

Absolute Idealism as a Necessary Condition for Sacramental or Other Theology

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By

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“Reality is friendly”
(Leo Elders, SVD)

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1. EVOLUTION AND IDEALISM

Thinkers from C.S. Lewis to the Danish psychiatrist and philosopher Axel Randrup point out the contradiction in supposing a chance or unguided evolution of a human power, intelligence, which then itself proceeds to establish the truth of evolution.¹ This chance or hazard, the theorists declare, is how we who now argue for evolution came to be as thinking, scientific beings. Thought, symbolic representation, abstraction itself, emerged in this way. One finds it argued that philosophical idealism is false because we now know that intellect thus materially evolved, as we now know that the earth is round and hanging in space because we have gone around it and seen it thus hanging. But this “knowing” and the associated journeyings is just what arguing for space as an *a priori* form of representation seeks to relativise.²

If one were to concede the point, though, then one would have to say that the theory too, our whole style of thinking and what we call thinking as such, was a chance result, a means of survival with which notions of truth have

¹ Cf. A. Randrup, “Cognition and Biological Evolution”, “Idealist Philosophy: What is Real?”, both articles in <http://cogprints.org/3373/01/evolutioncognition.html>. For Lewis, see the relevant chapter in the first edition of his *Miracles*, chiefly remembered for the savage criticism he received to his face from the young Elizabeth Anscombe at an Oxford club in 1947. As her husband Peter Geach remarked to me rather sadly thirty years later, during one of our fortnightly supervisory meetings at that time, after himself concurring in an argument identical to that of Lewis’s as employed by me in what became my *Morals as Founded on Natural Law* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1987, 1988), she “only did what she thought was her duty”. In her further defence, however, one may consult Hegel’s affirmations as to reason’s being ever its own judge as not possibly being anything other than that. In that sense, indeed, it does not need, indeed cannot brook, a divine guarantee, is rather itself divine if anything “and therefore law”, Cicero’s position in *De legibus*. As such, however, reason could never unguidedly or by chance “evolve” from unreason, as it would be. Here already we have the basis for absolute idealism as philosophy’s “dogma” (Plato, Aristotle, Anselm, Hegel), most incisively grasped among later Hegel-interpreters, to my knowledge, by McTaggart or G. Rinaldi, neither of whom base it upon an extrinsic divine guarantor in the manner, taken at its face-value, of Lewis’s text.

² Cp. J.B.S. Haldane, “Some Reflections on Materialism”, in *The Rationalist Annual*, 1930, pp. 33-34.

no proportion, unless we drastically re-define them. Our theories would be, so to say, symbolic representations, without further guarantee or foundation, ways of “getting on” such as any animal might have stumbled upon in a struggle to survive. So they would be subjective, pragmatic, or at any rate it would thus emerge as pragmatic to view them as pragmatic!

The paradox is suggestive. Conceding the point concedes the impossibility, in logic, of logic, i.e. of any such concession in regard to a supposed truth. This is where Hegel’s Cartesian point, as we might call it, comes in, viz. philosophy, that is to say knowing and thinking, is necessarily idealist. There is no thing-in-itself or thing apart from a relation to thought. Even thought, furthermore, ultimately thinks itself (Aristotle) *and that is what it is*. It could be “wrong” to do this, to be this, an idea however at once putting it, along with that idea, beyond such a criterion. This is why Hegel concludes his first account of logic (1816) by saying that being is the Absolute Idea and conversely, implying of course also that it isn’t, i.e. if it is after all “just an idea”, as we say. Even if he, we, insist that the Absolute Idea *is*, yet we add a warning against too absolute a reliance upon “this soulless word ‘is’”³, which happens to be the traditional logical *copula* (in perhaps a majority of languages).

The notion, says Hegel, is play (*Encyclopaedia* 161). Here we find, after all, a certain coincidence of the two views, viz. of a self-contradictory materialism with, as it may seem, a mystic idealism. The materialists must plump for a certain “internal realism” or, which is the same, pragmatism, the “way of life” view of things. “This is what we do”, with our signs and symbols, our discourse, our now deconstructed constructions. It is all a matter of what we have to say. Foundations, ultimate validities, are not so much puritanically eschewed as paradigmatically deconstructed, in exquisite self-contradiction, in their notion. In truth, however, this is all a virulent form of slothfulness in sadness.

The idealist version of things may indeed yield a similar result. For example, the Absolute of Hegel is necessarily differentiated, in order to be at all. An undifferentiated absolute is a merely abstract concept of ours. Yet these differentiations of infinite spirit can only be persons, McTaggart will later argue. Only so can the (finite or thus infinite?) part be one with the infinite whole, as Hegel too says it is, in the perfect unity which is reality. Matter and time are self-contradictory illusions.

³ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*: “The difficulty people find in these conceptions is due solely to sticking to the term ‘is’, and forgetting the character of thought, where the moments as much *are* as they *are not*, - are only the process which is Spirit” (transl. Baillie, New York 1966, p. 777f.).

These persons are related in accordance with the final category, love, which as final is the reality to which dialectic attains *as being the sole reality*. McTaggart differs from Hegel (as he thinks) in placing love after cognition, the “absolute idea”, finding the whole knowledge-relation as such to be lacking in the perfect reciprocity required by the reasoning. They, the persons, are, as according to him they must be, related in *love*, in a loving perception of one another transcending all propositional judgments. This does not, however, mean of itself that all are thus related with all, but rather each with some, McTaggart says. Yet he cannot know this, nor does it correspond to our natural desire for what is free from *all* restriction, to which the Pauline “knowing as I am known” corresponds but which McTaggart wishes to exclude as destructive of “individual” freedom. So here one might expand the pattern of his thought, keeping that pattern while simultaneously disclosing it as more purely an interpretation of Hegel.

This, anyhow, is the final reality of thought. Thought transcends cognition, even of itself as its self-enclosed object, one might say. This can seem a reduction, to voluntarism or to play, again. The spirits, for whom even the category of substance, along with cause, is superseded, exposed as untruth, may think what they like, if they think at all. Truth itself would be superseded as an abstract stage of the dialectic as, therefore, are these very sentences in and as representing it merely. This is the Humean element in Hegel and also perhaps his reason for apparently stopping short of a final category transcending philosophy, that “whereof one cannot speak”. In our time Zen has popularised the situation, as we, more justly said, have popularised Zen.

