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself...this subsistence of existence on its own account is the Notion [*Begriff*] posited in its determinateness and thus also its *immanent* movement, that of going down into the simple substance, which is Subject only as this negativity and movement. The 'I' has neither to cling to itself in the *form* of *self-consciousness* as against the form of substantiality and objectivity, as if it were afraid of the externalization of itself: the power of Spirit [*die Kraft des Geistes*] lies rather in the selfsame Spirit in its kenosis [*Entäußerung*].¹³⁹

Spirit is not “a third term” [*ein Drittes*] that grounds and mediates oppositions, but the inner unity of differentiations as grasped in thought *as* thought.¹⁴⁰ “On the contrary, knowing [Spirit] is this seeming inactivity which merely contemplates how what is differentiated spontaneously moves in its own self and returns into its unity.” The power of Spirit is its kenosis, its self-negation and becoming other while remaining “selfsame.” It grasps that it must become immanently reflexive, each of its moments now grasped as elements of the speculative syllogism.¹⁴¹ In grasping the *kenotic* power of Spirit to remain “selfsame” through its self-negation, to endure the death of its immediacy and to be resurrected or recollected “spiritually,” spirit realizes its truth in the form of the *Concept*. The Absolute is fully self-manifest where it *comprehends* identity-in-difference as *Concept* [*Begriff*], where it *knows* itself as itself.

In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, insofar as this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness, a difference now overcome. Spirit has won the pure element of its existence, the Notion. The content,

¹³⁹ Ibid., 587- 588; 490 (Translation modified).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 588; 490.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 576; 480.

in accordance with the freedom of its being, is the self-emptying self [*das sich entäußernde Selbsts*], or the immediate unity of its self-knowledge.¹⁴²

The conceptual expression of Spirit is not an elaboration of an *a priori* framework “applied” to some entity or quality which is assumed—quite paradoxically—to be *external* or *alien* to conceptuality as such. But why must there *be* a speculative science to follow this logical unfolding of the dialectical life of phenomena? Absolute Spirit as *Concept* appears at the end of the *Phenomenology* not only as a result of the preceding movement (i.e., the reflexivity and recollection of the “path of despair”), but also as a new starting point, since the kenotic “power of Spirit” constitutes for the philosopher a new *immediate* and hence still seemingly *contingent* content. For religious imagination, this appears as something “external.” Here, Spirit has not yet surmounted the contingent externality of its self-presentation. The difference between these, in short, is that philosophy interprets the “contingency” of the discrete elements of the sacrificial imagination of Christianity as a form of conceptual necessity [*Notwendigkeit*], in Hegel’s view.

Kenosis and Concept

The highest form of freedom, Hegel argues, is the grasp of the kenosis of the concept as a form of *necessity*. To understand these difficult passages, and the relation of kenotic sacrifice as presented in the sacrificial imagination of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the speculative Idea of Hegel’s mature system will require some brief comment on the relation of kenosis to Science—hence the *Phenomenology* to the *Science of Logic*.

Following the *Phenomenology of Spirit*’s demonstration of the kenotic structure of Absolute Spirit’s self-manifestation, the “power of Spirit” rendered reflexive in the philosophical

¹⁴² Ibid., 588; 490.

comprehension of religion (specifically the “revelation” of the whole dialectical life of the idea in the kenotic self-manifestation of the incarnate, suffering, Christian God), speculative “Science” begins as a systematic elaboration of the *conceptual* self-determination of Absolute Spirit as self-negation. It is plain that the dialectical “method” is modelled on the “power of Spirit” as a form of immanent negativity that is to be formalized pursuant to the “path of despair” traced in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel puts matters thus when tracing the relation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the *Science of Logic*:

Reason is negative and *dialectical*, since it dissolves the determinations of the understanding into nothing; it is *positive*, since it generates the *universal* and comprehends the particular therein [...] this movement, which is thus the immanent development of the concept [*Begriff*], is the absolute method of the concept, the absolute method of cognition and at the same time the immanent soul of the content.¹⁴³

“The power of Spirit” provides the imaginary anticipation, the religious *Vorstellung*, of the “method” of philosophical science. Spirit realizes its truth where it grasps itself in its difference vis-à-vis that which it has ‘externalized’ or opposed to itself, i.e., by grasping itself as constituted in and as an act of kenotic self-negation. In the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, we find the formalization of the “power of Spirit” as an account of conceptual necessity that yields the systematic exposition of the Absolute as self-comprehending Idea. Hegel’s *Science of Logic* exhibits kenosis-as-dialectical-necessity in its opening syllogism. “Being,” like the pre-existent *Logos*, God the “Father,” is the most abstract and immediate determination of the Absolute. But it is also the most *empty*—hence it passes over into ‘Nothing’—just as it incarnates itself in the person of Son and submits to death. But in its passage to ‘Nothing’ it is

¹⁴³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft Der Logik I/1* (1832), in *Gesammelte Werke* Band 21. Edited by Friedrich Hogemann and Walter Jaeschke. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985), 8; *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 10.

grasped as passing from one state to another in thought—it is now specified negatively, that is kenotically, *as* negatively self-specifying. It is, rather than “Being” or “Nothing” immanently characterized as “Becoming,” much as the appearance of the Holy Spirit resurrected daily in a concrete, historical community.¹⁴⁴

The kenotic movement is not only characteristic of this specific speculative syllogism, but also every moment of the system at both the most general and particular levels of description. It structures, for instance, the architectonic of the system: Logic as the Idea *in* itself, Nature as the Idea *for* itself or in its otherness, and Spirit as the Idea *in and for itself*, “the science of the Idea come back to itself out of that otherness.”¹⁴⁵ But it also constitutes the basic structure of each discrete moment of the system. Dialectical antinomy, Hegel writes in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, is not peculiar to some special class of transcendent theoretical objects as we find in the Kantian critique of dialectical reason. In fact, the self-opposition of in the infinite in the finite, as constituted in and through self-negation is constitutive of rationality *as such*. Dialectical antinomy as the “life” of the concept is modeled on kenotic sacrifice and is present “in all objects of every kind, in all conceptions, notions, and Ideas [...] the property thus indicated is what we shall afterwards describe as the Dialectical influence in logic.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, what was described initially as a new form of finite spirit raising itself to the level of the infinite by means

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 68-70; 59-60.

¹⁴⁵ GWF Hegel, *Enzyklopädie im Grundrisse* (1830) in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 20* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 60; *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, UK ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991) 42.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 84; 92-93.

of the sacrificial imagination of Christianity is formalized as the basic building block of philosophical ideation.

