

Can Philosophy Understand Religion?

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2. *The return to life*

The classic text in which Hegel offers the self-interpretation of his change from a religious to a philosophical perspective is the letter to Schelling of November 2, 1800. He writes: »In my scientific development, which began from the more subordinate needs of men, I had to be driven forth to science, and the ideal of my youth had to change to something that had the form of reflection and at the same time to a system; I wonder now, while I am still busy on it, what return there is to intervention in the life of men.«⁵ Without wanting to give a complete analysis of this often interpreted passage, I want to call attention to two elements that can help us in understanding what exactly happened with Hegel's attitude towards religion in this period. First of all, there is the question of the character of Hegel's ideal of youth. As he writes in his letter, this ideal is primarily practical, more specifically an intervention in the life of men. In Frankfurt this is shown by the task he attributes to religion in the *Systemfragment*: the elevation of man to the infinite life is above all a practical ideal. In Jena the practical aspect of this ideal remains the same, in spite of the reflective and systematic way in which he presents it. The need for philosophy, as he puts it in the *Differenzschrift*, is primarily the need of a divided time for a thinking that is capable of overcoming the oppositions, the need of life to restore the power of unification. In his course-manuscripts Hegel is still more explicit on this point. The question of the need for philosophy is eventually the same as »the relationship of philosophy to life, and this question coincides with the one to what extent philosophy is practical. In fact, the true need for philosophy turns out to be nothing else than that it teaches us how to live« (V, 261). Thus, not only in Frankfurt, but also in Jena, Hegel's intellectual activity, regardless of whether it has a religious or a systematic philosophical character, is at the service of a higher, practical need. This implies that Hegel never gave up the ideal of his youth as such. What does change, however, is the *form* of this ideal, the way in which it is to be realized.

Another element to interpret Hegel's changing attitude towards religion appears in the second part of the quoted letter to Schelling. Working on his philosophical system, Hegel wonders what *return* can be found to the intervention in the life of men. Apparently he thought that the important practical goal of his intellectual activity could no longer be realized by religion; religion had lost its impact on the life of men, it was no longer able to elevate man from finite life to infinite life. This means that shortly after he concluded the *Systemfragment*, Hegel abandons a key idea of this text. But since he maintains the ideal of his youth as such, he wonders whether it can be realized more adequately by philosophy. Criterion for this adequacy is the intervention in the life of man. My question in this article focusses on the specific reasons for the loss of the meaning of religion for life. As I will show, these reasons refer to religion as such as well as to its fate in modern civilization.

3. *Tensions in Hegel's approach to religion in Frankfurt*

In the *Systemfragment* Hegel discusses the relationship between religion and philosophy. As the elevation to infinite life, religion is superior to philosophy; the true infinite is beyond the reach of the latter, it »is a reality beyond all reflection« (N 348). But philosophy is nevertheless of importance to religion: »Divine emotion, the infinite sensed by the finite, is not integrated until reflection is added and dwells upon it« (N 349). This implies concretely that philosophy recognizes its own finitude: it is a thinking activity and therefore opposed to the non-thinking; moreover, as an activity it is subjective and as such opposed to the objective, that what is being thought. Philosophy has to be especially aware of its finitude when reflection itself produces an infinity, at such a moment it has to realize that its finitude is inadequate because it remains opposed to the finite. Because it is capable of such insights, philosophy does not coincide completely with reflection, but is also »reason«, with the particular task of showing this inadequacy: »It has to disclose the finiteness in all finite things and require their integration by means of reason. In particular, it has to recognize the illusions generated by its own infinite and thus to place the true infinite outside its confines« (N 348). In this sense, philosophy is a preparation for religion; where philosophy stops, religion begins. From its own perspective religion too recognizes the necessity of philosophy: the infinite life, to which religion

CAN PHILOSOPHY UNDERSTAND RELIGION?
TENSIONS IN HEGEL'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS RELIGION IN 18001. *Introduction*