Of course, again, if we have invented evolution then we must invent the fossils in the misperceived ground (*the* “Ground”, in transferred or analogous sense, is a non-ultimate or “provisional” yet, quite consistently, necessary category in Hegel’s dialectic) as also, if we invent space then we must invent space-travel, as we invent the useless evolutionary survival of the inflamed appendix, of which so many have died or seem to have done, as they seemed to live; i.e. Life is itself a seeming as “only the idea immediate” or, thus, for Hegel, a merely intermediate but purely logical category. Thus “no birth no death” (Buddhist saying). It is *in our, rather, initial perception* that Nature can itself be no more than that, intermediate between Logic and Spirit, “groaning and travailing” in St. Paul’s apocalyptic representation. Thus when Hegel speaks of death as “the entry into spirit”, he too is really saying “no death”, finding it immediate and thus “representative” just as a conception. *Non moriar sed vivam*. In fact the warrior-king does neither, needing only to be absorbed into thought as final reality or Absolute Idea (of itself only), such that one can say, even now, “I live yet not I” (St.

Paul, adding “but Christ lives in me”), this being what is celebrated at the Mass as its, it is believed, God-given sacrament, thus in a sense signifying nothing other than itself.⁴

So for the idealists, as for the materialists, truth disappears and this is the truth. Truth is one of the penultimate abstractions of the dialectical ascent to love and, finally, being, *das wahre Seindes*; for “*die Absolute Idee allein ist Sein ... und ist alle Wahrheit*”⁵. This is expressed in the ancient insight, “God is love”, i.e. love is the final reality. This, consistently taken, means that there is no reality to be contemplated, not even that of love, beyond or in separation from the *exercise* of love, mutual, unqualified by time or matter. This indeed is the secret of the so-called fire of concupiscence, so far as it goes, misconceived or pictured, rather, as a wound of original sin, i.e. it is not the fire that is the wound or sin here but the helpless division of our integrity. God, by contrast, compels no one to love him, something we yet do by his own fire alone, freely offered, freely taken. Men know and have always known this in the depths of spiritual awareness, which is why Hegel would see truth in all philosophies “worthy of the name”, as he

⁴ For this notion of self-signifying signs cf. M. Levering, “Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology: Retrieving Anscar Vonier” (in *Indubitante ad veritatem*, ed. Jürgen Vijgen, Damon Publishers, Kerkrade, Holland, 2003, pp. 281-300). This retrieval is of Abbot Vonier’s *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* from the year 1925. The relation of self-signifying signs to the “formal signs” that some late-Scholastic logicians, such as Jean Poinot OP (known as John of St. Thomas), a contemporary of Descartes, identified all concepts as being, seems to be rather close. Thus a concept, while only signifying something other than itself, yet signifies itself in what came to be called “second intention”, in which case, however, it signifies itself as simultaneously “other”, simply because it can never signify or conceive even itself directly. Levering’s signs, however, such as he claims to find them delineated in Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* III (cf. q.76, 5), the treatise on the sacraments, *do* signify themselves in this “sacramental mode of being”, but “after the manner of substance” or of what they are, viz. essentially non-sensible and hence mediated, rather than in the usual way. Transubstantiation, that is, is not so much a miracle merely as a or, in a sense, *the* “mystery of faith”, as the canon of the Roman mass-rite has it. Hence Aquinas insists that the sacrament’s signification, *which it is*, viz. Christ’s (sacramental) body, is never carried about, e.g. in the liturgical processions for the then new *corpus Christi* feast. But that this instance is so closely related to the or a theory of the concept as such indicates the proximity of any properly theological conception here to Absolute Idealism, which one can well argue the “moderate realism”, so called, of Aquinas does not contradict, being rather identifiable with it. Cf. also John of St. Thomas, *Ars logica* II, 22, 1; also our own *Philosophy or Dialectic*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1993, esp. pp. 119-154.

⁵ Hegel, *Werke* 6, *Wissenschaft der Logik* II, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt-am-Main 1969, p. 549. Cp. Hegel, *Enc.* 236: “The Idea ... is the notion of the Idea”.

somewhat lamely qualifies his assertion. The ecumenical movement will have, can have, no other outcome. It reveals, identifies, the relativity of truth itself, in that this is not being simply but being, *esse*, as related to, in our case, a finite faculty, human intellect, analogous to good as this same *esse* in relation to finite will⁶. This finitude is brought out in its reversal, when it is said that there is none good but God, or that *I* am the truth and not any declaration, just the one Word or, finally, being (“and the Word was God”).

It, this outcome, is in our own hands, as free immortal spirits, and so it is play. No one judges us (except the truth itself, thus truly personalised) and we do not judge ourselves, self-constitutive as we are. Heaven does not then rest upon a *right* vision of things, or any vision, save that of *self*-perception in one another, this being not so much the precondition as the very exercise of love. Here too, then, *nunquam minus solus quam cum solus*. Beyond all our intellectual and other effort here in time, in time’s unreality, this truth beyond truth abides, is enjoyed, plays. The spirit of play, like or equivalently the spirits at play, is immortal, without beginning or end, before or after. “This day have I begotten thee”, begetting like conceiving, fulfilling first, logically, an interpretative role in Hegel’s thought, since there what we find immediately real is itself what is “objectively” representative.

To be consistent (and that is an internal requirement, even if objectively spurious, for writing anything at all, even if in deep love consistency cannot categorially apply) we must say that it is fundamentally indifferent whether we are immortal or not. This is what puzzled McTaggart about Hegel. For both materialist and idealist it is a matter of freely choosing the schema which best serves. In having love we have everything; they are inconsistent maybe, we are consistent, maybe. Heaven is now; that is, our “now” participates in transcendent timelessness, in the light of which it is as past while actually being experienced, as its very structure, instant within instant, proclaims. So the truth of immortality is not an independent reality limiting or contradicting love’s infinity and sole reign. As, so to say, the temporal denial of temporality it is itself but representation (*Vorstellung*). Hence nothing of concern to thought is denied in saying just this. The same, however, applies to the “truth” of death. Death too is nothing other than the other of itself, “the entry into spirit” (Hegel), precisely what Christ’s death shall have actualised. “O death I will be thy death”. Love reigns. *Finita la comedia* exclaims the deaf musical genius in that moment of moments, of “entry into spirit” (Hegel), having written, prayed, in his note-books, “Give

⁶ This is also exactly the position of Thomas Aquinas! Cf. *QD de potentia* VII, on “transcendental predicates”, e.g. being, unity, truth, goodness, something, the future, beauty in some lists. Thus as used there this expression differs from Kant’s usage of the same, *toto caeli*).

me the strength to conquer myself; nothing must bind me to life". Nothing did!