“The Idea turns out to be the thought which is completely identical with itself and not simply identical in the abstract, but also in its own action of setting itself over against itself, so as to gain a being of its own, and yet be in full-possession of itself while it is in this other.”¹⁴⁷ Only in taking up and transforming the *representation* of the divine life as inclusive of its own self-negation in kenotic sacrifice is thinking able to transcend the limits of the finite understanding as a constellation of *fixed* antitheses, and return to its dialectical self-manifestation—its “fluidity” or “movement.” In pre-critical metaphysics, Hegel writes, rational and natural theology treated the concept of God within an absolute antithesis [*Gegensatz*] of reality and negation, i.e., in accordance with representation [*Vorstellung*].¹⁴⁸ Hence God appears as an “infinite” object in fixed opposition to the finite subject. In that connection, Hegel claims, God or the Absolute remained transcendently situated beyond subject’s faculties and placed in a future synthesis, excluding negation. At least one form of religious representation, as we have seen, marks for Hegel the exit from abstractly representational consciousness as such—namely that of Christianity. What makes Christianity accord with this dialectical conception of reason is, as noted, its inclusion of self-negation within the “Supremely Real Essence,” the model of divine self-sacrifice as *Entäußerung*.

We find here, years later in Hegel’s remarks on rational theology in the outlines of the *Encyclopedia*, a succinct restatement of precisely that concern that also animates Hegel’s

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 59-60; 42.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 74; 73-74.

reevaluation of negativity and kenosis in Frankfurt's 1800 System. The passage to Hegelian "Science" marks the sublation of Hegel's sacrificial imagination, the transformation of the agapic, kenotic gift of the Christian theological tradition into the dialectical necessity of the concept. The infinite "night" of Hölderlin and Schelling exhausts itself in the finite as a wave disappears into sand. This constitutes a fundamental shift in the terrain of ontology traced through Hegel's logic: the being of beings is nothing other than their manifestation for thought. *That* what is given is given disappears in that which is given. Absolute idealism is only consummated where the kenotic gesture is thus conceptually comprehended.

The interpretation of divine and human kenosis as moments of a mutually necessary, conceptually articulated unity, distinguishes Hegel not only from pre-critical rational theology, but also from dogmatic theology. What distinguishes him from dogmatic theology also proves the wedge between Hegelian phenomenology and post-Heideggerian phenomenology of the "gift." And it is in this connection that the Hegelian economization of kenosis, I would suggest, might run parallel to the anti-foundationalist attacks on the "given" that have animated resurgent Hegelianism among analytic or post-analytic philosophers.

First to the dogmatic question. The Trinitarian background of kenotic sacrifice cannot be ignored, and directs us toward a consideration of love and gift. For Hegel, as is by now clear, the Trinitarian background of kenotic sacrifice corresponds to the speculative syllogism and the tripartite division of the mature system. This is quite far afield from the traditional dogmatic view, which attributes this Trinitarian kenosis as springing forth from a superabundance of love.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, as Hegel claims in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, while "love" (supreme

¹⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 76.

among the theological virtues enumerated by Paul)¹⁵⁰ is a necessary step in the advent of the Absolute and the new world order it heralds, it is nevertheless insufficient. Unless mediated by the patience and suffering [*Schmerz*] of the negative, the laborious achievement of conceptual reflexivity, sacrificial love will remain, in Hegel's view, an "insipid" appeal to affect or "feeling."¹⁵¹ The persons of the Trinity, Hegel claims, are rather the quasi-representational form of the logical moments of speculation, the "absolute, eternal idea."¹⁵² Divine eternity, prior to and distinct from the finite world, corresponds to the pure, logical idea, the "universal" moment [*Allgemeinheit*]. The second moment of creation and incarnation corresponds to the moment of particularity [*Besonderheit*], and finally, as present in the self-consciousness of the community, the Holy Spirit corresponds to the moment of singularity [*Einzelheit*].¹⁵³ The Hegelian trinity is thus, unlike the dogmatic trinity, not a self-procession arising from an unfathomable abyss of self-giving, agapic love. Agapic love, like the death that becomes a moment of and infinite life, or the gift apparently economized by Hegelian logic, disappears in the Hegelian infinite's account as the infinite as the ineffable "beyond" is gradually shown to be fully mediated, exhausted in its self-manifestation as thought returning to itself. *What* appears in thought exhausts the phenomenality of disclosure as such, and the possibility of interrogating giving and gift disappears into the economy of the Idea.

¹⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians, 13.

¹⁵¹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 24; *Phenomenology*, 10.

¹⁵² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 3, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 415ff. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 198ff.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

To the extent that Hegel understands this radical, speculative interpretation of kenosis as a *triumph* of Spirit, rather than the foreclosure of a precious and unspeakable mystery, it seems quite apparent why Heidegger was in his middle and later phases such a vocal critique of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. For what is thus apparent—in Hegel’s eventual rehabilitation of negativity and retrieval of kenosis as a model of reconciliation—is a logic of sacrifice at work in Hegel that uncouples itself from the question of *Dankbarkeit* with which it begins. This, it seems, forecloses the possibility for idealism of a certain mode of sacrificial thought, of a thinking [*Bedenken*] that is also a thanking [*Bedanken*], a rendering “sacrifice” [*Opfer*] that is an “echo” [*Widerhall*] of the self-giving of Being.¹⁵⁴ This holds, *a fortiori*, for the more directly and concretely theological iteration of these themes in Jean-Luc Marion’s accounts of “the major *aporia* of the gift,” and his attempt to articulate a non-metaphysical concept of sacrifice as *redondance*. Such *redondance* of the gift suspends the content of the gift in order to hold its gift-character in view.¹⁵⁵ But for Hegel, as we have seen, *that* something is given disappears in *what* appears for thought.

Hegel’s theological and religious background has typically received more attention within the “continental” constellation of interpretations, and it is largely in that context that comments on Hegel’s idea of sacrifice and kenosis have appeared when they have appeared at all.¹⁵⁶ But in addition to the radical difference between the Hegelian economic account of kenotic

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Nachwort zu ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’” in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 9.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “Esquisse d’un concept phénoménologique du sacrifice” *Archivio Di Filosofia* 76, no. 1/2 (2008): 9-22.

¹⁵⁶ A recent example of such works is Joseph Cohen’s *Le Sacrifice de Hegel*. Unlike Cohen’s excellent book—which focuses on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—my own contribution to this vector of questioning has been to develop a systematic and contextual approach to the question of sacrifice as it appears in various, shifting accounts across a range of Hegel’s early works. In doing so, I show that the comprehension of sacrificial action is, for Hegel, essential to the emergence of the system. An exception to the general disinterest in sacrifice on the part of more “deflationary,” analytically aligned readers of Hegel is found in Molly B. Farneth’s spectacularly clear and concrete volume, *Hegel’s Social Ethics: Social Conflict and Rituals of Reconciliation*, which has been cited throughout.

sacrifice vis-à-vis post-Heideggerian phenomenology of the gift, we might note a perhaps more surprising, and certainly more textually tenuous parallel. Again, the hinge is the economization of the agapic gift. The “analytic” Hegel arises via the impact of quasi-Hegelian American Pragmatism on the reception of congenitally *anti*-Hegelian Analytic philosophy in the United States during the early and middle twentieth century. This process begins with the “*meditations hegeliennes*” of Wilfrid Sellars,¹⁵⁷ and has a decisive impact on the emergence of the so-called “Pittsburgh Hegelians” such as Robert Brandom¹⁵⁸ and John MacDowell.¹⁵⁹ The distinguishing characteristic of this type of reading is attention to the sustained Kantian momentum in Hegel’s mature works against any immediate, non-inferential “givenness.”¹⁶⁰ A question that occurs, given the preceding analyses, is how far, and in what way, might the Hegelian polemic against kenosis as an expression of agapic love finally correspond to the critique of givenness in epistemic foundationalism that takes pride of place among “analytic” or “post-analytic” readers of Hegel?

