

Thought and Incarnation in Hegel

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PREFACE

Hans Küng, writing on God and incarnation in Hegel, speaks of “the very notion that God incarnates in Jesus Christ”. Where would such a notion come from, though? *What is it?* A product of love, Küng urges, thereby siding with McTaggart as seemingly against Hegel in finding a supreme place for love in the Notion, rather than for knowing. The truth, rather, one feels bound to affirm, is that God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ *is* the notion that he incarnates, inasmuch as necessarily *trans*-historical, notional in a word. One thinks, therefore, that this Word incarnate, and not merely the fact of it, *is* the notion or Concept, “first”, Hegel variously says, reaching fulness *conceptually* as or when immediately sensuous and sensible. He has his cake and eats it. For there is not a general predicate or essence of incarnation which then instantiates in one chosen being or perhaps more, by adoption as it was once put, by participation or by other means¹. God, the infinite being, could not be so complicated, so complex, since these are limitations. This *thought* of incarnation, Hegel comments, “is religion elevated to the level of conceptual consciousness”. Jesus Christ, that is, *is* God’s word, his *verbum interius*. “The Word was with God and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. This was the true Word ...” This, I take it, from the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, is the sense of an otherwise oddly phrased exclamation by one of the twelfth century Victorines, viz. *Jesus Christus, solutio omnium quaestionum*. It also corresponds to Aristotle’s refusal to distinguish, in the sense of spiritually or mentally separating, God, *ho theos*, from God’s *thought* of himself and only of himself. This is the background to Hegel’s statement, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, that God *is* revelation and is his revelation of himself indifferently, simply because, in the first place perhaps, he could not be anything else or less. It is also first foundation of and final conclusion to the system of Absolute Idealism as set forth and/or worked out in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, either version. The tie-up with Duns Scotus is patent, though not in any exclusive sense, as sensitive interpretation of Thomas

¹ Hegel’s making this point is well brought out and emphasised in a short piece by Chrysantho Sholl 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).

Aquinas, or Augustine, would show.² A *felix culpa*, namely, is no merely abstract *culpa* or fault, but is bound to finitude itself, such as the infinite is bound to allow as what highlights its own specific character. Hegel's dialectic of good and evil grows naturally out of this whole complex background, inasmuch as by the same movement of thought it takes it to itself.

To this thought of "incarnation" belongs, therefore, according to Hegel, all that follows, not as derived from but as fulfilling and itself explicating the religious systems preceding or accompanying it, along with any artistic products thus elicited from or presaging it. This becomes, namely, the explication of self-consciousness to itself:

The readiest instance of Being-for-Self is found in the 'I'. We know ourselves as existents, distinguished in the first place from other existents, and with certain relations thereto. But we also come to know the expansion of existence (in these relations) reduced, as it were, to a point in the simple form of being-for-self. When we say 'I' we express the reference- to-self which is infinite, and at the same time negative. (*Enc.* 96, *Zus.*)

The connection between the two ideas, so to say theological and philosophical, lies in the word "infinite" as used here. Its sense, as applied to self-consciousness, expresses the profoundest truth of Hegel's logic. Thus he adds here that just this is what distinguishes man, just or inasmuch as it distinguishes self, "from nature altogether, by knowing himself as 'I'"; that, namely, is what he is. For in this I alone is to be found the apprehension of Nature as one whole in what is an identity of knower and known, this in turn, necessarily, entailing the identity of each self-consciousness with each and with all. This has the profoundest consequences for our apprehension

² I refer here to Scotus' doctrine that incarnation is/was intrinsically necessary to God, i.e. it belongs to his "idea", irrespective of any *culpa, felix* or not, on the part of man. It is part, though, of the same line of thought, of analysis, to find the fault, *culpa*, ultimately in finitude itself (cf. Hegel, *Enc.* 24, *Zus.* Part 3, comprising an interpretation of the *Genesis* account of the "fall" of man). Yet this is to say simultaneously that it is necessary to man, implicit, that is, to the phenomenology of finite mind, of mind in nature. This in turn prompts one to look for echoes or variants or anticipations of the doctrine in other religions generally (Krishna, Al Hallaj) as well as for further development of this in the Christian proclamation and/or theology itself, such as Hegel found in Eckhart's "If I were not, God would not be", *just as* if he were not then I, or Eckhart, would not be. Pauline or Johannine thought in the earliest Christian writings themselves encourage such a development, in which Hegel's own philosophy can then be seen as participant. This is the supplement, part of it at least, of which Marxist or related interpretations of Hegel stands in need, though the result may well be less adaptable to ephemeral aims or programmes.

of incarnation as necessarily entailing the “that they may be one in us” of Scripture (the “high priestly prayer” of Christ, where the “us” refers to the Father and Son in their unity).

It is therefore typical of the child, of man in his prime or initial and foundational situation, to wonder how it can be that he finds himself one amongst the objective crowd of people surrounding him, or surrounding him and his mother maybe, or how, indeed, he can find himself at all. In Newman this leads on to the statement that he, Newman, or the subject, “knew” as a child or even knows now as “reality” no other being but two, himself and God, say self and God, two horns of a dilemma in Hegel which thus become there irresistibly identified in an “absolute idealism”, where God is the Idea, namely, closer to self than self, *intimior me mihi* as Augustine had seen it and/or distilled it from innumerable Johannine or Pauline texts, or his own interior life indeed. The system (of logic) thus corresponds, as much theologically explicating as originatively eliciting, to deep tradition, hence its belonging to as also constituting philosophy, to these texts, such as “I in them and they in me” or the Pauline “I live yet not I, but Christ lives in me” as the Absolute Subject it thus has to be, Hegel claims, not as idea merely but in concrete mediation. To this corresponds the historic, theologically positivist notion of “sanctifying grace”, not with any certainty found in everyone in this objectified natural world, nor even certainly in any given individual, starting with self. “The truth shall make you free”. There is though, necessarily on Hegel’s premises or findings, an element of representation in this hallowed *picture*, again, of things. Thomas Aquinas would rescue it from this limitation when he explains such “grace” as necessary response to a divine offer, made, it seems, to all, of personal “friendship” (*amicitia*). This can seem distinct from the findings of even a true philosophy. The offer, though, would be based upon an initial consanguinity of spirit with spirit, of, again, spiritual or “logical” absorption of the individual, thus *a priori* “ruined”, into the ultimate concrete universal, into the “one God and father of all” (St. Paul). Yet from “our” point of view in such a frame as this would not everything be grace, as many dogmatic theologians, even they, concur in affirming?