But if there is no death then everything, just as love's exercise, is *free* of death, while *that* and not some other positive quality, apart from just love, that freedom from death, is just what immortality is as a norm. We have it now, and so forever, since just now is forever. It is always now, in a sense not touched by Philip Larkin's objections, the "fears that I may cease to be". "Was I ever anyway?" We are challenged, invited, by reality, Hegel and others claim, to a switch in consciousness toward absolute *self*-consciousness. This is not mysticism but the latter's rationale, as distinct, note, from its rationalisation negatively taken, negative *theology* though it be, what used to be "called" mysticism merely, being rather "speculative truth" (Hegel, *Enc.* 82, *Zus.*).

And so we play, as wisdom does, "before God's throne" namely, though others may think we die; but again, no birth no death. We do not love because we are beautiful, or for any reason. We are beautiful because we love, constitutively. Boehme's insight into the pure as it were *thin* will prior to or apart from creation is thus far correct. Love is not born of intellect, as its inclination (as will, namely), as if intellect might just have stopped short of it⁷. Love is not born at all. It is eternal play, as we see it in young animals or children. We *see* it, that is, but all that is seen is representation, hence such life is "only the idea immediate" (Hegel) of love, as we may add. Nor, I would argue, does this McTaggartian stress upon love contradict Hegel's account of "absolute knowledge" as a quality beyond all our knowing as, again, the finite is, in very truth, infinite (we see nothing other there since infinitude must itself contain and hence transform our vision of the finite) while the infinite, *inasmuch as we manage to think it* (i.e. we don't), is finite. This does not mean, though, that we have a reversible relation here:

After this examination (with which it were well to compare Plato's *Philebus*) tending to show the nullity of the distinction made by understanding between the finite and the infinite, we are liable to glide into the statement that the infinite and the finite are therefore one, and that the genuine infinity, the truth, must be defined and enunciated as the unity of the finite and infinite. Such a statement would be to some extent correct; but is just as open to perversion and falsehood as the unity of Being and Nothing already noticed. Besides it may very fairly be charged with reducing the infinite to finitude and making a finite infinite. For, as far as the expression goes, the finite seems left in its place, - it is not expressly stated to be absorbed. Or, if we reflect that the finite, when identified with the infinite, certainly cannot remain what it was out of

⁷ The same applies to the interior word, *verbum interius*. Cf. our *Thomas Aquinas and Georg Hegel on Trinity*, CSP Newcastle 2020.

such unity, and will at least suffer some change in its characteristics (- as an alkali, when combined with an acid, loses some of its properties), we must see that the same fate awaits the infinite, which, as the negative, will on its part likewise have its edge, as it were, taken off on the other. And this does really happen with the abstract one-sided infinite of understanding. The genuine infinite, however, is not merely in the position of the one-sided acid, and so does not lose itself. The negation of negation is not a neutralisation: the infinite is the affirmative, and it is only the finite which is absorbed.⁸

*

Charles Taylor, in his book *Hegel*⁹, considers Hegel's denying of evolution, as Taylor sees him as doing, a "disaster". That is far too easy. I consider this misreading itself a disaster from where Taylor would stand, regrettably. It derives, I suspect, from a genuine inability to conceive Hegel's absolute idealism as a serious project, even or especially for Hegel. Or, to be more specific, Taylor has failed to note, or to keep in mind at least, Hegel's exact specification of the place of Nature within his thought. Add to this that Hegel finds a certain incoherence precisely in evolution as this theory, or family of theories, is usually conceived and propounded. Natural scientists are in these our own days perhaps more used to, and hence more hard-boiled in relation to, such charges, as it were prepared to "live with" these inconsistencies, as, we have noted above, after all, in his own fashion, was Hegel. His is, though, a superior fashion, inasmuch as taking explicit account *of* while being ready to account *for* such inconsistency within the inconsistency. Such superiority, of philosophy above the particular or finite sciences, is not forbidden to scientists as human beings, of course. It is only that their professional, once much lauded, "method" is barred from accounting for it. They thus write books, when attempting to popularise their calling, with such titles as *Our Mathematical Universe*¹⁰, without thought of accounting for *how* the universe could possibly be mathematical, given that it could not possibly be presented as such while simultaneously transcending all the objections of any conceivable metaphysics.

To give credibility to our claim that Taylor has not properly engaged with Hegel's text in sufficient qualitative amplitude we have now, to the best of our ability, to do just that. This is not of course a matter of who can call

⁸ *Enc.* 95. Cp. C.S. Figueiredo, "The Logic of Incarnation: Hegel's Use of the *Philebus* in the Shorter Logic and in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*", in *Philosophy Study*, October 2016, Vol. 6, No. 10, pp. 569-577.

⁹ Cambridge University Press, 1975.

¹⁰ Title of a recent best-selling book by the Swedish physicist (he does not show much respect for or acquaintance with philosophy) Tegmark.

quantitatively upon the most texts. We must consider, rather, “text” in the singular. This, in fact, is the idea which the theological or sub-theological notion of the absolute inspiration or truth of canonical Scripture, setting aside separated or abstracted parts, reaches after having absorbed or “sublated” while with this elevation simultaneously “cancelling”¹¹ the jots and tittles more in accordance with the ancient belief in the magical quality of writing as such. This is thus typically incised by an invisible hand upon stone tablets or, in judgment, upon the wall of a banqueting hall, with here maybe just a hand visible, all this before it was shown, or suggested, in a figure, again, that *all* writing is done in sand¹², is only to be “read” by the apprehending spirit in the moment, which need not be momentary, of the apprehension, bypassing the deadening “letter”.¹³ But only spirit, here too, knows the things of spirit, the mind being “its own place”.

*

Hegel writes, in introducing his “Philosophy of Nature”, middle section of the *Encyclopaedia* (we have also to ask why there is thus a middle section and just this one, which Gentile, for example, considered an inconsistency in Hegel’s system), concerning evolutionary theory, as this may apply before or after Darwin, as follows (I give the Introduction to the shorter, 1816 version of “The Philosophy of Nature”, i.e. to this middle section, again, of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* as of that date):

192. Nature has presented itself in the form of otherness.

Since in nature the idea is as the negative of itself or is external to itself nature is not merely external in relation to this idea, but the externality constitutes the determination in which nature as nature exists.