At the end of his stay in Frankfurt Hegel was confronted with a fundamental philosophical problem: is philosophy capable of understanding God, or does it have to stop short of religion and recognize its incompetence of thinking the absolute? More specifically, the question is whether the ideal of life which religion presents to man is annihilated under the influence of reflective thinking, in spite of all its efforts to deal with this ideal in the most worthy way. If this is the case, religion has to resist any interference by thinking and reject philosophy as a kind of self-conceit. On the other hand however, man is a thinking being and as such searching for truth about his own existence and the world he lives in. Such a search cannot leave the religious ideal of life unconsidered. Neither can religion, from its side, stick to images, stories, and rituals, but wants to expose the truth of its ideal for man as a thinking being. Finally, one can wonder whether philosophy itself does not have a practical task, consisting in impressing this ideal on man by reason. If this is the case, philosophy comes close to religion. As is well known, Hegel gave greatly diverging answers to these questions within a short period of time. With regard to philosophy, he stated in Frankfurt that the infinite life is »a reality beyond all reflection«, and that »philosophy has to stop short of religion« (N 348);¹ thus philosophy has to place the true infinite outside and above itself. A few months later, however, he states that philosophy has to construct the absolute for consciousness. For philosophy it is of utmost importance »to place God once again at the absolute beginning of philosophy as the only foundation for everything, as the only *principium essendi* and *cognoscendi*« (IV, 179). Consequently, Hegel considers it as »the death of philosophy, that reason should renounce its existence in the absolute« (IV, 316). With regard to religion, Hegel stated in Frankfurt that it is an elevation of man from finite life to infinite life, and is able to involve all limitedness and finitude (including all kinds of space-temporally determined acts, feelings and customs) in the infinite unity of life. In Jena, however, he no longer sees religion anymore as the living heart of culture at all. It appears at the margin of civilization, and has lost its meaning for life almost completely. »As it progressed, civilization split away from religion, and juxtaposed it to itself or vice-versa. Both have come to enjoy a measure of mutual peace by separating into realms that are completely set apart from one another. What happens in one has no significance in the other« (IV, 16).

These changes in Hegel's intellectual project have been the subject of many diverging interpretations ever since the publication of the *Jugendchriften*.² Most of them mainly focus on the changes in Hegel's idea of the task and contents of philosophy during this period, and on the extent to which certain key topics of his later philosophical system, such as dialectic and reflection, are prepared in the manuscripts of the Frankfurt period.³ Within this context Hegel's conception of religion is studied especially as far as it can be seen as a foreshadowing of his speculative philosophy. The philosophical aspect of his approach to religion in the so called *Systemfragment* is brought to the fore, so as to show that the speculative character of his thinking in Jena is a logical step in his philosophical evolution.⁴ Without wanting to dispute the importance of these interpretations, they seem to me somewhat onesided: the impulses for the change in Hegel's position are almost exclusively situated in the immanent development of religion. In this article I want to examine in more detail the modifications of Hegel's conception of religion at the end of the Frankfurt and the beginning of the Jena periods. I want to show that the reasons for giving a reflective form to the ideal of his youth were not in the first place new insights in to the speculative power of reason, but more a growing awareness that the unifying role of religion was played out. An important factor in this process was Hegel's discussion of Jacobi's philosophy of faith.

elevates man, is not opposed to the finite, but bears it as a moment in itself. Analogously »life cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as opposition as well« (N 348).