It is, though, in perfect consistency with this that Hegel begins his “The Philosophy of Nature” (*Enc. II*) by declaring that Nature as such is outside the Concept, is the Idea “in alienation from itself”. As such it is in fact exteriority itself, radical contingency as such rather than its exemplification merely (*Enc. 247*). It is to this alienation that man, as subjectively or essentially I, does not finally belong, but which is nonetheless necessary to the Infinite conceptually precisely in its contingency, in its alienation, that is to say, as the other of the same which thus is the same, making the infinite

what it is for thought, i.e. made for itself by itself or by necessity understood as its own constitutive freedom from limitation, necessarily inclusive therefore of *its own* (as it must be seen as) otherness.

The contradiction of the Idea, inasmuch as, as Nature, this is itself outside of or alienated from itself, is rather the contradiction of the on the one hand conceptually spawned necessity of its formation or “creation” (*Gebilde*) and its rational place or determination within the organic totality, with on the other hand Nature’s indifferent whimsicality (randomness) and indeterminate lack of conceptual regularity. (*Enc.* 250)

Here, in this text, one might find the answer to Gentile’s rejection of a philosophy of nature as logically incompatible with Hegel’s system. Nature, namely, is not “thought as thought of” (*pensiero pensato*), as Gentile seems to have assumed, but “thinking thought” (*pensiero pensante*) in that moment of contradiction (rather, it *is* that moment, Hegel seems to say here) of otherness, necessary to or within the Infinite as such.³ Not only this but the incarnate Word, i.e. the Word simply, just is what we call man. “Behold the man” or, in the Latin simply, *ecce homo*. The face, therefore, the “holy face” of the Word, is archetypal or generative, all our faces being modelled thereon, whether we live before or after that historically perceived phenomenon we call a lifetime (of Christ). Hence the prophet: “There is no beauty in him that we should desire him”. There is a kind of iconographic history here. We are referring rather to the eternal Word, which a face might one-on-one reflect as being naturally “transfigurable”. Thus a breviary hymn speaks of Adam or the first man having the face of Christ. Thus C.S. Lewis remarks meeting a Swiss pastor who had met Hitler. “What did he look like?” Lewis asked. “Like Christ”, came the answer, apparently not meant as distinguishing Hitler but quite the reverse. Another hymn speaks of his coming down from the heaven he never left (i.e. not even or least of all, rather, in thus “coming down”). Hence there was no Word or essence of a word *before* him, again, no “pre-existent Christ”, a phrase Herbert McCabe (*The New Creation*) criticises Raymond Brown, the Scripture scholar, for using, not simply because it seems to set a temporal limit to Christ’s inseparable humanity but because “all times are his”, in the liturgical and Scriptural phrase. There can be no other *concept* of Christ, in Hegelian logical terms, as we have been urging above or, as Hegel says at the end of the Greater Logic, the Concept is “the true Being”. That is the

³ This thought is adumbrated, at the same time as he in general praises Gentile’s *Philosophy of Art*, in G. Rinaldi’s *The Philosophy of Art*, Whitelocke Publications, Oxford 2020.

meaning of “He came down from heaven”, the heaven which he never left. This, we may note, is what McTaggart attributes to humanity as a whole, the “Before Abraham was I am” of the Fourth Gospel, while of Abraham too, or of just anyone, it is said in Scripture: “I have loved thee from before the foundation of the world”, i.e. for ever, since God, any God, is necessarily immutable. This, one may note in passing, is the surest basis of the dignity of personality. The conceptual, that is, is the actual, the actual the conceptual, as clearly implied by Hegel’s deeply serious but much maligned adage: “the factual is normative”, as the contingent is the necessary as proceeding from the divine thought, the freedom of which consists in its having “no shadow of turning”, this, this freedom, being what then constitutes the necessary as derivative upon absolute thinking and not a rule conditioning it. Note though that when we say the real in Nature is its concept this is not to be taken as mere exclusion of the contingently sensuous along with temporal and spatial conditions. As Aquinas remarked, sensation is itself a type of cognition, *sensus est quaedam cognitio*, even though one grant the dubiousness Hegel uncovers in its temporal and spatial *objects*. This consideration, in fact, is essential underpinning of his succeeding assertion that the *appearance* of the Word to sense and touch is the Word’s and indeed the divine perfection as itself revelation, not only “to us”, he seems to mean, but as such. It is so, rather, through an inherent dialectic, that of being and nothing, highest and lowest, of a “bringing to nought the things which are”. Yet a careful study of Hegel’s system of logic, *The Science of Logic*, should lay to rest any suspicion that Hegel, with his deep Biblical roots, is merely seeing to it that his texts corresponds to these famous Pauline utterances. We rather find there their spiritual or “sapiential” roots and do not need to deny that the religious and theological past, of Christianity in particular but not exclusively, may have been a necessary condition for the philosophical advance Hegel’s system embodies.

This might be the place to remark that the traditional teaching that the image of God in man lies in “his” soul and not in his body, somehow equated in this its abstract consideration with the phenomenal (“body”, the term, has no place in metaphysics, declares Aquinas, adding that it is only of interest for logicians!), is being superseded in most contemporary theology in favour of this “image” being most nearly caught in the Scriptural statement, “Male and female created he them”.⁴

⁴ Cf. Fergus Kerr OP, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, Blackwell, Oxford 2007, pp. 193-202, on Karl Barth, Karol Wojtyła, as Pope, and Joseph Ratzinger as promoters of this development and/or change of view.