193. In this externality the determinations of the concept have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation in regard to each other. The concept therefore exists as an inward entity. Hence nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only necessity and contingency.

¹¹ Cf. Hegel’s account of the function(s) of *Aufhebung* (e.g. at *Enc.* 96, *Zus.*).

¹² Cf. *Gospel of John* 8, 1-11. According to Aquinas the “new law”, as final form of the fourth type of four types of law (eternal law, natural law, human law, divine law), is not written at all, but “poured into the heart” (*Summa theol.* Ia-IIae, “Treatise on Law”, prefacing that on grace as immediate complement).

¹³ I offer these remarks in the service of a possible philosophy of reading. Wittgenstein offers a more thorough and profound discourse on this theme of reading (and hence writing), of what reading is and is not, among the thoughts of his that are collected in the volume entitled *Philosophical Investigations*.

Here is summed up all that Taylor disregards. Nature has presented itself as *the idea* in the form of otherness, not merely otherness to God or the Idea but otherness within itself of part to part, as rule (*partes extra partes*: this notion is not new with Hegel but merely Scholasticism freshly expressed). Logic and the philosophy of mind are needed to first see it, nature, as whole, as inclusive of its relation, in our other-positing conception of it, to just these disciplines, the spatio-temporal void (!?) constituting the parts in their mutual externality here remaining analogous to the non-conceptual “void”, to the *picture*, as Hegel finds it, still separating the atoms in physics as this has later developed when viewed now as a “real” part or foundation, rather, of a specifically and hence abstractedly empirical nature set in oppositional contrast to nature as seen and felt on the basis of particular observations of, for example, readings on instruments of extended rather than mediated perception. By contrast the ancient philosophers, and philosophy itself on Hegel’s account, rather sets aside this immediacy by a turn inwards expressive of thought as identified in post-Cartesian times with self-consciousness, in a personal subjectivity demanding the conceptual universalisation or “God’s eye view” which is, though thus imaged, philosophy as, in aim, final *sophia*. Many scientists of this or that, especially the more “popular”, for example Konrad Lorenz, quite fail to respect this final and hence omni-constitutive dimension.¹⁴

This simply means that here, as nature, “the idea is the negative of itself”. This is indeed the identificatory role of nature as thought absolutely, is what makes it, in fact, an othered “creation”, one such, however, that conceived *apart* from the Idea, from Mind, it is nothing. Quantum physics can be seen, is seen by many of its theorists, as, while itself entailed by empirical research, yet itself entailing recovery of the more monistic tradition and outlook become “inlook”. Experience itself here becomes self-conscious in the requisite *Socratic* sense. Nature now, as not merely or, it would follow, inexplicably *something* external to the idea (this would reduce money spent on many grandiose projects to sheer wastage; “What went ye out for to see?”) but, rather, externality itself through and through, demanding philosophic reintegration, embodiment until then of a “groaning and travailing” counter-pole to true being or the Idea, though internalised as such a “pole” to immediate fantasy and picture, as we find these, if they be taken “to the letter”, in St. Paul’s apocalyptic. This externalism is in fact the fault of the negative metaphysics implied in empirical field-work, i.e. in its concept, along here with the assessments of such field-work yet remaining within

¹⁴ Cf. the frequent, mostly ironical references to Kant, but none of any kind to Hegel, in Lorenz’s *Die Rückseite des Spiegels* (Verlag Piper, Munich 1973), nonetheless dedicated, interestingly, to “my friends in Königsberg”.

“the concept” just in this outsideness as pseudo-humbly according the final honour to it, to its own outsideness, alone. The fault is one of literalness, therefore. The badge of this, in regard to fieldwork’s abstracted object, is precisely “the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation from each other” regularly attributed to the most particular particle, if such can or, rather, could indeed be found. By contrast thought’s concept, *der Begriff*, “is an inward entity”. With the term “inward”, to repeat, an idealism is signalled, but as absolute, transcending the subject-object divide. As such it is freedom, while as such nature is unfree, “only necessity and contingency”.

... the being of nature does not correspond to its concept; its existing actuality therefore has no truth; its abstract essence is the negative, as the ancients conceived of matter in general as the *non-ens*. But because, even in this element, nature is a representation of the Idea, one may very well admire in it the wisdom of God. If, however, as Vanini said, a stalk of straw suffices to demonstrate God’s being then every representation of the spirit, the slightest fancy of the mind, the play of its most capricious whim, every word, offers a ground for the knowledge of God’s being that is superior to any single object of nature. In nature, not only is the play of forms unbound and unchecked in contingency, but each figure for itself lacks the concept of itself.¹⁵

Hence the being of nature as a whole indeed “does not correspond to its concept”. This, I suggest, is what St. Paul indicates when he speaks, in apocalyptic mode again, of nature as groaning and travailing, *awaiting* redemption. Now how does this relate to not merely admitting but insisting, rather, as does Taylor, on a hold of Darwinian evolutionary theory over free philosophical speculation? Well, firstly:

The highest level to which nature drives its existence is life, but as only a natural idea this is at the mercy of the unreason of externality, and individual vitality is in each moment of its existence entangled with an individuality which is other to it, whereas in every expression of the spirit is contained the moment of free, universal self-relation.¹⁶

Hence we have the possibility of the question, “Why am I alive?” This possibility is not evidently more than grammatical, however, just as can be said of the same possibility as G.E. Moore used to support his claim to show a “naturalistic fallacy” in any definition of “good”, which he called a “non-natural” quality, as it doubtless is, whether or not dialectically evanescent, just as “I”, as naming self-consciousness, as “universal of universals”, but

¹⁵ *Enc.* 193 (1816 version). Cp. §248 in the later expanded revision, c. 1830.

¹⁶ *Enc.*, *eodem loco*.

also myself, whoever I may be, is (or am?) non-natural, Hegel in effect claims. Life here, in this question, is contrasted against spirit, even though we often speak of the “life of the spirit”, simply because, however, as Scholastic thought but also Scriptural representation acknowledges, *viventibus esse est vivere*. The adage itself implies a higher state of being than life, as does Hegel’s bald declaration, in full accord with the witness of piety, that “death is the entry into spirit”.