But behind Hegel's analysis of the relationship between philosophy and religion two tensions are hidden, specifically related to his concept of religion. As already mentioned in the introduction, my hypothesis is that it precisely this growing awareness of these tensions that served for Hegel as the main reason to give up the religious form of the ideal of his youth.

a. *Philosophy and the extra-reflective character of religion*

In the first place there is the tension between Hegel's philosophical approach to religion and the non-reflective character of religion itself. The status of the *Systemfragment* is obviously a philosophical analysis of religion as such.⁶ Hegel writes about the nature of infinite life, which can be called a spirit, about its relationship to the manifold and about the problems involved in this relation. The language in which he formulates all this is philosophical; more specifically it is a conceptual clarification of several shapes of infinite life and their mutual relation. But, and here the tension comes to the fore, the specific character of religion consists precisely in being a reality beyond reflection. Thus, in the *Systemfragment* Hegel tries to carry out a task that is in itself impossible: he presents a philosophical analysis of the essence of religion, to which philosophy, according to his own views, has no access. Hegel formulates this tension several times in this fragment. »Religion is the elevation of man from finite life to infinite life«, and it is distinguished explicitly from a conceptual elevation »from the finite to the infinite« (N 347). With this distinction Hegel wants to stress the non-reflective character of religion. Religion does not express itself in abstract, reflective categories, but is spiritual, a living union of the manifold. This spirit is opposed to the abstract plurality, to the separation that is present in the concept of life. Thus, the living spirit of religion and the dead concept of reflection are opposed to each other. The latter does treat life in the worthiest manner, but nevertheless it remains a fixed life that is as such opposed to the infinite life (N 347). It is by no means able to express the true infinite adequately. Somewhat further in this fragment the same tension occurs.⁷ Hegel writes about life, that it »cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as opposition as well«, as »the union of union and nonunion« (N 348). These expressions are clearly philosophical. Hegel admits this himself: »Every expression whatsoever is a product of reflection«, and the word »regard« also refers to a reflective activity. In order to avoid a manifest contradiction he states that this expression »is not something propounded by the understanding or by reflection but has a character of its own, namely that of being a reality beyond all reflection« (N 348). Reflection thus expresses something in its own (reflective) terms, which cannot be expressed reflectively. How is this possible? Of course, philosophy does not coincide with reflection, but is also a work of reason; that is why it can »keep in mind« that these expressions are beyond reflection and »recognize the illusions generated by its own infinite« with regard to the true infinite of religion. But what Hegel is in fact reflecting on is the structure of the true infinite, not the illusory infiniteness of reflection itself. Therefore, this recognition does by no means change the character of the opposition which is at stake here, namely that between the reflective expressions about religion on the one hand, and the essence of religion as something outside reflection on the other. Again, the question is whether Hegel's philosophical approach to the non-philosophical essence of religion is consistent. Probably, Hegel was well aware of this tension. Therefore he begins this passage with the counterfactual »I would have to say« (N 348). I will come back to this point below.

The very problem discussed in the previous paragraph returns even more explicitly in the so called *Neufassung des Anfangs of the Positivität der christlichen Religion*, written shortly after the conclusion of the *Systemfragment*. In this text Hegel repeatedly discusses the tension between the concrete liveliness of religion and the infinite diversity of the appearances of human nature on the one hand and the abstract generality of philosophical concepts on the other: »The living nature of man is always other than the concept of the same, and hence what for the concept is a bare modification, a pure accident, a superfluity, becomes a necessity, something living, perhaps the only thing which is natural and beautiful« (N 141). Hegel draws a similar distinction between the ideal, which does »permit of particularisation, of determination in detail, and therefore demands appropriate religious actions, feelings«, etc. and »the lamplight of general concepts«, for

which all this »seems only ice and stone« (N 142). General concepts are completely inadequate to present the living ideal of life, because they give it a harsh treatment. For Hegel »the crucial point« is this: »What never claims to be intellectual (*vernünftig*) or reasonable (*vernünftig*) cannot fall under their jurisdiction« (ibid.). The same holds true for religion: »General concepts cannot be applied to religion, or rather to religious experience, because this is itself no concept« (N 147). These remarks confirm Hegel's attitude in the *Systemfragment* with regard to religion, viz. that it is a reality beyond reflection. But moreover, they point out that he seems to reject the possibility of a non-reflective reason, that was still present in the *Systemfragment*; understanding and reason are both reflective, and therefore not capable of grasping the absolute.