While such convergences and divergences must be noted, it is beyond the scope of the current study to treat them at length. Nor is it my aim in the current study to attack Hegel for an idolatrous distortion of Christian dogmatics or to celebrate his interpretation of kenosis as a

¹⁵⁷ Willem A. Devries, and Timm Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given: Reading Wilfrid Sellars’s “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” Including the Complete Text of Sellars’s Essay*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000).

¹⁵⁸ Robert Brandom, “Some Hegelian Ideas of Note for Contemporary Analytic Philosophy” *The Hegel Bulletin* 35, no 1 (May, 2014) 1-15.

¹⁵⁹ John McDowell, *Mind and World: With a New Introduction by the Author*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁰ The example of John the necktie salesman, from Sellars’ *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is perhaps the most famous illustration of what Sellars takes to be the emptiness of talk about “givenness” in the context of sense-datum theories found in the works of thinkers such as C.I. Lewis. Cf. Sellars “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” in *Knowledge, Mind and the Given*.

heroic act of anti-theological deflation, or the various forms these and related approaches to Hegel might take. I have been concerned and continue to be concerned, rather, to understand how Hegel interprets the role the sacrifice—particularly kenotic sacrifice—plays in the imaginative or representational staging of the speculative Idea, and the way that this configures the relationship between thought and representation, philosophy and religion.

In turning to Hegel’s mature philosophy of religion (delivered in the form of lectures in 1827), we find again clear signs that the revaluation of negativity and the rehabilitation of a kenotic sacrificial imaginary are absolutely key to Hegel’s distinctive, dialectical approach. Unsurprisingly, given what I have demonstrated in the preceding analysis, this negativity is explicitly linked by Hegel to sacrifice—indeed this conceptual negativity is the essential meaning of sacrifice, to which all sacrifice can be reduced, Hegel claims.

The concept of religion—differing from philosophy primarily in virtue of its representational and contingent form—is interpreted by Hegel as the self-consciousness of the finite in relation to the infinite, or the knowledge of God. Religion thus always tends unconsciously toward philosophy, for Hegel, in as much as it seeks to render this relation to God reflexive, to become a “knowing of this knowing.”¹⁶¹ This genuine reconciliation must *include* negation—as Hegel realizes with increased clarity from 1800 forward. Christian religion, by taking up this negativity in the representation of divine and human kenosis, provides the model for a speculative cognition of the essential unity of finite and infinite. In those lectures, the same logic that Hegel develops with respect to infinite “Life” in 1800, and that motivates the

¹⁶¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 3, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 337ff. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 197.

rehabilitation of negativity and the kenotic imaginary from Christianity, appears in Hegel's discussion of the logically necessary self-contraction or finitization of God:

If God has the finite [*das Endlich*] over against himself, then he himself is finite and limited. Finitude must be posited in God himself, not as something insurmountable [*Unüberwindliche*], absolute, independent, but above all as this process of distinguishing that we have seen in spirit and in consciousness—a distinguishing that, because it is a transitory moment and because finitude is no truth, is also eternally self-sublating [*auch nur dies ist, sich ewig aufzuheben*].¹⁶²

This speculative comprehension of God is developed by Hegel through the formalization of kenotic sacrifice into a process of self-manifestation through the dialectical necessity of thought. But religion, as Hegel states plainly in the *Phenomenology*, offers an account of Spirit prior to “Science.” This theoretical relationship, the basis of religion in Hegel's view, must be displayed and affirmed *practically*. This is what occurs in the *cultus*, per Hegel. The *cultus* aims to practically actualize what is, for consciousness, theoretically present: the finite as a moment or aspect of the infinite. This begins with inward devotion [*Andacht*] but this must be affirmed externally [*äußerliche*], in a sensible [*sinnliche*] manner.¹⁶³ Just as in Hegel's earliest writings, sensible externalization of an inner truth is a necessary condition for a genuine, socially actualized freedom, and just as in the *Volksreligion* fragment the kernel of this transition point between infinite and finite appeared in the unstable position of sacrifice [*Opfer*], so it appears again in the lectures:

To the *cultus* belong...the external forms [*äußerlichen Formen*] through which the feeling of reconciliation is brought forth in an external and sensible manner [*auf äußerliche, sinnliche Weise hervorgebracht wird*], as for instance the fact that in the *sacraments* reconciliation is brought into feeling, into the here and now of present and

¹⁶² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 5, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. Edited by Walter Jaeschke. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984) 406; . *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 190.

¹⁶³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 3, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 334; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 193.

sensible consciousness; and all the manifold actions embraced under the heading of *sacrifice* [und alle die vielfachen Handlungen, die Opfer heißen].¹⁶⁴

Sacrifice appears as the “negative” moment of devotional consciousness, Hegel claims. In renouncing or divesting herself, the devotee not only demonstrates her earnestness in longing for reconciliation with the infinite, but in virtue of the act of sacrifice “posits” herself as being in unity with God.

Thus from the negation or from the sacrifice [*Opfer*] one advances to enjoyment [*Genuß*], to consciousness of having posited oneself in unity with God by means of it [*zum Bewußtsein fortgegangen, sich vermittelt ihrer Einheit mit Gott gesetzt zu haben*]. The sensible enjoyment is linked directly with what is higher, with consciousness of the linkage [*Verbindung*] with God.¹⁶⁵

From here, the gesture of sacrifice is internalized. One no longer makes sacrifices *to* a heteronomous being beyond, but one makes sacrifices *for* the sake of one’s own infinity, the realization of freedom through self-formation that occurs in a community with its own ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*].¹⁶⁶ The parallels between this passage from 1827, the revaluation of negativity linked with destructive and substitutionary sacrifice in the 1800 System fragments, and the dialectic of religion as it appears in the *Phenomenology* are unmistakable. In each case, the act of sacrifice externalizes and dramatizes the emergence of reflexive self-consciousness from immediacy. Where this negativity is comprehended as Spirit, i.e., as expressing the contiguity and mutual necessity of the finite, the representation points beyond itself to its sublation as

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 333; 193.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 334; 194.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

concept, from merely representational to genuinely speculative thought, the elevation of “Historical Good Friday” to “Speculative Good Friday.”¹⁶⁷

Philosophy, Hegel claims, is no less than religion, a form of *cultus*—devotion [*Andacht*] or service to God [*Gottesdienst*]. But again, it differs in form. What forms of sacrifice does philosophy make? As “a continual cultus” [*ein beständiger Kultus*] philosophy does not dispense with the negative moment of religion as we have seen. It does not abstractly negate the sacrificial imagination, but in sacrificing sacrifice as such, renders it reflexive. It contains—within thought and as the self-apprehension of the sovereignty of thought—the moment of negation that sunders the apparent unity of the immediate or natural, externalizes it. Again, we see clear resonances between the Eucharist as a model of dialectic in the “Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (1798/99): interiority, immediacy, and feeling for the infinite are externalized—in the case of the wine literally poured out—and then further negated in the act of eating. The infinite restores itself as the congregants consume the host.¹⁶⁸

The third moment of religion is, Hegel claims, the “knowing of this knowing” the rendering reflexive of the knowledge posited through the self-negation of sacrifice.¹⁶⁹ The Christian kenotic drama presents for religious imagination this entire process whereby the immediate is negated in sacrifice and introverted or internalized. Hegel is unequivocal about the relation in his account. In direct parallel to the problem of the genuine versus the spurious or “bad” infinite, the death of Christ presents the infinite as containing the negative, as expressed in

¹⁶⁷ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 413-414; *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191.

