

## True Faith in Faith and Knowledge

Jonkers, P.H.A.I.

*Published in:*  
Hegel-Jahrbuch

*Document version:*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2003

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Jonkers, P. H. A. I. (2003). True Faith in Faith and Knowledge. *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 5, 183-189.

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

TRUE FAITH IN »FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE«

1. Introduction

In the introduction to the *Difference Essay*, Hegel presents a well-known description of both knowing and faith. Knowing is »this conscious identity of the finite and infinite, the union of both worlds, the sensuous and the intelligible, the necessary and the free, in consciousness«. <sup>1</sup> Knowing supersedes these oppositions in an original union. Faith, on the other hand, is »this relation or connection of the limited with the absolute, in which there is consciousness of their opposition only; there is no consciousness at all of their identity. Faith does not express the synthesis inherent in feeling or intuition. It is, rather, a relation of reflection to the absolute«. <sup>2</sup> Thus, faith, in which there is no consciousness of the identity of all oppositions, seems to be opposed to knowing, which is the conscious suspension of oppositions in an original, absolute unity.

These definitions of faith and knowing, as well as their mutual relationship, occur, to a certain extent, again in *Faith and Knowledge*. In this text, just like in the *Difference Essay*, Hegel points out that »the sole idea that has reality and true objectivity for philosophy, is the absolute suspendedness of the opposition. This absolute identity is not a universal subjective postulate never to be realized. It is the only authentic reality. Nor is the knowing of it a faith, that is, something beyond all knowledge; it is, rather, philosophy's sole knowledge.« <sup>3</sup> In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel specifically dwells upon the development of the concepts of faith and knowledge in modernity. Already in the first paragraphs, he makes clear that the meaning of these concepts has changed dramatically since the Enlightenment. The task of knowing is no longer to construe the absolute for consciousness, but »[to] renounce its existence in the absolute«. <sup>4</sup> While this used to be considered as the death of philosophy, it now seems to be philosophy's zenith. Therefore, the knowledge of the Enlightenment no longer deserves the name reason; instead, it is actually a reflective understanding in which not the identity, but the opposition is absolute. However, this degeneration of knowing did not leave faith unaffected either. During the Enlightenment, understanding criticized positive religion severely, with the result that it posed religion as an unreasonable faith over against itself. The consequence of this interconnected change of the meaning of faith and knowing is that »the positive element, with which reason busted itself to battle, is no longer religion, and victorious reason is no longer reason. The newborn peace that hovers triumphantly over the corpse of reason and faith, uniting them as the child of both, has as little of reason in it as it has of authentic faith.« <sup>5</sup>

As is common knowledge, Hegel considers the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte as the completion of a movement that was started by the reflective understanding of the Enlightenment. »So little do these philosophies step out of this basic character that, on the contrary, they have merely perfected it to the highest degree.« <sup>6</sup> The nature of this reflective philosophy of subjectivity and its relation to true speculative knowing has already often been examined. Another important question, which remains somewhat in the background in *Faith and Knowledge*, is what attitude speculative philosophy should take with regard to the inner and subjective faith of the Enlightenment. Conversely, the question arises whether faith can have a positive relation to the absolute. Of course, the usual image of Hegel's attitude towards faith is a negative one. But the question could be posed as to whether this conclusion, which is commonly arrived at in Hegel-research, should not be modified. To illustrate my thesis, I want to point to the fact that Hegel, in several passages of *Faith and Knowledge*, speaks of a »true faith«, which he qualifies as a sublime manifestation of the great form of the world spirit and, more precisely, of Protestantism. <sup>7</sup> On the basis of this question, there arises another question regarding the content of this true faith and its relation to (the knowledge of) the absolute. First, I will analyze the shapes of faith in modern culture, as Hegel discusses them in *Faith and Knowledge*. Afterwards, I will examine in detail the relation of true faith to speculative knowing.

## 2. True Faith

Roughly, Hegel distinguishes two moments in the development of the relationship between faith and knowledge in modernity. First, there is the old opposition between reason and faith, which has been accentuated since the beginning of modern culture and reached a climax during the Enlightenment. For example, one can notice this opposition in the classical phrase that »philosophy was said to be the handmaid of faith, [...] against which philosophy has irresistibly affirmed its absolute autonomy.«<sup>8</sup> However, this opposition explicitly comes to the fore for the first time in Protestantism. Hegel calls this attitude of faith »naive«, since faithful man does not raise himself to the level of an abstract reflection about the nature of his faith and its relation to thinking. Therefore, he is not aware of the fact that his faith is opposed to reflection. This attitude of faith »is a pure position, without regard to anything else; it is not a negation either of another faith in something else, or even of another form for its own content.«<sup>9</sup> In the consciousness of the faithful, who do not reflect on their faith, finite thinking and faith in the eternal are completely external to each other: the faithful are not aware of the opposition between the two. Such an unconscious attitude is characteristic for non-philosophical consciousness.