Nevertheless, and that is a striking element of the *Neufassung des Anfangs*, Hegel again leaves room for a non-reflective approach to religion that is philosophical. He writes: »It is obvious that an examination [of the relation between God and man in Christian religion] would, if it had to be thoroughly pursued by concepts, become in the end a metaphysical treatment of the relation between the finite and the infinite« (N 146). The question is of course whether the meaning of the term »concept« in this quotation is the same as the one in the passage about the reflective character of general concepts. In most commentaries on this topic, Hegel's remark about a metaphysical treatment is rightly interpreted as a foreshadowing of his transition to philosophy in the Jena period. The concept, about which he writes here, is undoubtedly more than the abstract concept of understanding, which is opposed to multiplicity. Moreover, the task of philosophy as conceptual thinking is here certainly more than pointing at its own finiteness, and placing the true infinite outside its confines. The infinite, that is conceived by »metaphysical« concepts is the true infinite.⁸ But, as in the *Systemfragment*, Hegel's remark is counterfactual: this examination would become metaphysical, if it had to be pursued by concepts. Hegel makes his position quite clear by adding that »this is not the aim of this essay« (ibid.).

Thus, both in the *Systemfragment* and in the *Neufassung des Anfangs* Hegel juxtaposes a philosophical or metaphysical and a religious approach to the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Apparently he is not sure which way to choose.⁹ This is also shown by his use of the counterfactual in both texts with regard to the possibility or the opportunity of a metaphysical treatment of this question. Why then did Hegel not decide right away in favour of a philosophical approach in these fragments? I am not convinced by the argument that, at that time, he did not dispose of the instrument of speculation to clarify the relation between the finite and the infinite philosophically, and to form philosophical concepts that include particularity. If one reads what he writes about the conceptual structure of the true infinite, the most probable conclusion is that at least »in nucleo« he did dispose of this instrument. In my view, the main reason is that he was still quite enthusiastic about the possibility of founding a new religion, which would realize the practical ideal of his youth, namely that religion touches the heart of man, not only his intellectual capacities. In sum, Hegel still had his doubts on the capacity of philosophy to be truly practical, to intervene in the alternative way of expressing the relation between the finite and the infinite. As I will show in more detail below, these problems are that religion inevitably loses its immediacy, and is polluted when it enters into a (negative) relation with reflection: in this situation it is no longer capable of elevating man from the finite to the infinite life.

I think that Hegel's views on the relation between religion and philosophy in the Frankfurt period are partly influenced by the work of Jacobi. To be more precise, Hegel's position shows both similarities with and differences from Jacobi's philosophy. To begin with the latter, in the *Systemfragment* Hegel rejects a religion that, as Jacobi supported, would be based on emotion only: »Divine emotion, the infinite sensed by the finite, is not integrated until reflection is added and dwells upon it« (N 349). As a consequence of this, Hegel attaches a greater importance to finitude and opposition within the absolute than Jacobi did. However, this does not permit the conclusion that Hegel would have completely overcome Jacobi's position in this fragment.¹⁰ The similarities with Jacobi's attitude towards religion are too evident to support such a conclusion. Both discussions in which Jacobi played a major role, the so called *Pantheismusstreit* and the *Atheismusstreit*, focused on a topic that was also of central importance to Hegel in his *Systemfragment*, namely the (im)possibility of grasping the absolute with conceptual categories. Jacobi writes: Faith is »an immediate certainty, that not only does not need proofs, but simply even excludes all proofs [...] The conviction based on proofs is a second hand certainty, relies on comparison and can never be completely

certain and perfect.¹¹ »God cannot be known, but only be believed in. A God that could be known, would not be God.«¹² These quotations show that Jacobi's position strongly influenced Hegel's attitude to this question. Concluding, one can say that both Jacobi and Hegel stressed the non-reflective character of religion, although they differ at the same time on the importance of a thorough philosophical analysis of the finite. They also both stress the practical character of religion in comparison to philosophy. As I will further expound below, Hegel's sharp criticism of Jacobi in Jena is by implication also a critique of his own attitude towards religion in the Frankfurt period. Therefore it can help us to understand why he gave up religion and turned to philosophy for the realization of the ideal of his youth.