It’s not ‘death’ that will come in search of me, it’s God. Death isn’t some phantom, some horrible spectre, as it is represented in pictures. It is said in the catechism that ‘death is the separation of the soul from the body’ and that is all it is.¹⁷

“All” here, one might think, is anyhow quite a lot, but neither for the saint nor for Hegel is soul or self anything less than the whole, as if after some fragmentation of “the body”. The latter, rather, is conceived as abstract *Vorstellung*, along with matter as such, identical rather with form, Hegel finds¹⁸. Hegel thus identifies here externality with unreason, as not belonging to the concept, the precise conceptual point where he excludes our hypothesis of biological evolution as, it is implied, itself no more than *Vorstellung*, representation. True evolution as it occurs within thought, or may be thus represented at least in the forms of language available to us, cancels its point of departure, as opposed to leaving it to be found lying fossilised in some rocks. More than this, or just *by* this, the whole posit of the temporal is miasmal. The philosophy of history, that is, be history “natural” or societal, excludes any possibility of philosophy itself being subject to it, as if it were some *object* within history; rather, it excludes recognition of any history as on a level with itself. Thus, by contrast, the *history of philosophy*, upon which, historically(!), Hegel lectured, is itself an exercise of philosophy but as viewing it from a standpoint, that of narrative, which is itself false or miasmatic self-representation, *Vorstellung*. This is what entails Hegel’s vision of the past and its events as “impenetrable” as such, i.e. as conceptually past in any way other than the present moment when first (or “later”) isolated for consideration. Such a history must thus include an account, an evaluation of or comparison with, this standpoint. That is, the history of philosophy cannot be pursued within philosophy in abstraction from the philosophy of history. It must, that is, allow for, take account, rather, of temporal unreality in general as at least a

¹⁷ St. Thérèse Martin OCD of Lisieux, 1873-1897, reprinted in *Last Conversations*, Institute of Carmelite Studies, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1977.

¹⁸ Cf. *Enc.* 127-128.

logically viable option. All turns, therefore, upon whether there is a “within philosophy” that could form part of a larger containing concept, i.e. one capable of containing without destroying it. This is impossible if in this field to contain just is to destroy or “cancel” (Hegel’s word, along with “absorption” etc., which he explains as compatible with such cancelling when explaining *Aufhebung*), as one sees in the notions of some theologians down the ages.

This mixture, which when organised we call interpretation, is strictly analogous to Hegel’s attempt here to give out, to *think* even, a philosophy of nature. Thus all these compartmental disciplines, as they are called, come down, in the last resort, as, paradigmatically, does logic itself (not distinguishable from the science thereof), to what Aristotle had characterised as thought which *qua* thought thinks only itself. It is, that is to say, the act of itself which act is. *Actus, agere*: hence we have the proverbial injunction, *age quod agis*. Do what you are doing, which in a temporal context might become “What you are doing do quickly”, if you must, as it might be (and was). The holding fast to these trans-temporal truths, precisely within time, not falling back when the going gets tough, is itself an instance of faith as a virtue, here as covering consistency in absolute or genuinely philosophical or trans-subjective idealism, just as the Christian faith is in or of something experienced by men in history, but then held to as a transcendence of history, such as Christ’s resurrection, whereby he himself shall have said (in a later report by a disciple) “I *am* the resurrection and the life”.¹⁹ Concerning such

¹⁹ We might compare, as a locution, the one-time mother of Jesus reportedly, as now eternal, declaring from this eternity, although in a vision (1854, to St. Bernadette of Lourdes), “I *am* the Immaculate Conception” (stress added), as distinct from just saying that she was at some past time immaculately conceived (there is of course more than mere coincidence between these two “uses” of *concupere*, i.e. there is *sense* in it). For Hegel the events of the “darkness of the past” are dark indeed, to the point of his denying finite events. There is just one Act, unending, and that is the Idea containing all as itself the whole in one “system”. *Deus meus et omnia*. Otherwise no *Deus*. Hence, in Christian belief, “If I go not away the Spirit will not come unto you”. The reason, transparently, is that the speaker himself, viewed as eternal, *is* one with the spirit, with Spirit, even though or if in Trinitarian thought they are personally distinct, just as, concerning “the Father”, “I and my father are one”. “He that has seen me has seen the Father”. Recall, “the Word was with God and the Word was God”. The speaker need not, must not, be taken as claiming to be just the Father in disguise, any more than the predicate *is* the subject with which it is identified just in its difference, a “function” of it according to some. All this, in any case, is naturally relatable to the insistence of ascetic writers or guides (surely paralleled beyond the Christian tradition, itself in a sense here conforming in difference to the universal view it claims to fulfil) on a need to pass in thought or

interpretation, however, we have to discern when it is development (e.g. of doctrine) and when it is betrayal. *Translatio* or *traditio* (betrayal) remain the options, which does not exclude betrayal also by more or less deliberate inaction, in, for example, what Hegel calls “certainty against the spirit”²⁰.

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So nature “is justly determined as the decline of the idea from itself”, writes Hegel²¹, as having “the determination of the inappropriateness of itself with itself” as an essential moment of the notion of infinitude. This aspect culminates, if analogously, in God’s Word being “made sin for us” (it is in this sense, of the positivity for infinity of inclusion of the negative within itself, that Hegel states that there is, meaning that there must be, “evil in God”). Is this “decline of the Idea from itself” a specifically Christian philosophy of nature? I would answer both yes and no, the claim being that the Christian determination is the right and true solution, to the puzzle of a created nature, as simply the rational one, gradually revealing itself in the history of philosophy as philosophy’s self-reflection. In harmony with this the pivotal role of Plato’s *Parmenides* also for Trinitarian thought (in an historical development) is today being increasingly emphasised, however

contemplative prayer from focus upon the humanly temporal life of Christ, or Mary, to unbending identification with the risen Christ of Trinitarian actuality in eternity in and with an “immaculate conception”, extendable in Christian life to Christ’s body the Church, *qua* his body but also his bride, in iconography, and here to the one bringing him forth first on earth. To be in heaven, after all, one *must* be an immaculate conception eventually, this end then reflecting back upon the beginning. “Though your *sins* be as scarlet they shall be whiter than snow”; much more, then, if without sin or “full of grace” or “highly favoured” indeed. This relates also, in mutual enlightenment, to the recent re-emphasis, from Rome, upon the *Genesis* identification of the divine image with the duality in opposition of the human sexes as what constitutes or most directly expresses (i.e. more immediately than man’s “having a soul”) what is meant by man’s creation “in the divine image” (Pope John Paul II and the then Cardinal Ratzinger in a development anticipated a half-century previously by the Protestant theologian Karl Barth). The Trinitarian implication is not to be missed. Cf. Fergus Kerr OP, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, Oxford 2007; also Georges Cottier OP, “Sur un texte majeur de saint Thomas (IV *contra Gentiles*, c. 11)”, in *Indubitante ad veritatem* (ed. Jürgen Vijgen), DAMON Budel, Rolduc, Netherlands, 2003, pp. 80-93.