The above, anyhow, is what Hegel brings into philosophy. It is part of the doctrine whereby he claims to be transcending *philosophia* towards *sophia* or knowing and not mere love of knowing. This advance to *sophia*, he claims is the historic duty of Christians or the Christian and “Western” world as fulfilling pre- or non-Christian philosophy. Theology, in claiming mere separation from philosophy of a defective kind, has caused confusion here. Philosophy becomes theology or entirely metaphysics (Aristotle’s *theologia*), previously its highest or ultimate pitch merely, but by this same metaphysics, whether or not “hylomorphic”, the ultimate form was ever determinative of the whole substance, as, just therefore, is the “intellectual” soul in man his (determinative) *forma corporis*, inasmuch as God came or comes down to earth, properly in incarnation but only because prefigured in the very creation of this “intellectual creature”. This is often called the implicit Scotism of modern philosophy, noted above here, which often thus understands itself (in Deleuze, for example, just as it is the entire thesis of Gilson’s *On Being and Some Philosophers*). Yet reflection, and consultation of texts, shows that it, this mood or approach, is equally Thomist, despite Thomas’s insistence upon the Augustinian *felix culpa*. For *culpa*, it can be argued, as already above here, can only be felicitous if it is natural to the finite, while Thomas himself accordingly asserts that “whatever can fail at some time does so”, which implies that the finite world as such would elicit the remedy posited. This, incarnation and even man as prefiguring and hence eliciting it, is the taking of earth into heaven, or “of the manhood into God”, there being no “conversion of the godhead into flesh”. Yet God did not change his mind as the result of a disastrous human “fall”. If that were possible, Hegel remarks, then there would be no God. Hence that prophetic or mystical sense of ancient Scripture ever believed in and venerated by orthodoxy. Hegel’s general comment is that “The End is as such realised”. See here *Enc.* 204 to 213, on “absolute Cunning”:

Within the range of the finite we can never see or experience that the End has been really secured. The consummation of the infinite End, therefore, consists merely in removing the illusion which makes it seem yet unaccomplished ... This is the illusion under which we live. (*Enc.* 212, *Zus.*)

Hence “Death is the entry into Spirit”, he elsewhere affirms. This, however, is as much Thomist as it is Scotist, being development of Thomas Aquinas’s doctrine that while the world or mankind is related to God yet God has no real relation to anything outside of himself, such as temporal sequence, a day being for God “as a thousand years” and conversely, to cite the Apostle. This could mean, has to mean, that mankind “outside of” God is nothing, hence not ultimately *relatandum* or, equivalently, so to say teasing out an

implication of Aquinas's statements, that the Trinitarian relations are the only or, pre-eminently, real ones. Apprehension of this aspect of things in relation to a "fall" (of man as such) has to affect the traditional doctrine of original preternatural gifts, such as freedom from death, "concupiscence" and ignorance along with how this doctrine should be interpreted if not historically, as is *represented* in the Biblical "story" (on which, see *Enc.* 24, *Zus.* 3, again). Thus Hegel's philosophy does not overthrow but penetrates more deeply into these traditional theological elements, "understanding spiritual things spiritually", as is demanded throughout the canonical writings and in virtue of which we find the Christ himself declaring that "Greater things than I have done will you do" since, he adds, "I will be in you".

So, thus viewed, there are not two duplicating sciences but only science itself or knowing, wisdom, prudence, love or faith, no "heaven and earth" which, rather, "shall pass away", while "my Word" endures forever. This knowledge, of Nature's transitoriness, in Hegel's thought, is not divorcible from its having a purely phenomenal character unless and until seen "in God", as an "idea" (a term requiring further exposition) which, like all the ideas, as Aquinas too argues (*Summa Theol.* Ia, Q15), is identical with the Divine Idea which is "the true Being", as Hegel states in the final section of his Greater Logic. That is revealed to be the truth of philosophy, the true *sophia*, thus *sancta* indeed, to which the Cathedral at Constantinople is originally dedicated.

So much for the soul, then, it now seems. For if the soul as "ultimate form" determines the whole substance as what it then is, then we have the unity of Spirit, *Geist*, in all its manifestations. This, indeed, is the meaning of "absolute knowledge" in Hegel's system. It is the end, in either sense, of Self-consciousness in its assumption into or putting by in favour of that universal consciousness which "I" was or is "all the time". This is the "dignity" Augustine urges the Christian to acknowledge, however much he himself grasped of it. Quite some, I would think, in view of his insight into one *intimior me mihi*. For that "one" cannot but be I as more intimately or "deeply" I than I am to myself.

So as touching faith, when we say "by faith we know" we are often, in our finite subjectivity, saying precisely that we do *not* know. This was the kind of faith that Hume successfully mocked. But it is a simple refusal of faith in disguise since faith, Hegel shows, is a form of intellection if it is anything. As for love, with which we began, we would note that Hegel makes of volition, of love therefore, a form and even a more advanced form (an advance upon "cognition proper", namely) of cognition. So philosophy, that is to say, by the Christian dispensation, is as much (or as little) a sacred

science as is theology, which has based its separate existence upon premises unknown to St. Paul, Justin Martyr or the Alexandrine Fathers, in particular upon the later tendency to materialise nature and grace into two separate *fields* rather than two intertwined spiritual principles. This was indeed the reason why philosophy was dropped, in favour of this achieved *sophia*, which should rather be seen as fulfilling it, since only thus can philosophy come to its intrinsic fulfilment, as is necessary for truth and, therefore, human redemption. When, during the main Scholastic period, study of it was revived, the Academy re-opened, so to say, there was no intention of making it an alternative source of wisdom as it were on all fours with theology. Again, everyone knew the pagan Aristotle called his metaphysics *theologia*, quite rightly, i.e. it was not separate or alternative, ever, but, as love for the as yet unattained, potential merely to the ever actual. The first step towards the later unworkable dualism was that of assigning a separate status to philosophy, in the Arts faculty, for example, as if it were something substantive still, as handmaid, *ancilla* to theology. It could not be anything of the sort, being *the same quest*, undertaken first with love-longing, later in serene contemplation, to be reflected back, in concept rather than in time, since the longing is ever with us all the same, upon that initial longing, to be fulfilled namely, by its own concretely universal principle and not in this or that finite individual. “For you are all one in Jesus Christ” – that was the form this insight originally took, though earlier anticipations of it, and later ones for that matter, are not wanting. Earlier and later, Hegel would want to say, are “outside the concept”.