b. *The ideal religion and its realization*

Another tension in Hegel's texts at the end of the Frankfurt period is the one between the ideal religion, which he elaborated in the first part of the *Systemfragment*, and the realization of this ideal in the civilization of his time. In the last pages of this text Hegel appears to be quite sceptical on this point:¹³ »As such an elevation [of the finite to the infinite] is necessary, because the finite depends on the infinite.« But »religion is any elevation;« and »the more perfect union in the realm of religion is not absolutely necessary« (N 350). Criterion for perfection is that in such an elevation »as little as possible of the finite and restricted remains, and that every opposition springing from this elevation and integration is reintegrated« (ibid.). But whether or not this is realized depends on the accidental historical situation of a people. Unhappy peoples, and Hegel refers specifically to the German people of his time, cannot reach this stage of perfect integration, and remain at a certain level of separation and integration. Peoples living in such a state »must take anxious care for the preservation of one member of the whole, for their own independence« (ibid.). If they did not take care of this, both the finite and the infinite would disappear completely: in the separation between a pure ego and an unattainable object at least the relationship between both is maintained. The status of the »must« in this quotation is one of the necessity for a civilization to safeguard the infinite in a situation of separation. Instead of a religion of union and elevation *to* infinite life, the only possible form of religion in modern civilization is one of »an elevation *over* finite life« (N 351), that is to say a religion in which the union is frustrated. »This religion can be sublime and awful, but it cannot be beautifully humane. And hence the blessedness enjoyed by the ego which opposes itself to everything and has brought everything under its feet is a phenomenon of time« (ibid.).

A striking element in this fragment is that Hegel no longer holds positive religion responsible for this situation, but points at the diremption of (modern) civilization. This implies that the tension between the important task of religion in its ideal form, and the actual conditions in modern culture to fulfil it, is perceived in this text as a much more important and urgent problem than before. Therefore Hegel will take a closer look at the consequences of the power of diremption for the life of man, and will try to find a solution for this problem in the Jena essays. It is obvious however, that in the *Systemfragment* he has not found this solution yet. The only thing he is convinced of is that the role played by religion in this matter is over. This awareness leads him to a major change with regard to the ideal of his youth. If one accepts, as shown above, that this ideal is primarily a practical one and consists of founding a beautiful religion, he recognizes that it cannot be realized because of the overwhelming power of diremption in modern culture. As a result of this he does not give up this ideal, but reformulates it in a »reflective form.«¹⁴

4. *The solution in Jena*

Why does Hegel distance himself from his earlier conviction that religion is capable of elevating man from the finite to the infinite life? As said above, Hegel refers to modern civilization for the answer to this question: »When the power of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises« (IV, 14). This quotation says a lot about the new role Hegel attributes to philosophy. Important herein is a new idea of reflection: it is no longer confined to understanding, like in Frankfurt, but is as philosophical reflection capable of construing

the absolute for consciousness and thus overcomes the oppositions present in life. But again why does he abandon the centrality of religion?