²⁰ Cf. Jordan Wood and Justin Coyle, “Must Catholics Hate Hegel?” Blog Posts, June 8, 2018, <http://churchlife.nd.edu/2018/06/08/must-Catholics-hate-hegel/>

²¹ This “determination” may well be taken as Hegel’s philosophical spiritualisation of St. Paul’s “religious” representation of nature as “groaning and travailing” while “awaiting” parousial or final revelation.

we would evaluate this²². Either way a or the virtue of faith is required, as it is for the taking of Plato, say, “seriously”, a kind of “hanging on” in difficult moments, as Peter Geach once put it²³. This is what Taylor’s and to some extent Findlay’s accounts seem to lack, falling back into merely representative thinking at the crucial moment which is revelation, as Hegel presents it, not renouncing the world in that *athanatizein* that Aristotle had once recommended, a clear instantiating analogy with Christian baptism as a descent into death, renouncing world and flesh both (and Devil). The startling words of Christ seem suddenly apposite: “Whoever does not hate his life in this world cannot be my disciple”, words Aristotle might have understood, perhaps eternally does so, just as did the formally atheist McTaggart, flatly declaring, strong-mindedly concluding, that life and the world are “misperception”. “In the Cross is strength of mind”²⁴.

²² Cf. Ryan Haecker, “Traces of the Trinity in Plato’s *Parmenides*: Alan Badiou, Theological Mathematics and Trinitarian Ontology”, being published; John Milbank, “The Return of Mediation”, in *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, Creston Davis and Catherine Pickstock; Brazos Press, Grand Rapids MI (USA), 2010. Cf. also C.S. Figueiredo, *op. cit.*, note 6 (above).

²³ See Peter Geach, *The Virtues*, Cambridge University Press, 1977. Geach upheld, indeed develops, Thomist tradition in treating of “the theological virtues” in one format with the three cardinal virtues, i.e. in one unified study of the habits, the habit, of virtue, *virtus*, power even, as what men, human beings, need to be fulfilled or happy.

²⁴ Thomas of Kempsey, *The Imitation of Christ*, chapter on “The Royal Road of the Holy Cross”. When we say it is by faith that these things are grasped, then, this is totally misunderstood, and hence despised, by those thinking it means accepting something beyond reason and evidence. I thus cite McTaggart’s writing as exercising, “in exercise” indeed, the virtue of faith which, although called Christian, is not less of a genuine or general virtue, albeit “theological”, for that. That is, McTaggart hung on to what he had once reasoned towards, ignoring mundane immediacy, as in fact all “scientists” have to do, in exercise of the virtue of faith as here expounded, its victory one of “overcoming the world”. Hence “the scientific attitude” belongs with a Christian civilisation, such as Plato and Socrates reached after, with *angustia*, Aquinas concludes. This claim implies nothing more than the traditional Christian theological distinction between *fides implicita* and *fides explicita*, while the perspective of absolute idealism might give motive for reversing one’s priority as regards these two, or at least insisting that the explicit gets all its worth from the implicit (hermeneutic circle). *Operatio sequitur esse* as Aquinas routinely expresses this. Recall here Hegel’s identification of *esse*, the “true being”, with the Idea, with that which it is not or, if it is, then itself is not (being is not true being!).

This “decline of the idea from itself”, it is important to understand, is not meant as expressing a weakness in the idea, like, say, old age. It is the strength of the idea, precisely as absolute or infinite, that demands this, i.e. it is the same moment of ideal process as that which Hegel denominates as its going “forth freely as nature” (*Enc.* 244). Just this freedom is infinity’s utmost necessity. For Nature just is “the percipient idea”, this being what explains its necessities as investigated by science. Viewed *as* and yet *by* “the method” of Logic, however, the “systematic totality” (*Enc.* 243), as of “parts outside parts”, the “decline”, is at the same time, as we find figured in art (as first form of Absolute Spirit, such as natural science is not), such that this “systematic totality” is “only one idea, of which the several elements *are each implicitly the idea*, whilst they equally by the dialectic of the notion produce the simple independence of the idea” (stress added). Each, that is, as moment of the whole, *is* the whole. Thus it is precisely the outsideness of the parts, in the idea’s “decline from itself”, that enables the identity of any finite element, in its idea, with the only one idea in its “simple independence”. It is upon this declination of the idea that art, most characteristically as practised by Hegel’s contemporaries, Wordsworth and Beethoven, goes to work, the latter confidently declaring, surely independently of Hegel, that “music is a greater revelation than the whole of religion and philosophy”. It is, so to say, the idea “in exercise”. Thus McTaggart declares, willy nilly propositionally, that eternally, or in true reality, there are no propositions, but a love without (other) object, rather, such as one may well square with the Christian declaration, in the mode of religious representation, that eternal life is “to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent”. For Hegel this difference between representation and truth is that between the earthly and the risen Christ which or who, in a sense, this latter, Christ was and is “all the time”. To which one might venture to add, in the light of the above, that the crucifixion and all such pains viewed as within time are the necessary “decline from itself”, being yet or just therefore “its”, the Idea’s, great and unique achievement, of the Idea, viz. a decline “from itself” within itself in the most positive negativity, therefore. One can relate this to the saying, “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy”, i.e. not taken away necessarily or “immediately” but transformed into its own opposite, this compound identity being the reality, as the bread and margarine with the cake form one meal, one refreshment.

That is, if it is the Idea that is the union of all opposites then it is the Idea (and not being) that is Being or “the true Being” (the German has the substantive capital in any case, so the dilemma about when to use it, i.e. in philosophy, is in a sense parochially English). Questions even as to God’s existence in some sense become relegated to representations. Voltaire most

likely did not realise his own meaning when he said that God was necessary, whether as object or invented, i.e. indifferently. God *is* necessity, as faith witnesses, and necessity revealed as friendliness, a holding together.