CHAPTER ONE

INCARNATION

One finds it suggested, e.g. by McTaggart, that Jesus “only” became, according to Hegel, “adopted” as the God- man, the truth being that *all* persons have this divinity, though, all the same, there needed to be *one* mediator of this truth. This appears to be different from the orthodox confession of Jesus as the Son begotten “before all worlds”, “by whom all things were made”. Nonetheless I want to explore the possibility that this distinction, between orthodoxy and the Hegelian view, is without a difference when viewed with respect to certain features of the account of *logic* that Hegel would establish as being *the* science, of logic. Here Absolute Idealism is presented as “the dogma of philosophy”. *Such* a “dogma”, it is implied, cannot be ruled out by some religious authority, which should rather defer to it as to the “perfect *Gottesdienst*”, nor even by God himself as there, accordingly, affirming or “loving” himself. That is, this view is on a level with “scientific” claims as to what we “really mean” when we say, in discourse (labelled for good or ill by Hegel as specifically “religious”), as “understanding spiritual things spiritually” (St, Paul), that Christ “ascended” into heaven (eternity) or that God did this or that on a specific or “certain” day. In fact both locutions, of adoptive exaltation or eternal filiation, occur in the body of texts attributed to Pauline authorship, but without much suggestion, if any, of the McTaggartian “only”.

Conversely, by Hegel’s logic again, but not only thus, the incarnate God’s death on that “good” Friday, but still more the succeeding resurrection, both being dogmas of faith, subvert if accepted the truth of historical and finite events generally as a real option for thought. God as God, the infinite, does not die or rise again, yet here a death and rising again, two events, is predicated of precisely God. It follows that they can be predicated only as appearances, precisely because they are events, which means that events as such are appearances, are not real or “conceptual”. The contingent fact, for finite thinking, that the temporally prior reality of such a faith played a possibly determinative role in Hegel’s or anyone’s achievement of such a thought does not signify once the thought is there as conceptually

established, if it is.¹ So the logical system of absolute idealism, for those who understand it, establishes the truth for thought of what is either already held and will continue to be thus held by faith for the believer or it may play a part in eliciting from one previously unbelieving a confession of faith. The case is similar after all to belief in God, since this is an article of the Christian Creed, even the first article, “I believe in God, etc.”, even though the teaching Church also proclaims that the truth of God can be naturally known by the enquiring mind and that with certainty *without destroying faith* (Vatican I, 1870)². Note that I say that the death of incarnate God “on the Cross”, once conceived, subverts time and the phenomenal, as itself other than the phenomenal generally. “Subversion”, in this usage, always signals a logical operation. There is no *prior* reality, temporal or other; rather, what had seemed to be standing firm in the mind is shown to have been merely a representation, so not a thought at all in Hegel’s sense here. The acts of God, that is, have as such the character of being event-transcendent. The overcoming of the world is not the destruction of something that was there before. Hegel has to make this point, therefore and

¹ This strict refusal by Hegel of truth to history and finite events generally, proclamations of which are thus, strictly speaking, not true but merely “correct”, is entirely bypassed in the theologian Hans Küng’s in general excellent study, *Menschwerdung Gottes, eine Einführung in Hegels theologisches Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie*, Freiburg 1970. He, on the contrary, suggests History as an additional transcendental predicate in the Scholastic sense of this. A similar line can be found in Karl Rahner’s writings, more flagrantly in Bernard Lonergan, as we noted in the Preface above. Philosophers seem in general to be better theologians, therefore, than those currently viewed as being such, as seems good to preface to a presentation of Hegel as theologian. This situation can be seen either as the absorption of theology into philosophy, as we find in Aristotle, or in St. Justin Martyr’s dialogues, philosophy then set towards eventual *sophia*, Hegel’s ideal. This is also touched upon by Thomas Aquinas in his treatment of the intellectual virtues under the rubric of “connaturality” in the case of *sophia*, transcending prudence, science, understanding and, as regards the practical intellect specifically, both synderesis and art itself as a virtue (of intellect). *Sophia* is the absorption of philosophy into theology, the supranatural becoming connatural just in its superiority following very closely upon this, there being no reduction in either case. In either case, again (see above on Gentile) this is not “something thought” but thought thinking itself in and through just this “moment”, a facet of this one unrestricted pure act as total actuality. Taken in reverse, this means there is no God over and above the subject and it is just thereby, Hegel argues, that God is the supreme and unique Object.

² Hegel is not quite consistent on this point, I find, though I am quite prepared to take this as maybe opening a need for further development of the original statement, i.e. for re-statement of the thesis.

above all, about the incarnate Christ himself as inserted into history. “Even have we known Christ after the flesh yet we know him so no more”, exclaims the Apostle., while the entire mystical theology and the accompanying practical guidance found in St. John of the Cross’s works could well be seen as being based upon this truth, this insight. This is part, at least, of eucharistic doctrine as *mysterium fidei*, a or even *the* “mystery of faith”, as participating, namely, in that one “sacrifice” otherwise viewed as occurring or offered some time ago. Sacrifice itself, though, may be and is viewed as no more and no less than “going to the Father” (John’s Gospel) or, in Hegel’s words, “Death is the entry into spirit” or, in a locution now out of fashion, the separation of soul from “the body” and “that’s all it is” (Thérèse of Lisieux). But body. *Corpus*, Aquinas once remarked, is not a term for use in metaphysics.

To these views corresponds a view of the deep-lying “friendliness” of reality, obscured from within time but not as viewed as the whole of “logic”, one with its “method”, as Hegel understands this term, a method (*met’hodon*, according to the way) equivalent to metaphysics, which thus, in its speculative character, logic sublates, i.e. logic does not “reduce” to metaphysics, becomes here their explication or final rationale rather. Thus, as transcending temporality, logic is, becomes, *post hoc*, or “after” time in the sense of beyond it (logically), adopted, in the eternity of absolute knowing or transcendently. Thus it is equally from the beginning, which does not itself begin. This and *pre*-destination, also transcendental, which is to say, we now see, logical, cancel one another out as categories. More shortly, what God will be He is and was, is “the end as realised” or realised end.