Fundamental to the loss of the importance of religion is the diremption of modern civilization. As a consequence of this religion itself is affected by the power of opposition: »Reason, if it is in fact reason that appropriates this name, has made itself into an authority within positive religion« (IV, 315). What does this mean? A typical feature for modernity is that understanding has become certain of itself and tries to bring everything under its supremacy. Religion is also threatened by this fate: understanding opposes religion as an insignificant subjective attitude of faith, and »distinguishes the objective from the subjective, so that the objective is accounted worthless and null« (IV, 317). Thus understanding presents a danger for religion, since »it will cognize what is intuited as a mere thing, reducing the sacred grove to mere timber« (ibid.). The only possible way for religion to avoid this danger is to withdraw itself into the sphere of interiority: »Religion builds its temples and altars in the heart of the individual. In sighs and prayers he seeks for the God whom he denies to himself in intuition« (IV, 316-7). It is a religion »that does not admit a communion with God and a consciousness of the divine that consists in the saturating objectivity of a cult and in which this nature and this universe are enjoyed in the present and seen in a sight that is in itself clear. Instead it makes communion with God and consciousness of the divine into something inward that maintains its fixed form of inwardness: it makes them into a yearning for a beyond and a future« (IV, 384).

This development of modern civilization has two important consequences. Hegel recognizes now even clearer than in the *Systemfragment* that the function of religion as an elevation of man to infinite life is over. Religion has lost its containing grasp on understanding, and has itself rather come under the influence of understanding. The peace in which understanding and religion can rest separated from each other in modern culture is a clear illustration of the fact that »what happens in one has no significance in the other« (IV, 15). This implies that religion definitively has lost its unifying power. Its only option left is to withdraw into the sphere of interiority. But if this is the case, the actually existing religion is no longer capable of a limited elevation to infinite life, a possibility which Hegel had left open in the *Systemfragment* for unhappy peoples. In religion, as a subjective attitude of faith, »the concept of an all-embracing coherence has been lost, and transformed into the concept either of supersession or of entertainment« (IV, 14).

But Hegel does not only distance himself from the actually existing religion; also the ideal religion becomes problematic for him. It is probably no coincidence that he elaborates this point in relation to his criticism of Jacobi. By doing so, one can suppose that his critique of Jacobi's faith in the absolute is to some extent also a self-criticism of his own position in the *Systemfragment*. In an important passage in *Glauben und Wissen* Hegel criticises Jacobi's conception of faith. It is a faith, »which has the eternal as absolute object, keeps cognition separated from it and not united with it. It excludes rational cognition; for it acknowledges cognition only as something subjective and as formal knowledge.« Hegel asks »about this faith if it is not polluted even as *faith* by being transposed into the relation to reflection« (IV, 378). The point for Hegel is that faith loses its immediacy at the moment that reflection arises. In order to illustrate this, he starts with a description of the truly immediate or naive faith. This is a kind of faith of man who has not elevated himself to abstract reflection, the faith of premodern civilization. This faith takes no notice of its relation to objective thinking, nor does it have any idea of another kind of faith in something else. It is a purely regardless position, an immediate certainty without any negation, in no way opposed to reflection, since there is no reflection present. But this naiveté disappears irreversibly »when faith as such is bound up with an awareness of itself and negates formal, finite knowledge« (IV, 379). The reason for this is that consciousness introduces opposition. Because the faithful is conscious of his own faithful attitude and reflects upon it, he enters into an opposition with finite knowledge, and can only exist thanks to and in this opposition. Therefore it is characteristic for this position that »no rational knowledge is supposed to be achievable,« which could unite the finite and the infinite. If this would occur, both the opposition and the purity, being the essence of this faith, would be lost. But the question remains whether this conscious attitude of faith »is truly able to raise itself above subjectivity and finitude« (ibid.) as it claims. The answer is negative, and therefore Hegel characterizes this faith as polluted. At the moment that faith enters into a relation to reflection it receives its features and thus loses its purity.