Analogous to this question, if one probes, is the question of my existence, of me who am now thinking and “typing”, I mean. How am just I here, unless I have an unsuspected necessity, as implied in the saying (to Israel first): “I have loved you with an everlasting love”? I see the shadow of the shape of my head against a wall and just cannot believe it, and yet I must. But that I thus exist means that I don’t exist. I am necessary, rather, and the whole world with me. This is what makes one out of many: “a body hast thou prepared for me”. This utmost realisation of the individual is the ruin of individualism, the birth of love even. The centre is everywhere. If they, the many, are the same then we know neither what we are nor what we shall be, in contrast to the Scriptural Johannine text, which begins from immediate knowledge of here and now, such as we have left behind here and now, in order to proceed to the eternal reality. Once there, though, we can ask the question again, put it differently. What is, who am, I? Universal of universals, answers Hegel, but as addressing just anybody asking him.

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To emphasise, however, his polemic against all deificatory idealisation of nature in the raw, so to say, we might evaluate the ideas and their vivid incarnation in Wordsworth or Beethoven (all three were born in 1770). Hegel, anyhow, now says:

A similar misunderstanding is to regard human works of art as inferior to natural things, on the grounds that works of art must take their material from outside, and that they are not alive. It is as if the spiritual form did not contain a higher level of life, and were not more worthy of the spirit than the natural form, and as if in all ethical things what can be called matter did not belong solely to the spirit.²⁵

Nature, again, is not a form of Absolute Spirit, as is Philosophy (inclusive of philosophy of nature), but rather an intermediate part of the system of philosophy as a whole, flanked by The Science of Logic (with which the actual system of logic is not to be confused) and the Philosophy of Spirit. That is, there is no nature outside the thought of nature. Yet the thought of nature, as beginning to organise, already partakes of art, as nature, in itself,

²⁵. On this issue, cf. G. Rinaldi, *The Philosophy of Art*, Whitelock Publications, Oxford 2020.

does not. This is expressed by saying that the first pair were placed in a garden, making and maintaining which is an art on spirit's part in direct contrast with the outlying nature or wildness into which the first pair were expelled, the garden being in future guarded against them. They had not paid their rent. Hegel sums up, while qualifying his general position on Nature, our subject here:

Nature remains, despite all the contingency of its existence, obedient to eternal laws, but surely this is also true of the realm of self-consciousness, a fact which can already be seen in the belief that providence governs human affairs. Or are the determinations of this providence in the field of human affairs only contingent and irrational? But if the contingency of spirit, the free will, leads to evil, is this not still infinitely higher than the regular behaviour of the stars or the innocence of the plants.²⁶

Hegel continues:

Nature is to be viewed as a system of stages, in which one stage necessarily arises from the other and is the truth closest to the other from which it results, though not in such a way that the one would naturally generate the other, but rather in the inner idea which constitutes the ground of nature.

This, denying temporal evolution though not what might be or try to be represented as temporal, directly mirrors the unfolding of logic. Yet here we have what Taylor and Findlay can do nothing with or choose, finally, to ignore, Findlay adding a somewhat vacuous remark to the effect that evolution, say, respectable as it may be, is not true "for philosophy", as if inviting today's reader to say "So much for philosophy then!"

Yet the meaning, the question, is indeed one of how nature is to be viewed *in* the system which is philosophy, meaning quite definitely by the latter the one and abiding system of truths, which is to say truth as one, however. So it is the same as saying how nature is to be viewed period, which one does not gather from Findlay's account so very clearly, since he does not stick to it. Truths, then, do not generate one another in parallel with the generation of animals, something belonging entirely to *Vorstellung*, representation, as much for Hegel as for Plato. In ignoring this Hegel thinks, says, that Kant was just not a philosopher but more like, as one could interpret, one of those journeymen among the theologians, reporting and sticking to what others have said or thought (in this case the human race in general), and so not in fact theologians. He dubs him more of a phenomenologist.

²⁶ Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, 1816, §193.

Our natural perceptions, that is, being in fact misperceptions, far from being sacrosanct first principles, the mistake of empiricism as dismissed at the beginning of *The Phenomenology of Mind*, merely supply the occasion for the dismissive or ungrateful, as he calls it, action of or which is, rather, thought.

It has been an awkward conception in older and also more recent philosophy of nature to see the progression and the transition of one natural form and sphere into another as an external, actual production which, however, in order to be made clearer, is relegated to the darkness of the past. Precisely this externality is characteristic of nature: differences are allowed to fall apart and to appear as existences indifferent to each other; and the dialectical concept, which leads the stages further, is the interior which emerges only in the spirit. Certainly the previously favoured teleological view provided the basis for the relation to the concept, and, in the same way, the relation to the spirit, but it focused only on external purposiveness (cf. §151) and viewed the spirit as if it were entangled in finite and natural purposes. Due to the vapidity of such finite purposes, purposes for which natural things were shown to be useful, the teleological view has been discredited for exhibiting the wisdom of God. The view of the usefulness of natural things has the implicit truth that these things are not in and for themselves an absolute goal; nevertheless, it is unable to determine whether such things are defective or inadequate. For this determination it is necessary to posit that the immanent moment of its idea, which brings about its transiency and transmission into another existence, produces at the same time a transformation into a higher concept.²⁷

This last, in fact, is Teilhard de Chardin's difference, which Hegel echoes or anticipates, from the current secular orthodoxy on evolution, which does not connect fitness to survive with any higher value. Still, "Nature is itself a living whole", Hegel writes. *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*. As for evolution, of course there is development, as the very form of time itself, but, like time itself, it is a picture, an image of infinity (as endlessness) taken from development, growth, of this or that within natural life and then applied to nature as a whole. The fittest would seem to be just those who do survive, so saying that it is they who survive seems like a kind of logical mistake, Nature being not after all different in kind from logic, something both Marx and McTaggart seem to imply. It is part of the picture, which thought turned aside from logic freely to draw, thus eliciting finally Absolute Spirit, though really this is or was (in our investigation) its own principle eternally. So not so much simple misperception, as McTaggart urges, but a stage in spirit's development of self-consciousness. I project nature, my other, in order to

²⁷ *Ibid.* §194.

absorb it again, the same applying *a fortiori* to my fellow human beings. Maturity is the taking of them to self, mutually and all round, “I in them and they in me”. “Greater things than I have done shall you do, because I will be in you”.²⁸

²⁸ This is the answer to the objections mounted by Fr. Daniel Jamros recently against a Christian Hegelianism.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND ASCETIC THEOLOGY: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

I focus here upon Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the Third Part. The content of this text recalls to me most immediately the work of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)²⁹, a Carmelite friar and theologian trained in scholastic Aristotelian philosophy, particularly his *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which aims to set forth the basic principles of contemplative prayer and the corresponding arrangement of life for those he terms "beginners". What distinguishes the latter, however, is that it can still seem a specifically "practical" guide, while in Hegel a basic principle, as both conclusion and premise (the hermeneutical circle again), is that contemplation (*theoria*) and praxis are ultimately the same in their difference. Compare the expression "doing the truth". The religious and hence practical equivalent of this might be the idea of doing all "in the name of the Lord Jesus", or that "whether we live or die we are the Lord's" or that we should use the world "as though we used it not", etc. Thus, similarly, Plato envisages a category of things that "both are and are not". These examples are already views of the world, of reality, as transcending monothematic conceptions. They are not instances of some supposed "self-conflicting reason", are not the ancient scepticism.