Such a view is what is expressed, if gropingly, by such expressions as “the hidden Christ of Hinduism”³ or talk of the Greeks as the “chosen people of reason” (Jacques Maritain) or, indeed, by all the attempts at a deeper, i.e. more rational, grasp of the “religious” mysteries (Christian or any other) by “mystical theology” as a genuine and established discipline taking for its matter the spiritual experience and consequent dissemination of the spiritual praxis, “understanding spiritual things spiritually” again, of those called in Christianity, whether it is “a religion” or not, “believers”, i.e. they are ultimately called to just this understanding. But the view can be applied to or derived from thinking. This is as such necessarily *bona fide* wherever it is found while, after all, and as it is taught in Christian theology, only God knows who has or does not have faith or any other virtue, which opens up this possibility, as in fact a necessity, that faith and thought are only

³ Title of a book by Raymond Pannikar, an Indian Catholic priest: Darton, Longman & Todd; London, 1964.

abstractly separable. Thus, in German, *Geist* means spirit or mind indifferently, while in English we say of any expression of a thought that it is “in good faith” just in so far as it is an *expression*, one might say rather a representation, *Vorstellung* thereof (such is the finitude of language) or, contrariwise: “Oh you don’t really believe that”. Faith, anyhow, is itself, along with hope and love, a virtue perfecting all the others, as supernatural prudence perfects, it is taught, even when seeming to contradict, natural prudence or as, in the traditional theological discourse, “grace perfects nature” generally, which is to say it duplicates it under a superior aspect. In this way “the Cross”, as noted above, perfects our concept of time and that by cancelling it, time being necessary for Spirit for “only so long as spirit needs it” (Hegel: *Phenomenology of Mind*, final chapter, viz. “Absolute Knowledge”). It would be wrong to take this last as a mere joke, if we consider, on Hegel’s part, since he implies the finitude of any temporal length or of any time at all, while the finite, he establishes, “is not”, on its own, having its being *in* God alone by an absorption in identity, God having “no other” (cf. *Enc.* 135), i.e. no other identity of or hence to himself. As infinite, that is, his other, all and any otherness, is the same as he, is “one with” him in just its otherness from him and this is the destruction of the finite and “the ruin of the individual”. So, of anything, as the speculatively true essence of dialectic (which otherwise be of little interest): “This also is thou, neither is this thou”. This is the concept of Absolute Unity as a “transcendental predicate” in the original Scholastic sense, preceding the predicates truth, goodness or, it is argued by some, beauty as itself, unity, immediately succeeding upon being as the only actual transcendental predicate, which is thus not properly a predicate, since it is falsified immediately as being thought (*pensato*) and no longer itself thinking (*pensando*)⁴ as the actuality or act of (the) Concept, *das Seiende als solches*, with stress on the actively gerundival suffix *-ende*. The other transcendentals, as taught, say, by Aquinas, are *entia rationis* only, i.e. they too, the true and the good, the one, are really being simply, but as presented, for example, to the universalising faculties of mind (true) or will (good).⁵ All otherness, in a word, is in itself analogical (and not merely “logically”), this alone ensuring both chaos of disorder among all atomic units and an equally unthinkable “coalescing” of all pluralities. One might cite Cajetan’s *On the Analogy of Names* as interpreting Aquinas (in *Commentary on the Sentences*) on this point.⁶ These thus concur with Hegel in a “unity of

⁴ Gentile: cf. Note 3, above.

⁵ Cf. Aquinas, *QD de potentia* VII.

⁶ The best account of Cajetan’s view that I know of is that by John P. Reilly, viz. *Cajetan’s Notion of Existence*, Mouton, The Hague and Paris, 1971. This book has

philosophical experience”, a theme defended in our time by Gilson or Huxley but previously systematised, in the sense of demonstrating its necessity, by Hegel. Hence also, it follows from the above, mere nature is the Idea in alienation as a “moment” of it along, indeed, with temporality and or space, both of these being, as *ganze abstrakte Aussereinander*, nature’s defining, indeed therefore, on Hegel’s premises, determining first moment as the *erste oder unmittelbare Bestimmung der Natur* (Enc. 253 and 254).

The view, of “realised end”, may not at first appear as self-evident. One finds Descartes asserting that God could change the laws of logic. This was indeed a common *theological* view during the late medieval ascendancy (inherited by Descartes) of the doctrine of the *potentia absoluta Dei*, the absolute power of God. Peter Geach mentions his encountering this quite often among his students “of the evangelical persuasion”. Nor, however, can the freedom of the Idea as presented by Hegel be taken as absolutely excluding such indeterminism, so to say, as a “moment”, in his special sense of a falsity from which, as in all cases, truth must result, it being *thought itself* which, alone, is the true being. Here we have the solution, indeed a *solutio* or “loosening”, of the objection, presented by John Macquarrie and others against “neo-Thomism” or, presumably, other “realist” accounts, that “it simply asserts that reason will never go against faith”⁷. Thus Hegel reconciles, in speculative “sublation” of them, the two one-sided views, exemplifying indeed his general “method” in dealing with the finite abstractness of the Understanding. What we call faith, that is, is the perfection of thought just as thought, in turn, perfects faith. Or, the submissive act of faith is an or the perfect rational act, while thought itself is anyhow spiritual or absolute. Thought must be allowed to “think itself”, this being its essence. The appearance of man as such, as the rational being, we must then finally say, is itself the “sublation” of time and not therefore “within” time. The Concept itself, that is, for its part, expands into

as its thesis a sustained criticism of the better-known account of Cajetan given by Gilson in his article entitled “Cajetan et l’existence”. *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, 25 (1953), pp. 267-286. Cajetan, Reilly convincingly shows, used the later Scotist terminology of his opponents, such as Antonio Trombetta, language to express an essentially Thomist viewpoint on existence. Something similar might be said of Hegel, in relation, say, to Kant, I am claiming here.

⁷ John Macquarrie: *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, London 1971, SCM Press, Chapter 18, section 89. Cp. our *From Narrative to Necessity*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2012, Chapter One, “Faith as Thinking with Assent”. An earlier version of this with the same title appeared as an article in *New Blackfriars*, January 2005, pp. 101-114 and is also in our *Unboundedly Rational Religion*, E-Book, GRIN Verlag, Munich 2008.

predication and “syllogism”, each of these but one thought or *verbum interius* and even the same thought, itself. “Everything is a syllogism” (Hegel). Man, that is, cancels evolutionary biology since this, *qua* evolution or “development”, is its own ever-becoming fruit in death of the seed (of the Idea, ultimately, of which also Existence is but a momentary category – *Enc.* 122-124). Death there “works” life here. Those in the frontline of life, of spirit, conquer by exhausting the ammunition of the enemy. More exactly, death is to be seen as “the entry into spirit” (Hegel), of which biological life as such is but an immediate representation while in the end only thought wholly “thinks itself” in necessarily self-knowing reality.