Hegel makes a clear distinction between this naive, non-philosophical attitude of faith and the faith that appears in the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte. In these philosophies, »faith completely loses this pure naïveté; for now it is reason which flees from reflection into faith in order to nullify finitude and suspend subjectivity.«<sup>10</sup> The crucial difference from naive faith is that these philosophies are explicitly conscious of the limitations of reflection, and try to somehow save the infinite by fleeing from reflection into faith. Concretely, the method of these philosophies is the following. As far as their positive knowledge is concerned, they restrict themselves to the finite: »According to Kant, the supersensuous is incapable of being known by reason [...] according to Jacobi, reason is ashamed to beg [for truth] [...] and according to Fichte, God is something incomprehensible and unthinkable.«<sup>11</sup> However, these philosophies do not simply resign themselves to this negative result but fill this infinite empty space, which was created by the finitude of knowing, with the subjectivity of an eternal longing for, and an inking of, the divine. By proceeding in this way, they place God »in a faith outside and above itself [viz., reason], as a beyond.«<sup>12</sup> As a result, these philosophies again make themselves a handmaid to faith. Again, not only does this procedure have far-reaching consequences for knowing, it does not leave faith unaffected either. More specifically, with their conscious flight into faith, the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte pollute the naive faith of Protestantism. In order to clarify the difference between these two kinds of faith, two images are exemplary. Characteristic for naive faith is that »all the midges of subjectivity are burned in this consuming fire.«<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, in the polluted faith »the reflection turns man's yearning [which is characteristic for naive faith] into basking in his subjectivity, in his beautiful thoughts and sensations.«<sup>14</sup> These two images show that the core of this pollution is that subjectivity is preserved in this philosophical faith, in spite of the appearance of the contrary. The philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte have a subjective consciousness of the fact that the subjectivity of finite knowledge has to be suspended. »Thus, subjectivity has saved itself in its own nullification.«<sup>15</sup>

In order to stress the true character of the naive, subjective attitude of faith, Hegel describes it as the most elevated manifestation of the great form of the world spirit. »From the religious point of view [this spirit] is the principle of Protestantism, subjectivity, for which beauty and truth present themselves in feelings and persuasions, in love and intellect.«<sup>16</sup> The subjectivity of this faith has to be understood as a reaction against the power of understanding having dominated modern culture for such a long time. As Hegel pointed out in the *Difference Essay*, understanding is the power of dichotomy and limitation. In the case of religion, it separates the objective religious manifestation (the sacred) from the subjective disposition (the sanctification), thus reducing the sacred to a finite thing, deprived of any sublime value. In order to escape from this sacrifice of the sacred, faith has withdrawn into subjective inwardness. »Religion builds its temples and altars in the heart of the individual. In sighs and prayers he seeks for the God whom he denies himself in intuition.«<sup>17</sup> It is precisely this subjective, inward attitude, which is a basic characteristic of modern culture that reveals the true, sublime aspect of this faith. As a love filled with eternal longing, »it does not get hung up on any transitory sight or enjoyment, but yearns for eternal beauty and bliss. Religion, as this longing, is subjective; but what it seeks and what is not given to it in intuition, is the absolute and the eternal.«<sup>18</sup> Therefore,

Hegel calls the subjectivity of Protestantism a »beautiful subjectivity« and admires »the poetry of Protestant grief that scorns all reconciliation with empirical existence.«<sup>19</sup> The expression »poetry of grief« refers to the tragic aspect of this faith: the faithful are aware that, because of the power of understanding, their consciousness of the divine can no longer show itself in the objectivity of a cult. Rather, it withdraws into the inwardness of the eternal longing for something beyond the sphere of finitude.

Another element of the authenticity of subjective faith is its naïveté (cf. above). As a result of this, subjective faith is capable of maintaining the purity of its orientation towards the eternal and preventing any pollution by reflection. »In true faith the whole sphere of finitude, of being-something-on-one's-own-account, the sphere of sensibility sinks into nothing before the thinking and intuiting of the eternal.«<sup>20</sup> In the philosophy of reflection, on the contrary, the philosophizing subject is aware of the finitude of his knowledge and consciously surrenders himself to faith. However, in true faith, »the very consciousness of this surrender and nullification is nullified.«<sup>21</sup> The faithful do not try to secretly justify their subjective individuality and finitude; on the contrary, they consider them unconditionally as something ungodly. Only if faith is capable of maintaining its purity, it can actually be something beautiful, pious, and truly religious.