¹⁶⁸ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 251; *Theologisches Jungeschriften*, 299.

¹⁶⁹ GWF Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 3, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 333. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 197.

and as the finite. “Otherness, the negative” that Hegel describes as emblemized in sacrifice of abstract immediacy, “is known to be a moment of the divine nature itself. This involves the highest idea of spirit. In this way, the external and negative [*Äußerliche, Negative*] is converted into the internal [*das Innere*].”¹⁷⁰ All forms of “sacrificial death” [*die Opfertode*], Hegel writes, “reduce themselves to what has been said here” [*reduzieren sich von selbst auf das, was hier gesagt worden ist*] with respect to Christ.¹⁷¹ “‘To sacrifice’ [*Opfern*] means to sublimate the natural, to sublimate otherness [*das Natürliche, das Anderssein aufheben*]. It is said: ‘Christ died for all.’ This is not a single act [*etwas einzelnes*] but the eternal divine history [*die ewig göttliche Geschichte*]: it is a moment in the nature of God himself; it has taken place in God himself.”¹⁷²

This transformation within the sacrificial imagination is pivotal for the emergence of distinctly historical self-consciousness, Hegel argues.

To have before oneself, in a sensible fashion [*sinnliche Weise*], the intuition of the nature of spirit and of the satisfaction of its needs is, therefore, what has been disclosed [*aufgeschlossen*] to the friends of Christ only after his death [...] Regarded in this respect, Christ’s death assumes the character of a death that constitutes the transition to glory, but a glorification that is only a restoration of the original glory. Death, the negative, is the mediating term through which the original majesty is posited as now achieved. The history of the resurrection [*Auferstehung*] and ascension [*Erhebung*] of Christ to the right hand of God begins at the point where this history wins a spiritual interpretation [*geistige Auffassung gewinnt*].”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ GWF Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 5, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 250. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 468.

¹⁷¹ GWF Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 5, 250. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 469.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 250; 469-470.

¹⁷³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* Band 5, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 249; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Press, 467-468 (Translation modified).

In Christianity, the occasion for “spiritual” comprehension of the kenotic externalization first appears in rudimentary, non-reflexive forms of sacrifice. In the same gesture that confers on the sacrificial death [*Opfertod*] of Christ a “spiritual” [*geistige*] interpretation, sacrifice is rendered in a representation that points beyond the formal constraints of finite consciousness to a dialectical model that grasps differences as moments of a mediate, comprehensive unity. Here, an explicitly historical self-consciousness—in the form of anticipation and retroaction proper to Christianity’s figurative or supersessionist interpretation of previous religious covenants—appears as perpetual expiation of contingency, sensibility, and particularity. “When it becomes comprehended spiritually [*geistig aufgefaßt ist*], this very death becomes a healer, the focal point of reconciliation [*der selbst zum Heile, zum Mittelpunkt der Versöhnung wird*].”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 249; 467 (Translation modified).

CONCLUSION

Hegel's retrieval of kenosis as the reflexive representation of sacrifice forms the core feature of the imaginary syntheses of religion as they are elevated into the conceptual necessity of philosophical comprehension. This constitutes a revaluation of negativity on Hegel's part, and facilitates the break with what he understands as Schelling's more abstract and esoteric form of intuitively grounded monism.¹ As seen in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel's awareness of the pivotal role of kenotic sacrifice in the development of his system does not wane with time. If anything, it would seem, Hegel becomes increasingly clear on this point.

In Hegelian kenosis then, the self-negation of the infinite and the finite are comprehended as mutually necessary moments of the Absolute; instantiated in the dialectic of experience as finite, reflective understanding is gradually disabused of its quest to find satisfaction [*Befriedigung*] of its needs [*Bedürfnisse*] in a phantasmatic "beyond" [*Jenseits*].² Hegel's interpretation of kenosis as the imaginary anticipation of the Concept tracks the transition in his project from romantic longing to idealist satisfaction. The needs of reason become satisfied, not through the *erasure* or *suppression* of this negativity of the understanding, but through accession to its constitutive dissatisfaction or its "restlessness." In this way, Hegelian kenosis aims to overcome the spurious infinite and to thus instantiate a post-Kantian non-foundationalism without *nostalgia* for the immediate, without *Heimweh*, without mourning for foundations. It seeks to resolve the problem of "homelessness" of the transcendental subject by radicalizing it—a being at home [*bei sich*] in its homelessness.

¹ Cf. O'Regan, C. *The Heterodox Hegel* (1994) 347ff, for an extended account of the Christian *Vorstellung* of "kenosis" as a "narrative operator" that functions as a corrective to substance monism as a species of "bad infinity."

² Cf. Žižek (2014) 11.

Gazing back to the kenotic acts of the *Phenomenology*, three broad features can be remarked upon. As a model of subjectivation, Hegel understands kenosis as the sacrifice of its immediacy *for* or *as* human freedom, rather than *to* some transcendent, heteronomous being.³ This process of subjectivation functions socially through the institution of a dialectical account of normative authority within human communities as exhibited in the emergence of “Absolute Spirit” from the kenotic dialectic of confession and forgiveness—the *Wendungspunkt* of Spirit wherein it finds the transcendental subject as constituted intersubjectively through kenotic relations. Metaphysically, the sacrificial imaginary identifies the kenotic self-negation of humanity and God announces this new world, wrests substance from its quietude into the self-alienation of the subject. The infinite exhausts itself in the finite, and returns to itself as “Spirit.” But as we have seen, the entire “spiritual” significance of sacrifice is fully realized, this movement complete according to Hegel, only where Spirit *knows* itself, comprehends this sacrificial action, internalizes its structure and grasps it reflexively, elevates it from its apparently contingent, external, and narrative form into the conceptually necessary form of becoming.

Religion is thus interpreted by Hegel as the representational anticipation of a pure, conceptual reflexivity, in as much as it *represents the negation and introversion of its own representations*.⁴ Religion is the “figure” [*Gestalt*] of the concept, for Hegel. As the Christian tradition has, from its inception, been forced to deal with the “residues” of its historical antecedents, particularly its relation to Judaism, the Hegelian concept must thus grapple with its

³ For more on the historical distinction between premodern models of sacrifice as sacrifices “to” versus modern models of sacrifices as sacrifices “for” Cf. Moshe Halbertal *On Sacrifice*, 2012.