On this Hegelian picture, just as in orthodoxy generally, which it accordingly subserves, Christ is perfected in death, becomes Spirit, “a living spirit”. Only, the Body of Christ, in which all are included in a coincident self-conscious identity, called love, now gets seen as the eternal or necessarily destined “body of man”. “Behold the man!” *Ecce homo!* Perhaps indeed the evangelists were already aware of this, as also, earlier, the Apostle, when he wrote, to cite it again: “Even if we have known Christ after the flesh, yet we know him so no more”. This rejection of any “reversion to the primitive” (Hegel) in preference to present actuality, to the mystical or “whole” Christ, as when it is further said: “Now you are the body of Christ”, is simply maintained by Hegel. For such a reversion

is based on the instinct to get at the notion, the ultimate principle; but it confuses the origin, in the sense of the immediate existence of the first historical appearance, with the simplicity of the notion. By thus impoverishing the life of spirit, by clearing away the idea of the communion, and its action with regard to its idea, there arises, therefore, not the notion, but bare externality and particularity, merely the historical manner in which spirit once upon a time appeared, this soulless recollection of a presumably (*gemeinten*) individual historical figure and its past. (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1967, pp. 764-5).

This confusion lies at the root of what we today are calling “fundamentalism”, somewhat inexactly or even confusingly. That is, immediate existence is not, and never was, even if or while the notion itself should appear as such an existence, “the simplicity of the notion”. There is a downgrading here of such existence. This must be born in mind when interpreting *gemeinten* here. Stronger than the translator Baillie’s “presumably” (it means rather something like “intendedly”) it does not simply, if at all, refer to the common-sense question about the historicity of Jesus but to the relevance, the causal efficacy, of such historicity or, rather, of history as such, to be seen rather as a gallery through which one walks “at a slow pace” (cf. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, final page), this phrase standing for the

elimination or transcendence in simultaneity of all moments, inclusive of the temporal. Hence Jesus is not, from the Hegelian standpoint, *abstractly* temporal any more than he is abstractly individual. He is *the* “Son of Man”. *Ecce homo!* Behold man or *the* man indifferently, more as a Platonic exemplar or form than as a universal. This is why the “right wing” Hegelian ontologists of the nineteenth century, Gioberti or the young Rosmini, some eighty of whose propositions were later, c. 1880, condemned by the Roman Holy Office, though he is now declared a saint, or W. T. Stace later, are often found, along with Scotus Eriugena or “the school of Chartres”, not to speak of Augustine or Malebranche, whatever we say about Thomas Aquinas, to have “missed the point of the question” of universals.⁸ From the standpoint of Hegelian logic this question *is* pointless. Hegelianism, of this or other sorts, relegates it to being a self-contradictory moment in the development of the eternal result which is the Concept. We can say that for Hegel Jesus, our subject here, *results* from history just as the true Concept, as held by the Idea of itself, results from the falsity in finitude of all considered apart from him. That is, even though the Idea Absolute results from finitude and its falsity this cannot, on Hegel’s scheme, be a temporal resulting. It is, rather, as if the false is the *premise* and/or foundation of the true. We may compare with what Hegel has to say about Satan as the first instance of self-consciousness.⁹ Jesus is thus, again, *solutio omnium quaestionum* (School of St. Victor, Chartres). The concept as such, concepts, Hegel would agree with John of St. Thomas (Poincot, contemporary with Descartes) in saying, has no reality but as a “formal sign” or sign only, even though ultimately of itself as Idea. So it is, as Phillips (cited above) rightly notes, that the divine ideas are each severally one with the divine nature (Aquinas), Hegel would say with the Idea. As Derrida saw it: “The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological. Perhaps it will never end” (J. Derrida: “Of Grammatology”: the phraseology recalls not only the evangelical Infancy Narratives but also Wittgenstein’s tip, rather than suggestion: “Essence as grammar”). So, indeed, one may well question whether the word “presumably”, in Baillie’s generally excellent version, is the best translation of *gemeinten* here, since it is just what Hegel does not presume in discussing what people in general intend or “mean”, in the pointedly subjective sense he rather brings out with his play on just this *meinen* as, in German, equivalent both to “mine” and “mean”. Hence in downplaying any dependence of specifically religious truth upon historicity,

⁸ Cp. R.P. Phillips, *Modern Thomistic Philosophy*, Burns Oates, London 1935, vol. 2, pp. 96-97. 103-104.

⁹ Cf. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, VII c.

upon events, Hegel downplays history and not religion, thereby differing *toto caeli* from what was condemned, e.g. at Rome in 1907, as “modernism”, seen as a total down-playing of absolute religious truth. The development of doctrine, to which Newman drew attention later, works in the opposite direction.¹⁰

As regards the Hegelian denial of absolute reality to history and the ephemeral generally, this, applicable to time itself in the first place, is nothing more than recognition that history, and a *fortiori* time, are but *moments* of the Concept, of God, false as having no reality outside of or abstracted from this concept. God, clearly, is not in time. That is, absolutely speaking, the End is as such realised, to repeat. It is only “within the range of the finite”, under the “covering” of objectivity, that “we can never see or experience that the End has been really secured ... This is the illusion under which we live” (*Enc.* 212, *Zus.*). Hegel will have read the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration of Christ, many times no doubt, and he reproduces its implications here, arguing, however, strictly from premises logically anterior both to transfiguration, whether represented or “spiritual”, and to his own conclusions. “Before Abraham was, I am”. This is here presented as a strictly philosophical truth, utterable by anyone whose self-consciousness has advanced thus far. There’s the rub, for some, of course. Yet without the general possibility we could not have the particular instance, questions of special divine help being not germane, frankly representational even. This is the deeper or hidden meaning of the saying that “God helps those who help themselves”.