The term that expresses most adequately the true yet simultaneously tragic character of true faith is eternal longing or yearning (*Sehnsucht*). Hegel regularly uses this word in *Faith and Knowledge* to characterize Protestant faith. It is a »love filled with eternal longings«, »a yearning for a beyond and a future« etc.<sup>22</sup> As the word itself already indicates, yearning is a pure, endless longing, which passes beyond the finite with disregard, because it is longing for the eternal. Yearning takes all finitude as dangerous superfluity and as evil, since finitude could destroy its absolute purity. However, for this same reason, this yearning also has a tragic aspect. The faithful of modern culture realize all too well that the object of their longing lies in a sphere beyond this world, which is not only inaccessible to finite knowledge, but also to longing itself: »For if the longing were to find its object, then the temporal beauty of a subject in his singularity would be its happiness, it would be the perfection of a being belonging to the world; but to the extent that religion as longing actually singularized beauty it would be nothing beautiful.«<sup>23</sup> This theme occurs again in the conclusion of *Faith and Knowledge*, where it is said that the religion of modern culture rests on »the feeling that God himself is dead.«<sup>24</sup> Following the preceding analysis, it is clear that this feeling is nothing other than the typically modern conscious awareness that the objective presence of God in the sensuous world has disappeared and has withdrawn into the subjective inwardness of prayer and yearning. In sum, one can say that the authenticity of faith as an eternal longing consists in its reference to God in a non-philosophical way; but faith's grief lies in the fact that God can never be actually given to the consciousness of the faithful.

## 3. True faith and speculative knowing

What significance does true faith have for the systematic philosophical knowledge of the absolute and, consequently, for the system of philosophy? Generally speaking, the answer to this question becomes apparent from the fact that Hegel puts this faith, specifically in its Protestant form, on par with a subjective philosophy of reflection. For Hegel, both are manifestations of the great form of the world spirit and, more specifically, of the principle of subjectivity. My question is the following: what is the relation between this faith and the true system of philosophy?

In order to find an answer to this question, we have to examine some passages of the introduction of the *Difference Essay* and the course-manuscript *Introductio in Philosophiam*. The task of philosophy is to construct the absolute for consciousness, which means that »the absolute shapes itself into an objective totality, which is a whole in itself held fast and complete, having no ground outside itself, but founded by itself in its beginning, middle and end.«<sup>25</sup> Consequently, philosophy is the only science that has to begin with itself, and does not depend on something external, like, e.g., the subjective faith in the eternal. This also implies that an introduction to philosophy is out of the question. »Philosophy as a science neither needs an introduction, nor does it endure one.«<sup>26</sup> The same holds true for all kinds of idiosyncratic insights of philosophies of the past or present that claim an independent place within philosophical science. »The essence of philosophy, on the contrary, is a bottomless abyss for personal idiosyncrasy. In order to reach philosophy it is necessary to throw oneself into it à corps perdu.«<sup>27</sup> Reason, which is active in the philosophizing subject, has to free itself

from the particularities in which it is stuck, and commit itself to the absolute. The one and only universal reason has to find itself through philosophical systems of various ages. Therefore, the only kind of individuality of philosophical systems that is of interest to speculative knowing »is the organic shape that reason has built for itself out of the material of a particular age.«<sup>28</sup>

But if thinking takes up a more limited position and thinks about the situation of the empirical subject who starts philosophizing, then an introduction to philosophy surely makes sense. »Whereas philosophy is complete and round, philosophizing, on the contrary, is something empirical and can depart from various standpoints and forms of culture and subjectivity; [...] therefore, with a view to the empirical starting points of philosophizing, an introduction to philosophy really is possible. It is a kind of link and bridge between the subjective forms and objective and absolute philosophy.«<sup>29</sup> This means that philosophy is related to something external, viz., the empirical subject who starts to philosophize from various finite points of view. The justified demand of this subject is that philosophy offers him a bridge in order to get access to philosophy as a science of the absolute. So, the purpose of an introduction to philosophy is to ensure the following: since the subject has to give up its finite points of view and has to commit itself to the absolute, it is essential that the incentives of reason do not appear in the eyes of the subject as one-sided, irrational demands, but are built on the reasonableness that is already unconsciously active in the subject. Here we can notice the core of the project that Hegel will develop in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* some years later.