In this fragment Hegel describes and criticizes an aspect of the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte, viz. »faith in its negative and conscious shape« (IV, 379). But this description can be applied to his own

conception of ideal religion in the *Systemfragment* as well. In that text too, ideal religion is characterized by a negative relationship to reflection, implied by the very status of Hegel's own reflective approach to it. Religion has a negative relation to finite knowledge and keeps itself apart from it. This leads to the conclusion that, as an implication of his criticism of Jacobi, Hegel recognizes a posteriori that his own position with regard to religion in the Frankfurt period was untenable. What Hegel wanted to support in the *Systemfragment* and humane. But through his philosophical approach to religion he made this position untenable at the same time; religion is polluted because of its affection by reflection. Since religion is opposed to philosophy, since it is a reality *beyond* reflection, ideal religion itself becomes something subjective, a faith. Therefore it can by no means play the practical role anymore, which Hegel had wanted for it.

Thus, as a conclusion one can say that Hegel's reason for giving a reflective form to the ideal of his youth, was not so much his new, speculative conception of philosophy, but all the more his conviction that the practical role of religion in the elevation of man to infinite life was over. The latter is due to the power of understanding over religion, and to the fact that religion loses its immediacy and absence of any opposition by a philosophical approach to it.

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NOTES

- 1 References to Hegel's works are made in the text between (). The following abbreviations are used: N: H. NOHL (ed.), *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, Tübingen 1907.
- 2 For an extensive survey cf. S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, Hamburg 1968 ff.
- 3 Cf. *Systemfragment von 1800*: (Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 32), Bonn 1991, pp. 23 e.v.
- 4 Cf. recent studies like G. PORTALES, *Hegels frühe Idee der Philosophie*, Stuttgart Bad-Cannstatt 1994, p. 212 ff.; M. FUJITA, *Philosophie und Religion beim jungen Hegel* (Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 26), Bonn 1985, p. 107 ff.; S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, p. 58 ff.; A. WYLLEMAN, »Driven forth to science«, in: Id. (ed.), *Hegel on the Ethical Life, Religion, and Philosophy (1793-1807)*, Leuven 1989, p. 38 ff.
- 5 Cf. A. WYLLEMAN, »Driven forth to science«, p. 32 ff.
- 6 J. HOFFMEISTER (ed.), *Briefe von und an Hegel*, Band I, Hamburg 1969, p. 59-60.
- 7 A. WYLLEMAN, »Driven forth to science«, p. 32.
- 8 M. FUJITA, *Philosophie und Religion beim jungen Hegel*, p. 118.
- 9 A. WYLLEMAN, »Driven forth to science«, p. 37.
- 10 S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, p. 83; M. FUJITA, *Philosophie und Religion beim jungen Hegel*, p. 128.
- 11 Unlike S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, p. 72.
- 12 F.H. JACOBI, *Werke IV*, 1, p. 210.
- 13 F.H. JACOBI, *Werke III*, p. 7.
- 14 M. FUJITA, *Philosophie und Religion beim jungen Hegel*, p. 121; S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, p. 80.
- 15 S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System*, p. 84.

Ernst-Otto Onnasch, Nijmegen

DIE NEGATIVITÄT UND IHRE TÄTIGKEIT IN HEGELS »PHÄNOMENOLOGIE DES GEISTES«

1

Der entscheidende Schritt, den Hegel bereits in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* über die Philosophie Fichtes – und in gewisser Weise auch über die Philosophie Schellings – hinaus tut, ist, daß er die Negativität als das tätige und Unterscheidende Prinzip nicht als etwas nimmt, das dem Absoluten oder dem Ich äußerlich hinzutritt, sondern als etwas, das zur Natur der Substantialität gehört und über den Weg eigenen Selbstbewegung vermittelt wird. Von grundlegender Bedeutung für den Hegelschen Philosophieansatz ist nun, daß diese Negativität nicht nur verantwortlich ist für die Bewegung des Bewußtseins oder des Geistes, sondern auch für die der nicht-geistigen bzw. naturhaften Wirklichkeit. Die *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (weiterhin zit. als *Phänomenologie*), um die es hier insbesondere geht, ist allerdings ihren Inhalt anbelangt, eine Philosophie des Bewußtseins. Folglich erscheint die Negativität oder Tätigkeit als der Motor hinter allen in ihr emergierenden Gestalten im Modus einer *geistigen Substanz*. Wenn diesem strengen Sinne wirklich so wäre, müßte das freilich eine erhebliche Einschränkung für die Gangthese bedeuten; denn nach dem Hegelschen Philosophieanspruch soll ja jene Tätigkeit nicht in bestimmter Modus, sondern in *allen* Gestaltungen der Substanz als dieselbe wirksame Tätigkeit auszuweisen werden. Das heißt, die Tätigkeit, die die Substanz als einfache oder naturhafte zu demjenigen was sie an und für sich ist, ist dieselbe, die die Substanz als geistige und absolute zu dem macht, was sie an und für sich ist. Nach Hegel muß es in der Philosophie darum gehen, die bestimmende Tätigkeit all der Gestaltungsformen der Substanz zu erfassen.