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As touching this body in which “You are all members one of another”, this Apostolic deconstruction or speculative contradiction of “body” and its limbs, in thought as in expression both, is exactly and specifically what Hegel designates as achieved self-consciousness, stressed by McTaggart, in his account of “heaven” or present (but not perceived) immortality, as the true or perfect unity, transcending organic life or the finite generally though, in contrast to Hegel, he deprecates mention of the infinite. Hegel’s defence

¹⁰ As this is developed as Absolute Idealism a religious outlook cannot but come to the point of seeing all “events” in the light of eternity, as themselves eternal realities or as just one, such as resurrection in death, death to self as life eternal of all in all, and so on. *Sumit unus sumunt mille*, as Aquinas had poetised the eucharistic communion, “where one receives a thousand receive”. This eternal event is the final sense of the *actus purus* of Aristotle, as it is equally the inner speaking of the one Word,

of “the true infinite” against McTaggart’s insufficient objection that we there transpose a term we “have” already in a different sense, however, stands. Infinity requires the identity of every member, every part, with the whole “body”, while Hegel is purposely correcting popular but also mathematical uses of the term. Furthermore, this establishing of the true infinite points, as touching indeed just this point, toward the logically necessary (divine) simplicity or absoluteness of the Idea, as thinking only itself, such as McTaggart would rather maybe have left obscure but, in the interest of final coherence, need not have done so. There is not of course, nor can there be, any such “body”, having limbs or members “one of another”. It is a speculative or self-sublating *representation* under the rubric of “the necessary picture-idea” (Hegel, in *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, discussing, as once Aristotle had done, how finite contingencies fall under eternal or divine necessity as thus eternally known). Similarly, St. Paul’s further use of it to explain diversity of finite functions in the visible community, teachers, prophets etc., has no immediate philosophical relevance, as does his saying, again, in sublation (*Aufhebung*) of this picture, that we are “all members one of another”, which, like “I in them and they in me” (John’s Gospel), cannot be pictured since apparently nonsensical, apart from the residual place-references signified by “in” or “of”, which fall short of the identities involved. Identity, for Hegel too, is *the* logical relation. To be “in” Christ is to be, finally, *alter Christus*, or Christ over again and yet not again. Compare here the picture (originally Greek but taken over with effect by Nietzsche), which breaks down as picture and is therefore precisely *not* this picture but speculative as picturing something else, viz. the illusoriness of time, or that the eternal return of time itself is therefore not a return but, rather, necessarily, the *same* time, so to say “de-timed”. That, in fact, is the “sublation” (Hegel’s *Aufhebung*) of time within the Idea Absolute, in God.

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. (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, p. 777).

In fact, without time there is no returning anywhere, since nothing then goes away, so this “returning” too is a picture. The evangelical “I shall see you again” is thus representation (*Vorstellung*) for the “I am with you always”, resurrection, spirit or full self-consciousness, ultimately, manifested in and as the moment of the death (“It is (or has been) accomplished”, this being the sense there of the English “finished” (in some translations). In Hegel’s

final ontology there is and can be no events, therefore.¹¹ The Idea in its simplicity embraces all its moments in multiple but real identification(s), each of which is in turn identical with the other. This, also, is what finally might seem to cancel or overthrow the individual uniqueness of the incarnation, which is as much caused by its so-called effects as it effects these effects. It is in fact the key to everything and so not itself an individual event or even man. *Ecce homo!* Is the Latin, unlike the Greek, intentionally ambiguous? This man, namely, the individual itself, is ever logically ruined for pure thought, i.e. in truth, “I” being “universal of universals” (Hegel). This is and only this can be the key to the Gospel saying, “Greater things than I have done shall you do”, which could not be true except inasmuch as *no one*, no one individual, finally “did” anything absolutely speaking. Rather, “I in them and they in me”, while a moment is not a doing. This is key also to the talk of it being “in a little while” that you shall see me and then, again, “in a little while” you shall not see me. “What is this little while? We cannot understand what he says”, exclaim the disciples. It is precisely the Idea in its eternity as Hegel, more than anyone thus far, maybe still, captures. The nothing of truth as itself all (but emphatically not nothingness), the unreality of time, are but suggested by talk of a very small thing or while, metaphysics as such having no place in Scriptural, i.e. religious, discourse (as inter-mediate form of Absolute Spirit, between Art and Philosophy, on Hegel’s account).

The question arises here as to whether we must assert as logically necessary the final “salvation” of all persons as we know them, as Hegel’s exposition of the text from the “pastoral” epistles, “God wills that all men be saved”, seems to imply. It is not, however, beyond infinite power to will there to be beings who hate him eternally. This is the meaning of the Saint of Lisieux’s saying that “Every soul gets what it expects”, hence that “If you want God’s justice you will get God’s justice”, spoken to some of her crazy sisters in religion who dreamed of placating this justice by their petty mortifications, ignoring the prophetic saying, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice”. Note, though, that she only said “if”, leaving open a possible coming to one’s better self, as we say. This, either way, it is important to see, is the sense in which “All shall be well and all manner of thing”, whatever be the truth of this after all particular matter as applied to self. This is the point of Chesterton’s grandfather’s saying he would thank God for his creation even if he knew he were a damned soul (G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*). It would not signify, nor does it, for the point that thought

¹¹ One may compare Cyril O’Regan’s discussion of this in his *The Heterodox Hegel*, NDU Press, Indiana, along with my “reply” in *The Orthodox Hegel*, CSP, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014.

here has now reached, whatever we say about thanking God, creation and so on.

Closely related to this is the question of the relation of created freedom to divine or absolute necessity, determining all things in eternally Realised End, i.e. realised as such:

Within the range of the finite we can never see or experience that the End has been really secured. The consummation of the infinite End, therefore, consists merely in removing the illusion which makes it seem yet unaccomplished. The Good, the absolutely Good, is eternally accomplishing itself in the world; and the result is that it needs not wait upon us, but is already by implication, as well as in full actuality, accomplished. This is the illusion under which we live ... (*Enc.* 212, *Zus.*)