What is more important for the question addressed in this paper is that the philosophizing subject appears here as a concrete, *historical human being*, who is confronted with the deadlock of modern culture. In this situation, the subject feels the existential need for a philosophy that is capable of overcoming this deadlock and bringing to consciousness its reasonable nature, which, until then, had been only unconsciously slumbering. Why is the concrete situation of the philosophizing subject so important, and what does it imply for faith? The particular form of the philosophy of modern culture »arises, on the one hand, from the living originality of the spirit whose work and spontaneity have reestablished and shaped the harmony that has been rent; and, on the other hand, from the particular form of the dichotomy from which the system emerges.«<sup>30</sup> This shows that the need for philosophy results from two conditions that are at odds with each other. In the first place, the dichotomy characterizes modern civilization and forms, as such, the given aspect of the philosophy of this age. »Dichotomy is the source of the need for philosophy.«<sup>31</sup> Both in the *Difference Essay* and in *Faith and Knowledge*, as in most other texts of the Jena period, Hegel discusses this aspect in detail. For, in spite of the coincidence of the »when«, »where«, and »in what form« these dichotomies occur, it is the most striking characteristic of modern, northern culture. As part of an introduction to philosophy, the task of speculative reason consists in showing the philosophizing subject, who is stuck in these oppositions, that the absoluteness and independence of this dichotomy is only apparent and has to be understood as an appearance of an original, absolute identity.

However, in order to bring this task to a favorable conclusion, a second condition has to be met, for the question is why the philosophizing subject should allow reason to convince him of the necessity to abandon the standpoint of dichotomy and commit himself to speculative knowing. How can the need for philosophy, which arises »when the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the oppositions lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence,«<sup>32</sup> remove its *coincidental* character? Why, is this need »with respect to the given dichotomy [...] a necessary attempt to suspend the rigidified opposition between subjectivity and objectivity«<sup>33</sup> How can speculative reason prevent the philosophizing subject from perceiving this attempt as an unreasonable, authoritarian word of power? These questions lead to the second condition for the need for philosophy. In the foregoing, we have seen that »in culture, the appearance of the absolute has become isolated from the absolute and fixated into independence. But at the same time the appearance cannot disown its origin, and must aim to constitute the manifold of its limitations into one whole.«<sup>34</sup> This means that the empirical philosophizing subject is not only stuck in all kinds of reflective oppositions, but also has an unconscious feeling of their origin, viz., the absolute. This feeling appears as an unrest, which is typical for the striving of life itself and is actually a secret activity of reason in a culture dominated by finitude and dichotomy. Therefore, the source of the need for philosophy is undoubtedly dichotomy. But the fact that the empirical subject feels the actual situation of dichotomy as a deadlock and is restless about it presupposes that he must also have a feeling of the absolute, which is the origin of the di-

chotomy and in which the latter is suspended. Only if this condition is met it does make sense to offer the subject a means to bridge the gap between his finite points of view and speculative philosophy itself.

Hegel formulates these two opposite conditions, which the need of philosophy has to meet, as well as the closely connected problematic of the introduction to philosophy, in a reflective way, and in particular, in terms of the presuppositions of philosophy. »One presupposition is the absolute itself. It is the goal that is being sought; but it is already present, or how otherwise could it be sought? Reason produces it, merely by freeing consciousness from its limitations. This suspension of the limitations is conditioned by the presupposed unlimitedness.«<sup>35</sup> This presupposition corresponds with the unconscious feeling of the absolute by the finite subject. »The other presupposition may be taken to be that consciousness has stepped out of the totality, that is, it may be taken to be the split into being and not-being, concept and being, finitude and infinity. From the standpoint of the dichotomy, the absolute synthesis is a beyond, it is the undetermined and the shapeless as opposed to the determinacies of dichotomy.«<sup>36</sup> With this last remark, Hegel considerably accentuates the antagonism between these two conditions. For the finite philosophizing subject, the absolute synthesis is a beyond, which means that he is separated from it by a gap. Consequently, the question arises as to how the introduction to philosophy, in which the crucial issue is precisely to elaborate the need for philosophy, can still function as a bridge between the finite subject and the absolute. The task of philosophy, to be sure, consists in unifying these two presuppositions. But the question is how can this be done? With this, we see that the problem of the introduction to philosophy returns. The answer to this question follows from the fact that Hegel thinks it inappropriate to use the word »presupposition« to designate the need for philosophy because, consequently, this need gets a reflective form and appears as a number of contradictory propositions.<sup>37</sup> Especially in relation to the philosophizing subject, this means that the need for philosophy in this way gets the character of an abstract, unfounded demand, which strikes the subject both unprepared and unjustified. Thus, the need for philosophy runs the risk of degenerating into a *petitio principii*: the absolute, in which the need for philosophy should end, is already presupposed as being present in the philosophizing subject who is dominated by the power of dichotomy. Obviously, the need for philosophy has to be demonstrated to the subject in way other than by the reflective pattern of thought of presuppositions.