⁴ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, “Le statut de Vorstellung dans la philosophie hégélienne de la religion” *Lectures*, 3, Aux frontières de la philosophie. (Paris: Seuil, 1997) ; Paul Ricoeur and Leroy S. Rouner, “The Status of Vorstellung in Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,” in *Meaning, Truth, and God*, vol. 3, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion (Univ of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

relation to its representational antecedents. Religion anticipates in representation the truth of Spirit as concept, which recalls its imaginary or “figurative” antecedent. This is not a break with this tendency of reading Judaism as the figurative anticipation of Christianity, but the recursion of this hermeneutic to apply to its own movement where Christian dogma is made to appear as the figure of absolute idealism. “Figurativity” is redoubled where Religion serves as the representational *Gestalt* of the Conceptual truth of the Absolute. Does this configuration of imagination and concept imply (as is often claimed) that Hegelian historicity and conceptuality are thus inextricably bound to a triumphalist view of temporality as fulfilment or supersession? Or—inasmuch as Hegel’s system elevates putatively contingent, externally related moments of Christian dogma into the form of conceptually necessary, immanent moments of the whole—does it rather more radically constitute a “disappearance” [*Verschwinden*] of time as the necessary condition of the Absolute’s appearance, as Martin Heidegger claims in his lectures on the *Phenomenology*?⁵ Can the appropriation of kenotic sacrifice as a model of onto-theo-logical systematicity, i.e., a complete and absolute idealism, actually be accomplished after Hegel’s fashion, or does it involve rather a suppression of its own condition of impossibility through a misunderstanding of the relation of Hegel’s sacrificial imagination, mortality, and *time*? What possibilities would open to the philosophical interpretation of religions if Hegel’s retrieval of kenosis is, so to speak, retemporalized?

A more radical account of the negativity of death, such as we find in the critiques of Søren Kierkegaard, Georges Bataille and, more recently, that of Tom Carlson, transforms the

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 2. Abt. Bd. 32: Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Edited by Ingrid Gölting (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, Vittorio, 1997) 17-18; *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Reprint edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 11.

time intimated in kenosis into that of a missed encounter, perpetual fugitivity, rather than the advent of transcendence. This suggests a reversal of philosophical fortunes. Retemporalizing kenosis in this way, Hegel's sacrificial imagination would not be understood as the anticipation of conceptual reflexivity in philosophy, but would serve as the phantasmatic index of its impossibility, a drama of self-mutilation situated in the hiatus of the Concept. Placed in the context of the broader historical career of kenosis and its cognate terms passing through various semantic fields (mystical literature, homiletics, political economy), this reversal has implications that reach beyond the text of the Hegelian system. In particular, I will suggest the retemporalization of kenosis that transforms or perverts the Hegelian sacrificial imagination can be leveraged as a corrective to certain pseudo-Hegelian, supersessionist or "figural" models of critique found in deflationary post-Hegelian naturalism and materialism, and philologically linked to Hegel's retrieval of kenosis.

The Time of Kenosis

The fragments of the 1800 System, I argued above, are pivotal in Hegel's treatment of the concept of sacrifice and its role in modern religion and philosophy. It is by offering an initial, conceptual interpretation of the representational function of destructive, substitutionary sacrifice that Hegel first signals the need for a robust retrieval of the figures of dogmatic Christianity. In identification with the victim that was destroyed or relinquished in an act of sacrifice, the sacrificer imagines her own disappearance while simultaneously remaining present. This is the necessary condition of an absolute idealism that unites the finite and infinite in a single, comprehensive vision, inasmuch it makes possible the representation of a horizon of presence that outlasts the self-presence of the subject of sacrifice. This representation allows for a new way of picturing the Absolute—not as excluding or suppressing difference, but as containing it,

expressed in and through its own self-negation. Søren Kierkegaard, writing as Climacus, argues in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, however, that it is impossible to know something about death “in general.” If death is the disappearance of the I, then it is always the disappearance of an irreducibly singular I.⁶ How then can Hegel so quickly assimilate sacrificial death “automatically” to dialectical negation? Georges Bataille extends this line of reasoning in his essay “Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice.”⁷ Such a moment of disappearance is fundamentally unthinkable, insofar as the I is the transcendental condition of thought. The disappearance of the “I” in sacrifice, which motivates Hegel’s revaluation of negativity and retrieval of kenosis from dogmatic Christianity, and which makes the transition from finite to speculative cognition possible, is thus organized around an impossible event situated at the very limits of transcendental reflection. The “I” that Hegel claims represents its disappearance in an act of sacrifice does no such thing—precisely the opposite, in fact. It is “pictured” as being dead, without being dead, because it affirms on the one hand the transcendental unity of its own egoity while simultaneously disavowing it. One cannot imagine the disappearance of the I without simultaneously imagining one’s self continuing to exist. Hence the need to represent the infinite as enduring beyond the disappearance of the “I” is not, finally, achieved. Hegel’s concept of religion, as organized around the sacrificial representation of death as a moment of life, is thus a kind of “*subterfuge*,” according to Bataille. The instant of death, understood as the disappearance of the I, reveals precisely and definitively *nothing*. Thomas A. Carlson makes a similar argument

⁶ Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1 edition (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 138-143.

⁷ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, la mort, et le sacrifice” in *Oeuvres complètes, tome 12 : Articles II 1950-1961* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).; “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” transl. by Jonathon Strauss. *Yale French Studies*, no. 78 (1990): 9—28.

in his account of the “indiscretion” of humanity and divinity in Hegel’s speculative system. The Hegelian interpretation of the death of Christ as radical *kenosis*, Carlson claims, marks the point of contact between these two poles, their *Indifferenzpunkt*.⁸ But, as Carlson notes, this effaces the impossible time of mortality, a moment that is always already accomplished but never arrives.⁹

Kenotic sacrifice, *pace* Hegel, thus opens an ecstatic temporality that is suppressed as a necessary condition of the system. The disappearance of the “I” in death, pictured in sacrifice, is a *fait accompli*. At the same time, it is an event that never arrives because it effaces its very condition of possibility. What is at stake then, in status of sacrifice as a figure of speculative cognition is what Martin Heidegger describes as the “disappearance” [*Verschwinden*] of time in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. The “guiding question” of metaphysics, Heidegger claims, is brought to a conclusion in the systematic self-sufficiency of the Idea that unites the being of ground and the being of ground in perfect conceptual reciprocity. The most radical and decisive moment of this absolute idealism occurs in the sublation of death through kenotic sacrifice as it appears in Hegel’s system, the inflection point for this kenotic turn being located in the 1800 System fragments, as I have argued. Time “is made to disappear” [*die Zeit zum Verschwinden gebracht ist*], where the missed encounter with death is effaced, absorbed into the economy of the Absolute. John Burbidge has suggested that Hegel’s understanding of the relationship of time is not, strictly speaking, “disappearance,” but reversal.¹⁰ The labor of the concept is a pushing back against time’s perpetual delivery of presence into the non-present. This conceptual reversal of

⁸ Thomas Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 26.

⁹ Ibid. 40-49;

¹⁰ Cf. Burbidge, “Concept and Time in Hegel” in *Hegel on Logic and Religion*.

time recollects what is negated in the non-present into the self-presence of the concept, actualizes the manifest from the latent, the spirit from the letter.