What distinguishes Hegel's work especially is the confident assurance with which he sets forth his "system", successively in *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), *the Science of Logic* (1812-1816) and *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817, 1827, 1830). If we accept his own account of *The Phenomenology of Mind* as being the first part of his system then *The Philosophy of Law* (1820) may be taken as a kind of appendix to it as well as to the *Encyclopaedia* (as first set forth prior to 1820, even though *The Philosophy of Law* is mentioned in the later edition), while the

²⁹ There is no evidence for Hegel's being acquainted with John of the Cross's writings, unless one count his rather unexpected, even odd reference to "Spanish poetry" (John was a fine poet, his treatises on ascetic theology taking the form of commentary on certain of his poems) in *Encyclopaedia* I.

addresses and reviews of an earlier date or the contributions to the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftlicher Kritik* published in the year of his death are incidental. These are his own publications. In addition we have extensive versions of his lectures, on religion, just mentioned, on history, aesthetics and other subjects, later published as mediated and edited principally from the notes taken down by his student audience. Such are these lectures here on the philosophy of religion, of which the third of three parts is devoted to Christian religion, the first to religion as such. Important too are the posthumous *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*.³⁰

Hegel's approach here, in *LPR*, is Trinitarian. So after an introductory section he deals successively with the three "kingdoms", as he calls them, of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit. For the most part he eschews the term "the Holy Spirit". This abstinence can be variously taken. One quite definite implication of it, however, is his universalisation of Trinitarianism, referable to as interpreting the ripping of the Temple veil at Jerusalem, as narrated and/or posited in Matthew's Gospel as marking the moment of Christ's death, but just as much to the Johannine Christ's emphasis on (the) Spirit as "blowing where it will" or on man's future worshipping "in spirit and in truth", i.e. neither here nor there. The Spirit, that is, is ever at work, always and everywhere, as is, then, holiness, among gentile or Jew, or in nature as in the minds of individual men and women, since constitutive of a sustaining Mind itself, the Aristotelian *nous*, this being the classical Christian difference, as Hegel clearly saw while yet still living on the threshold only of our now galloping "globalisation", quite obviously stemming from Christian Europe³¹ and its offshoots, great and small, open

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of these in close relation to the present enquiry see my *Thought and Incarnation in Hegel*, CSP Newcastle 2020, Chapter Four, pp. 259-327.

³¹ I would repudiate the epithet "post-Christian" as a misunderstanding of Christianity. It is rather a new phase, the seventh or eighth, of the Church's development, indifferently positive or negative, as chronicled, again, in Christopher Dawson's historical works. The present such age might then be taken as inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-4), the three annual sessions of which, initiated by Pope John XXIII, were held in Rome. It was billed as to be unique; there were to be no definitions, for example, yet its influence upon theology, immediately or just to begin with, has been enormous. Thus viewed the time is hardly "post-Christian". Rather, the localisation of Pentecostal life in Europe specifically is past, whether or not an actual place in Europe, Rome, still inhabitable or not, remain, like the Hebrew scriptures, though their authors, like St. Peter or Christ himself, have passed over into memory or, in the latter case, sacramental presence, "until the end of the world", i.e. outside of eternity, which is "with you always", as prayer, or even philosophy, can but testify. Similarly *nous* remains Aristotelian but now properly universalised,

or hidden but never superseded, abusive names notwithstanding, around the world. All theological distinction of nature and grace is subsequent to and, for Hegel as for Duns Scotus and others, subsequent even *upon* this difference that would abolish difference. The affixing of "holy" becomes thus in a sense otiose, this in the spirit of words spoken to St. Peter in a dream after Christ's return to the heaven of the Father, viz. "What God has cleansed call not thou common", That is to say, just the common, bread, flesh, mankind, is what is holy, if anything is beside the "Lord of hosts", *Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, as in a sense *omnia*, in a dialectical sublation of both concepts, viz. of nature as of grace, or, differently, nature is thus reborn, thus cancelling, again, as overflowing or submerging, the immediacy of the first or natural birth. Note the parallel with baptism. Note also, however, that a possible opening to atheism or trans-theism (apophatic theology)³² necessarily has part in this. Insofar as "the gods of the heathen are nought", this is to say, the Christian God, who is and was also the God of Israel, is like no other god. From this point of view we may recall the judgment of Hilaire Belloc, in his book *Heretics*, that Islam, like, he thought, Protestantism, is a specifically Christian heresy. It is a small step from here to say that God is not god or, identically, that each and everything is God, is a moment of the Idea as Hegel will say. He posits this *as the polar opposite* to or converse of a nonsensical pantheism, the relation being analogous to that between infinite and finite referred to above. Regarding, then, any particular concept or individual, one may well say: "This also is thou, neither is this thou", that inevitable terminus of the philosophy of which Hegel is principal spokesman. Whether a Hitler or a Stalin in the days of their evil-doing would have felt flattered or insulted by this assimilation we need not enquire, only noting that this uncertainty, of theirs or ours indifferently, gives us one more example of that union of opposites that Hegel's thought principally uncovers, while showing it to be what is and remains concealed.

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there being in truth neither Greek nor barbarian, neither male nor female, to limit it. Such, too, was both the function and fate of ancient Israel as "chosen". "In thy seed shall *all* the nations of the earth be blessed" (stress added), *quam olim Abrahæ ...* (Mozart's exultant music here suggests, I here suggest, no less forcibly than his *Requiem's* setting of the *Dies Irae*, that Milos Forman's grasp of Mozart the man, as explicitly without faith, was a "Formanian" limitation. This death-bed *requiem* was not, as was said of another composer's, his "greatest opera").

³² Not to be confused with the unreflecting "free thought" of the street, more free than thinking.