Wenn aber, wie gesagt, die Tätigkeit in der *Phänomenologie* nur im Modus der geistigen Substanz dargelegt wird, dann fehlt einer ihrer maßgeblichsten Aspekte, nämlich nicht-geistige bzw. selbst noch wußtlose Tätigkeit naturhafter Substanz zu sein. Nun scheint zumindest eine der Obliegenheiten des Verfassers zur eigentlichen *Phänomenologie* – gemeint sind die »Vorrede« und die »Einleitung« – zu sein, gerade einer solchen Vermutung von vornherein das Wasser abzugraben. Meines Erachtens muß dieser Versuch dann auch als eine auf ihre Grundbestimmungen kondensierte Naturphilosophie gelesen werden (Freilich erfüllen »Vorrede« und »Einleitung« gewiß noch andere Funktionen, was aber im zur Rede stehenden Zusammenhang nicht weiter berücksichtigt zu werden braucht). Was Hegel in diesen Eingangsstücken versucht zu zeigen, ist, daß die Gegenstände des Bewußtseins nicht schlechthin Folge intentionaler Bewußtseinsbezüge seien, sondern schon Resultate einer an sich selbstständigen Tätigkeit, die selbst nicht Bewußtseinstätigkeit, aber auf die Selbsttätigkeit extrametaler Substantialität zurückgeht. Diese Tätigkeit erweist sich dann spätestens im Selbstbewußtseinskapiel als die Tätigkeit oder Intentionalität des Bewußtseins selbst. Dennoch ist es für die gesamte dialektische Entwicklung der *Phänomenologie* wesentlich, kein einziger Gegenstand des Bewußtseins jener an sich selbstständigen Tätigkeit entspricht, die nicht dem Bewußtsein, sondern auch den extrametalen Gegenständen zugrunde liegt.

Daß dem Bewußtsein sein Tätigkeitsprinzip durch die immanente Tätigkeit der ihm gegenüberstehenden Substanz andemonstriert sein muß, läßt sich durch folgende Überlegung dartun. Wäre der Wissenschaft der Erfahrung das generative Prinzip als alleiniges Prinzip der Substanz ganz äußerlich, dann wäre der Tat nicht zu sehen, wie die dialektische Erfahrungsentwicklung, jemals eben dieses Prinzip erziele könnte. Gehörte jenes generative Prinzip allerdings ausschließlich dem Bewußtsein an, so wäre es bloß subjektives Prinzip. Und von einem solchen Prinzip ist nicht zu sehen, wie es auch Prinzip der nicht-wußtseinsgemäßen Realität sein könnte; daß es dies sein soll, erweist Hegels kritische Pointe gegen Kant und Fichte. Diese zugegeben äußerliche Reflexion auf die Einseitigkeit jeder der beiden Alternativen ist allerdings einigermassen klar angesichts der notwendigen Strukturiertheit der *Phänomenologie*. Denn da das System keine der beiden einseitigen Seiten als grundsätzlich falsch verwirft, muß für die *Phänomenologie*