Indeed, in the manuscript of the 1831 *Vorlesungen*, Hegel describes the expiation of guilt through the self-sacrifice of Christ in terms of just such a reversal: “Spirit can undo what has been done [*Der Geist kann das Geschehene ungeschehen machen*]. The action certainly remains in the memory, but spirit strips it away [*der Geist streift sie ab*].”¹¹ Hegel continues: it is this expiation of guilt that anticipates the expiation of finitude and contingency in the appearance of “spiritual” self-consciousness, as opposed to the “merely historical” that reflects only the “spurious infinite,” an endless and meaningless repetition of the finite. “Here any merely historical view comes to an end; the subject itself is drawn into this process.” The subject now understands this process as reflective of its own activity, “Spirit,” which emerges from the immediacy of substance, becomes subject, and returns to itself from alienation. And the annulling of the irretrievability of temporal loss, most radically expressed in death and represented in kenotic sacrifice, is the necessary condition of this process: “The greatest grief [*höchste Schmerz*], the feeling of complete irretrievability [*Rettungslosigkeit*], the annulling of everything that is elevated, are bound up with this thought. However, the process does not come to a halt at this point; rather a reversal [*Umkehrung*] takes place: God, that is to say, maintains himself [*erhalt sich*] in this process, and the latter is only the death of death [*der Tod des Todes*]. God rises to life, [death] thus into the opposite [*Es wendet sich somit zum Gegenteil*].”¹² This is the interpretation of the “sacrificial death” of Christ offered “by those upon whom the Spirit is

¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Band 5, 246; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 467.

¹² *Ibid.*, 246; 465 (Translation modified).

already poured out.”¹³ The “spiritual” historicity, which grasps negativity as a moment of the infinite, begins with the dispensation of Spirit in the self-consciousness of the community. Philosophy, as we have seen, is nothing other than the conceptual comprehension of this movement that, at the level of the concept, expiates the finitude and contingency of the material and temporal particularity of the tradition from which it emerges. This reversal of temporality that emerges from the Hegelian interpretation of kenosis as the figure of the Concept, is thus implicated in the “figural” or “supersessionist” tendency of Hegelian critique.

Read against the background of this ecstatic conception of temporality it disavows, however, the sacrificial imaginary of Hegelian religion does not appear as the figure or anticipation of a pure reflexivity, but as the phantasmatic suppression of its impossibility situated in the hiatus of the concept, I have claimed. What are the implications for this re-temporalization of kenosis in the context of a broader history of retrievals and for contemporary philosophy of religion?

The Career of Kenosis

Hegel, I have shown, mines Christianity for a kenotic spirituality that serves as basis for speculative philosophy, an absolute idealism. Kenosis is not simply a “tool” that Hegel takes up but indeed, inasmuch as religion enjoys temporal, if not conceptual, priority over philosophy, that “cunning of reason” that makes Hegelian speculation historically possible, the wave of which Hegel believes his thought the crest. This move requires, I showed, the suppression of the ecstatic temporality that announces itself in the contemplation of kenosis. It is this suppression of this “missed encounter” that facilitates the emergence of Hegelian Spirit, and the “spiritual

¹³ Ibid.

interpretation” of Jesus’s history becomes the model of historical consciousness generally. I suggested that the retemporalization of kenosis—an accession to the “impossibility” represented by kenotic sacrifice—frustrates this Hegelian model of “spiritual” or historical self-consciousness. The sacrificial imagination, as the presentation of an essentially “missed encounter” with death, would no longer be understood as the anticipation of reflexivity, but of the phantasmatic record of its impossibility, inscribed within the trace of non-dialectical, temporal negativity. But Hegel’s “spiritual” or “figural” form of kenotically constituted historical self-consciousness persists beyond the Hegel system proper. In order to understand the impact of this retemporalization of sacrifice, Hegel’s retrieval of kenosis must be situated within the context of a broader pattern of appropriations.¹⁴

Its Christian *locus classicus*, famously, is Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:7), whence “kenosis” and its various cognates begin to resonate with imbricated theological, ethical, ecclesiological, Christological, and mystical themes. There, the apostle implores congregants to ground their community in the imitation of Christ’s “emptying” or “renouncing” of equality to God: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself [ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν], taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:4-8).

¹⁴ The following passages are adapted from a presentation made on November 18, 2018 at the American Academy of Religions annual meeting in Denver, Colorado, to a panel co-sponsored by the Mysticism Unit and the Theology and Continental Philosophy Unit.

We find similar language of “out-pouring” in medieval *sapientia experimentalis*, Neoplatonic visions of God, and even vernacular homiletics. According to Meister Eckhart, to take just one notable example, God’s relation to the created order is characterized by fecundity or superabundance that he terms “boiling over” [*ebullitio*].¹⁵ Eckhart’s approach to mystical union of creature and creator similarly extends the kenotic theme as “detachment” [*Abgeschiedenheit*]. Eckhart prescribes the human kenosis of *Abgeschiedenheit* as a response to divine kenosis of *ebullitio*. Our detachment from created beings opens us up to divine superabundance and “unifies us with God.”¹⁶ One who seeks to be filled with the consolation of God must become like a perfectly empty goblet.¹⁷ The highest expression of the spirit, Eckhart claims, is its self-emptying, the most powerful prayer the petition to become an “empty spirit” [*ledige gemüete*], perfect in obedience.¹⁸ Protestant reformer Martin Luther was suspicious of most forms of mysticism—especially those with Platonic or Aristotelian resonances—but he found the Eckhartian and Taulerian themes in the anonymous *Theologia Germanica* quite attractive as interpretations of human obedience or passivity before God, as well as a clear sign that solid and effective theology could be achieved in simple, vernacular speech.¹⁹ It is, finally, from Luther’s translation of Paul’s letter to the Philippians that we find “kenosis” first rendered in German as *Entäußerung*. “[H]e emptied himself (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν)” (Phil 2:7) becomes, in Luther’s

¹⁵ Beverly J. Lanzetta, “Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart.” *The Journal of Religion*. 72:2 (1992).

¹⁶ Meister Eckhart and Houston Smith, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, New edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 294.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, ed. Bengt Hoffman, Revised edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 54.

rendering, ‘*entäußerte sich selbst*’. Here, the act of kenotic emptying takes on an additional meaning in the act of translation that links that which is “poured out” to a trace or surplus—Luther’s *Entäußerung* literally translates as “externalization” or even “alienation.”

The resonance of *Entäußerung* with the act of dispossession made it an especially useful term for translating the notion of “alienation” (e.g., of rights, or property, or labor), from English-language political and economic theories into German. Its philosophical career, however, properly begins with Fichte.²⁰ In his *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, Fichte uses the term to describe an essential feature of Kantian philosophy of religion, namely the “externalization” of practical reason in the postulate of a moral lawgiver.²¹ Eventually Fichte comes to employ the same term to characterize *all* positing whatsoever in accordance with the self-limiting activity of the Absolute ‘I’.²²

Critique and Kenosis

Clearly *Entäußerung* has traversed a historical path more tortuous and complex than Lukács allows in his *Der Junge Hegel*. All the same, just as the kenotic lexicon predates Hegel in more robust theological and mystical forms, it extends beyond him in increasingly deflationary form, even anti-theological forms.²³ The kenotic turn, by providing the model of speculative

²⁰ Gyorgy Lukacs, *The Young Hegel*.