In this context, the theme of faith is important. Hegel's elaboration of it in *Faith and Knowledge* shows that it is directly connected with the situation of the subject in modern culture. Through this elaboration, Hegel shows that the feeling of the absolute, as the second condition of the need for philosophy, is not an abstract demand which strikes the philosophizing subject unprepared and unjustified. On the contrary, in the shape of true faith this feeling is actually present in modern culture and is a counterweight to the power of dichotomy.

#### 4. Conclusion

On the basis of the preceding analysis, the significance of true faith for speculative knowing becomes clear. It is a crucial element in Hegel's project of an introduction to philosophy. As we have seen above, the introduction must present the finite points of view of the philosophizing subject systematically and connect them with each other. The major step forward of modernity in comparison to pre-modern times is precisely that the philosophical subject is conscious of the fact that he has stepped out of the immediate totality, out of the multiplicity of mutually opposite points of view. However, this subject is not unconscious of the unity of these points of view in the absolute: therein lies the subject's limitation and this also explains the necessity that he has to be elevated to the consciousness of the absolute. But in order to allow philosophy to elevate him at all, the subject must first feel an inner unrest about the dichotomy and must have a sense of the absolute. Only this sense is capable of harassing his better nature and urging him to overcome the sphere of limitedness. Just like the imprisonment of the subject in the dichotomy, this sense of the absolute is also rooted in the situation of modern culture. Concretely, this sense becomes manifest in the eternal longing of faith to pass beyond the dichotomy, as becomes apparent in Protestant faith. By showing that these two conditions of the need for philosophy are actually given in modern culture, philosophy can build its bridge between the philosophical subject and the absolute. In this way, the subject feels the demand of philosophy less as an unjustified, one-sided word of power or as a *petitio principii*. This leads to the conclusion that the analysis of

true faith in the concrete situation of modern culture is a necessary condition for the secret workings of reason to be effective.

Nevertheless, this faith is not a sufficient condition for the need for philosophy. In the eyes of the faithful, »this synthesis of what is sundered in faith is an abomination to faith. In its consciousness the holy and the divine only have standing as objects. So the healthy intellect sees only destruction of the divine in the suspended opposition, in the identity brought into consciousness.«<sup>38</sup> Consequently, faith cannot take over the place of philosophy and produce, by itself, the consciousness of absolute identity. The reason for this has to do with the ever-growing power of dichotomy in modern civilization and with the fact that the striving of life to produce harmony has, again, become more and more insignificant. Concretely, Hegel here thinks of the attempts to restore this harmony in the beautiful, inner faith of the eternal in Protestantism. This religion has only been effective up to a certain level of culture. Its role has to be taken over by philosophy, which is capable of attacking understanding on its own field.<sup>39</sup>

*Prof. Dr. Peter Jonkers*  
*Katholieke Theologische Universiteit Utrecht*  
 Postbus 80101  
 3508 TC Utrecht  
 Niederlande  
 Pjonkers@ktu.nl

## ANMERKUNGEN

- 1 G.W.F. HEGEL, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 4, ed. by H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler, Hamburg 1968, 18.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 3 G.W.F. HEGEL, »Glauben und Wissen«, in: *ibid.*, 325.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 316.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 315.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 319.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 316–7, 379, 383–4.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 315.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 379.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*, 316
- 12 *Ibid.*, 315.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 379.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 384.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 379.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 316.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 316–7.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 319; cf. also 383.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 379.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*, 317; 384.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 414.
- 25 G.W.F. HEGEL, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, 30–1.
- 26 G.W.F. HEGEL, *Introductio in philosophiam*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, ed. by M. Baum and K.R. Meist, Hamburg, 1998, 259.
- 27 HEGEL, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, 11.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 29 HEGEL, *Introductio in philosophiam*, 261.
- 30 HEGEL, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, 12.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 14.

- 33 *Ibid.*, 14, *italics mine*.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 15–6.
- 37 Cf. *ibid.*, 16; 23 ff.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 39 Cf. P. JONKERS, »Can Philosophy understand Religion. Tensions in Hegel's Attitude Towards Religion in 1800« in: *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 1997, ed. by A. Arndt, K. Bal and H. Ottmann, Berlin 1998, 210–216.