²¹ JG Fichte, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*. Translated by Garret Green, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 73.

²² J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions*, ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs, 1 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 154.

²³ Of course, the kenotic lexicon extends beyond Hegel in the form of Christological debates in dogmatic theology as well. For a historical discussion of these debates, Cf. David R. Law, “Kenotic Christology,” Chapter 12 in Fergusson, *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*.

cognition, lays the groundwork for a critical tendency that is linked to a “figural” account of temporality. Viewed as such, the meaning of time becomes supersession and fulfillment, a perpetual delivery of the non-present into the present or, as Hegel puts matters, recognition that “the negative is the negative of itself.”²⁴

For Hegel, I have showed, “kenosis” enters speculative philosophy where the death appears vis-à-vis the essential unity of onto-theo-logy, the thinkability of the union between the being and ground and the ground of being, as I argued in Chapter Four through an analysis of the 1800 fragments. The unity of the finite and the infinite, in Hegel’s terms, is reflected where the “death” of the finite is a necessary moment of the infinite’s self-expression. The identification with the victim of a destructive sacrifice renders phenomenologically impossible “natural” death thinkable as a moment of the absolute.

It is this same logic at work in the representation of the life of the concept in the kenotic narrative of incarnation and death, as Hegel reads it, in Christianity—in kenosis, the finitude of the infinite is radicalized to the point of death. In consideration of the kenotic drama of Jesus’s incarnation, life, and death, Hegel claims, “Self-consciousness...does not actually die, as the particular self-consciousness is *pictured* as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e. in its knowledge, which is essential Being reconciling itself with itself.”²⁵ As I have shown, Hegel revalues the Christian kenotic imaginary as a means to address what he takes, following Schelling, to be the major logico-metaphysical problem of post-Kantian idealism in his own peculiar fashion. God becomes flesh, divests itself of its transcendence and

²⁴ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 590; *Phenomenology*, 492.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 571; 475.

dies. This is a divinity of whom we must say, “God himself is Dead,” according to Hegel. God must disappear through the incarnation to be “arisen *in the Spirit*.”

Death loses this natural meaning in spiritual self-conscious, i.e., it comes to be just its stated concept [*Begriff*]; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz., the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected [*aufersteht*].²⁶

Death thus takes on an “ideal” meaning over and above its abstract, material significance. It is only in imagining death and resurrection in Spirit that we can grasp the unity of finite and infinite, here and beyond, that, as we saw above, must be described in their integral and mutual self-expression, as *moments* of the Absolute. As the body of Christ bears the wounds of Golgotha, so also cognition of the Absolute bears the wounds of its finitude. But finally, these wounds are healed inasmuch as the negative appears as the pathway to grasp the dialectical movement of the concept. “The wounds of spirit heal and leave no scars behind.”²⁷ These dramatic terms can be parsed in rather prosaic logico-metaphysical terms. The upshot is that the Absolute or infinite is not abyssal, or occluded, but rather is essentially self-manifesting, self-giving, and without remainder. The infinite is not “out there,” “beyond,” “behind,” “above,” or “below” things. It is, rather, manifest through and exhausted in the finite. Hence it can only be articulated in cognition as the systematic, i.e., logical, comprehension of the world and of this process of self-manifestation constituted as Spirit that reflexively grasps itself *as* this kenotic process. Thus religion, for Hegel, does not mark a hiatus of the conceptual where the transcendent appears. It is rather, an anticipation or figure that is logically superseded by the

²⁶ Ibid., 570-571; 475 (Translation modified).

²⁷ Ibid., 492; 407.

philosophical forms that recollect it. The phantasmatic sacrificial imagination can thus be dialectically resolved into its authentic, conceptual meaning, per Hegel.

This pattern of interpretation persists, *nolens volens*, in Feuerbach and Marx, their various significant differences from Hegel notwithstanding. Each seeks to dialectically resolve the “imaginative,” “representational,” or “figurative” *form* of religious imagination into its putatively genuine basis—to re-appropriate what has been alienated in religious imagination through *Entäußerung*—a term that as we have seen begins in vernacular German, takes on a technical theological meaning in Luther’s translation of the Bible, and finally makes its way into the Fichtean account of productive imagination.

Following Adorno and Horkheimer’s claim that “The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice” [*Die Geschichte der Zivilisation ist die Geschichte der Introversion des Opfers*], the kenotic resonances of Feuerbach and Marx’s respective critiques of Hegelian negation, to which I turn below, should come as no surprise.²⁸ These naturalist and materialist rejoinders to Hegel are attempts to grapple with this process of introversion, to take it up critically, deliberately, and self-consciously. Even as Feuerbach and Marx attempt to distance themselves from the theological residues of Hegel’s kenotic lexicon, they enact its supersessionist, reappropriative momentum. Linked to this kenotic logic is the shared critical tendency that interprets religious imagination as awaiting reflexive articulation, an odd dream that can simply be interpreted away rather than a dogging, recurrent fantasy.

Feuerbach’s version of the Hegelian claim, for instance, is naturalistic. In his early work *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach invokes *Entäußerung* as a psychological process of

²⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, (Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag 1988), 73.

projection and misapprehension of its relation to essential qualities of the species [Gattungswesen] rather than a metaphysical or epistemological process. Feuerbach notes, “The historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective is now recognized as subjective; that what was formerly worshipped and contemplated as God is now perceived to be something *human*. What was first religion becomes at a later period idolatry; man is seen to have adored his own nature [*eignes Wesen*].”²⁹ The idea of God or Spirit is, according to Feuerbach, “the means by which man converts the qualities of his own nature into the qualities of another being —of a being external [*außer ihm*] to himself. The personality of God is nothing else than the projected [*entäußerte*] personality of man.”³⁰ In Feuerbach, as in Hegel, religious imagination is constituted through kenotic self-emptying and finds its fulfillment [*Vollendung*] in the overcoming of the formal constraints of religious thought as such. “If it is only in human feelings and wants that the divine ‘nothing’ becomes something, obtains qualities, then the being of man is alone the real being of God—man is the real God.”³¹ We find here a deflationary, psychologistic iteration of the Hegelian view. Religious imagination is a formally deficient reflexivity. And—as in the case of Hegel—Christianity is given pride of place as a reflexive representation of this process in divine kenosis as incarnation, death, and resurrection, in contrast to Judaism, the alienated character of which it supersedes: “Israel is the most complete presentation of Positivism in religion. In relation to the Israelite, the Christian is

²⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen Des Christentums in Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 47; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008) 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 377n2; 226.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 384n1; 230.

an *esprit fort*, a free-thinker. Thus do things change. What yesterday was still religion is no longer such today; and what today is atheism will tomorrow be religion.”³²

Karl Marx’s transition from philosophy to radical analyses of political economy can be traced precisely and explicitly to his materialist interpretation of Hegelian kenosis in various remarks throughout his 1844 manuscripts.³³ Hegel’s major accomplishment, as well as his major error, rests on his interpretation of kenosis or *Entäußerung*, Marx claims. “The outstanding thing in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*...is thus that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of the alienation [*als Entäußerung und als dieser Aufhebung dieser Entäußerung*]; he thus grasps the essence of labor [*das Wesen der Arbeit*].”³⁴ But Hegel fails in his merely theoretical reappropriation of the contents of religious imagination, per Marx.

On Marx’s view, Feuerbachian naturalism comes closer to truth than Hegel, but misses the historical and material contingency of *Gattungswesen* reflected in processes of production and social arrangement, and hence falls short of a radical critique of material conditions.³⁵ For Marx, religious imagination is not to be simply resolved into its material basis *theoretically*, but to be dissolved *practically* through the eliminations of the contradictions of the material

³² Ibid., 74n7; 32.

³³ In these manuscripts, Marx typically employs the notion of *Entfremdung* and its cognates when he refers to a relation or product characterized by “alienation” and *Entäußerung* and its cognates when describing the act or process of alienation.

³⁴ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan, (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1988) 149.

³⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Theses on Feuerbach” in *The German Ideology, Including Theses on Feuerbach*, Paperback edition (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1998) § VI.

conditions which produce it.³⁶ But this practical turn does not finally constitute a break with the supersessionist logic of the dialectical form but, as Marx himself has it, extends “the criticism of heaven” to the “criticism of earth”.³⁷ The reappropriative critique of the kenotic imaginary that animates Hegelian dialectic is *horizontalized* into relations of production as basis for a critique of the commodity form [*Warenform*] and its fetish [*Warenfetischismus*]. It is no surprise then that Marx’s early accounts of the critique of the commodity form, like Feuerbach’s critique of religion, is linked with the supersession of Judaism: “The god of the Jews has become secularized and become the god of the world. Exchange is the true god of the Jew”³⁸ pursued through “selling” [*Veräußerung*], that is to say, “the Praxis of alienation” or kenosis [*Entäußerung*].³⁹

For both Feuerbach and Marx, *Entäußerung* forms the horizon of religious consciousness, and its proper critical assessment is the crux of philosophy of religion. But taking seriously the ecstatic retemporalization of kenosis suggested above seems to turn the glove inside out, so to speak. Sacrifice, by allowing the subject to indulge in the unthinkable fantasy of enduring beyond its disappearance, is a representation of what is, phenomenologically and transcendently speaking, strictly impossible. No modification of the conditions of labor (conceptual or otherwise) are capable of sublating the non-dialectical negativity of time, if my reading is correct. In other words, the retemporalization of kenosis demands not only a

³⁶ Ibid., § IV.

³⁷ Karl Marx and Lucio Colletti, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Reprint edition (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 244-256.

³⁸ Ibid., 239.

³⁹ Ibid., 241.

reconsideration of the deep theological roots of Hegelian sublation, but also a critical reappraisal of the theological model of historicity and the political-theological bases of post-Hegelian radicalisms that, in their turn, took up this gesture as a model of psychologistic or materialistic deflation and disenchantment.

Final Remarks: The Absolute or the Impossible?

I have argued that Hegel's speculative philosophy—by his own lights—arises from, and returns to, the image, representation, or figure of kenosis. Hegel interprets this as a conceptually necessary arc of reflexive self-knowledge, the process of self-sacrifice that drives the motor of history, and internalizes the kenotic remains of religious imagination in memory, conceptually comprehending this process as immanent dialectical necessity. Philosophy bears the traces of religious thought because it is anticipated by religion. Its function is to finally *make sense* of religious imagination, to show how religion is “thoughtful” in its essence and origin, and to elevate these religious figures into conceptual comprehension. Christianity anticipates speculative philosophy as Judaism anticipates Christianity, latency anticipates manifestation, letter anticipates spirit. In explicating religion, philosophy “explicates itself,” mapping the transition from apparently contingent, adventitious, empirical content to an appreciation of the nature of God as the immanent dialectical necessity of the Absolute, self-manifested in thought, and rendered reflexive as Spirit.

But on my reading, Hegel fundamentally misunderstands his own sacrificial imaginary, and this misunderstanding is the necessary condition of absolute idealism. Retemporalized, the kenotic sacrificial imaginary reveals non-revelation, or perhaps better, the inscription of finite self-consciousness within the non-dialectical negativity of time. Here, what appears is necessarily unthinkable *as* unthinkable. The return to the kenotic sacrificial imaginary in Hegel's

project is a struggle to emerge from the limitations of reflective and religious representation. The concept of religious imagination read obliquely here in the Hegelian project does not constitute a retrieval of a previous phase of Hegel's thought, but its perversion through the repetition of impossibility intimated in a missed encounter with death.

If we deny Hegel the ability to “expiate” time after his fashion, and in so doing retemporalize kenosis, affirming in it the “irretrievable” [*Rettungslosigkeit*], then it would seem the role of Hegel's sacrificial imagination is not the achievement of an absolute, reflexive idealism. It is, rather, the return of thought, again and again, to the unthinkable, the emblem of the Concept's transcendental frustration, its inability to conceptually demarcate its own limit. It is on the stage of sacrifice that Hegel attempts to enact a cognitive response to the affective force of an irreducible transcendental antinomy: the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of grasping the identity of identity and difference, the unity-in-distinction of the infinite and finite. This effects a reversal within the Hegelian model of conceptual and historical reflexivity, and undermines Hegel's Christian-supersessionist, figural, or “spiritual” interpretation—perhaps even, as I have suggested, in its most deflationary iterations. The sacrificial imagination is not dialectically resolved into its “true” basis. It is, rather, the emblem of the final impossibility of such a resolution, the inscription of the finite self-consciousness within the trace of ineradicable, non-dialectical difference. This retemporalization of kenosis directs us to rethink the sublation of religion in philosophy, and to reconsider Hegel's earlier construal of their relationship as he articulated in the Frankfurt period—but now with a key difference. In the “Oldest System-Program,” Hegel wrote of the need for a “monotheism of reason” whereby the particular, sensual shapes of spirit found in religion and art could be traced back to an absolute, integral, and generative ground. Something like this idea survives in the later interpretation of religion as

“imaginative” representation of the concept: the shapes of Spirit that appear in religion are understood as more or less sufficient representations of rational necessity. Rather than pointing the way to a “polytheism of imagination and art” that is *grounded* in a “monotheism of reason and heart,” however, the retemporalization of kenotic sacrifice suggests a kind of inverted Hegelianism, a philosophy of religion that reads religious figurations of negated immediacy in terms of a perpetually fugitive, fundamentally irrecoverable instant. The Hegelian sublation of religious imagination, and the figural construction of history are thus reversed, like a glove turned inside-out. The shapes of spirit would no longer appear as anticipations of a conceptually transparent reflexivity, Absolute Knowing. Rather, they would thus appear as phantasms in the hiatus of the concept, emblems of non-dialectical negativity, figures of a “polytheism of the impossible.”

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