If this is so then why should not McTaggart's or similar accounts (e.g. that of Giacomo Rinaldi among today's Hegelians) of Hegel as positing our perceptions generally as illusory be acceptable? Here, anyhow, any absolute "freedom of indifference" is excluded, since infinity, the Idea, *necessarily* goes before or "prevents" (in the sixteenth century sense) us "in *all* our actions" (stress added). In God himself freedom finds its own identity with or as absolute necessity. This, the teaching of Aquinas, following St. Paul but arguing from philosophical principles, is entirely replicated in Hegel. Self-consciousness, so to say, simply watches, like the perfect chess-player or strictly probabilistic gambler, what is in itself "realised" *as* "end". The basic consideration here is that what Aquinas calls God, the Idea Absolute in Hegel (whether or not "for" Hegel), is First Mover (as in Aristotle) of every created movement of will or of anything else and thus *makes* the will and the will's action, individually as universally, mine and everyone's, free. The evil, where it occurs, is thus first in God (there is evil in God, Hegel reasons), where it *is*, in itself, *as the negative*. This seems, metaphysically, to be an improvement upon, or maybe further explanation of, Aquinas's seemingly feeble accounting for moral evil in terms of a specifically or exclusively finite dereliction of duty simply (what can fail at some time does fail), i.e. a simple negative abstract, therefore, as being *in no way* positive or just, not being at all, rather, and so not even non-being, which is something, e.g. an object of thought, whereas evil is "a sham-being" (Hegel). "Offences must come" – why, except that, as logical moment, the infinite must be allowed to offend itself? Thus, though, good and evil come to be posited as the same, in which case, however, "evil is just *not* evil nor goodness good" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p.776). The opposition is sublated in the Idea. Although they *are* thus the same, however, it *must be said*, "just as certainly" or "with immovable obstinacy", that they are not

the same, Hegel here writes. Both are equally wrong, since both are equally right, he says, since, after all, “all judgments are false”, including this one. This, I would venture to assert, is the ancestry of the Nietzschean “beyond good and evil”, thus illustrating all the more “the unity of philosophical experience” (E. Gilson), whether or not this would exceed the historical Nietzsche’s own perception. High priests may utter truths in part or wholly beyond their own perception, in virtue of their office, while philosophers, as offering perfect or absolutely spiritual *Gottesdienst*, are the highest of priests (cf. LPR III, end sections). In fact, however, good and evil are here sublated, however obstinate anyone’s speech. All the same, Hegel does seem to have drawn back a little here. If this offends us then we must look rather to the discussion where he distinguishes the divine knowledge of evil from commission of the same, discussed, anyhow, expounded most profoundly, rather, in the same place (*Phenomenology of Mind*, VII C: “Revealed Religion”), where it shows this to be the key to Hegel’s whole theology of the incarnation, leading on to its redemptive effect as a change in man, not in God.

The case is similar, though, if we consider Life or other related general concepts, a fact which C.S. Lewis, to take an example, uses to bring out the emptiness, as he sees it, of F.R. Leavis’s constant appeal, in his literary criticism, to Life, giving this a kind of “semantic halo” all on its own.¹² The word “life” here is just used, Lewis claims, to mean “what I approve”. In fact it means everything and nothing at the same time, as is also the case with goodness in God when not paired with evil. So Hegel’s “There is evil in God” functions as establishing that neither good nor evil has meaning there, in God. Good is then, or there, just not good, evil is then just not evil, he says. Lewis offers the analogy of the chessboard, while Hobbes flatly states that God may justly afflict whomever he wishes, meaning clearly whomever he does in fact afflict: whomever, note, not just what can be explained positively via certain human canons. God, rather, IS, is true being, the Thomistic insight leading Hegel to say that “the factual is normative”, the ground-maxim of natural law theory. It is also the reason for Hegel’s claim as to the irrationality of questioning moral imperatives¹³. St. Thomas in fact explains goodness and truth as Being presented to (human) will and intellect respectively, i.e. and not as themselves, here approaching most closely to Hegel’s general critique of predication as such. God, anyhow, has no such abstractly separable faculties, whether or not we have them. Hence it is that God is only called good analogously while he *is* absolutely being, as we are not, being, collectively, *plura entia sed non plus entis* (more

¹² Cf. C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, CUP 1967.

¹³ Cf. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, pp. 451-455 (Baillie translation, 1967).

beings but not more Being). Of course this can also find expression oppositely, such as in “There is none good but God” or, conversely, either than God is not being or that the divine being is finally freedom, rather, and/or the Idea, and that *this*, literally, actually Thought, is “the true being” (thus Hegel concludes his first *Science of Logic*). Hence our title here. We might compare the dialectic of Fatherhood. God as fathering is nothing but Father (of the Son), “act” (of or *as* self) in a word. All in all, then, by Hegel’s logic, truth and goodness retire before the Absolute Idea which is Being indeed (being human, however, he calls it anyhow there “the *true* being” at one point).

The enthusiastic utterances about *life* which occupied our attention in the last section are, let us note, a great novelty. The older writers know nothing of *life* as a flag, a cause, or a deity. Sober moralists like Seneca say, unanswerably, that the condition which makes all evil and all good possible can hardly be called good or evil itself (is a chess board a good or a bad move?).¹⁴

God, like Life, “makes all evil and all good possible”. We may seem, Lewis may seem, to approach the thesis of Maimonides, rejected by Aquinas, that God is good as the cause of goodness only. No, rather, the goodness of God, Hegel states, being the same as evil there, just is not goodness, nor is evil there evil. Verbal analogies may be drawn but Hegel does rule out or might seem here to be ruling out the Thomistic analogy of being. This though may well be, analogously(!), a kind of optical illusion. We are closer rather to saying that both the good and the evil in God are good! “Have we received goodness at the hand of God”, Job asks, “and shall we not receive evil?” In fact we are terminally reduced to saying, with Hegel as with Aquinas, that evil is simply a sham-being anyway¹⁵, not to be separated from its (good) context.

Evil is “only the absolute sham-existence of negativity in itself”. This judgment can only mean that evil is an abstraction set up by finite mind, i.e. erroneously. This, and not some Manichean fantasy, is what Hegel intends by saying that there is evil in God. The sham-being is known as such there, which is to say it is eliminated as never having been, as we eliminate a false hypothesis, exactly so. This, again, is to say that the very being of God, the Idea, *is* the elimination of evil or, as Hegel also puts it, in God “evil is just not evil”, though this destroys good as well. We have sheer actuality and that is indeed all, not by limitation but by infinity overflowing. God cannot

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Hegel, *Enc.* 35, *Zus.*: evil is “only the *absolute* sham-existence of negativity in itself” (stress added).

share his omnipotence with anybody or anything, not even with evil (or good). At the metaphysical level evil is just a contradictory concept, therefore. Evil, or those following it, has and have to say, “Evil be thou my good”. This is why, again, there is no *sui generis* moral motive in Thomas Aquinas. The honourable good, e.g. morality, virtue, he declares, is called good by metonymy as leading to the only and entire good or, in truth, being.¹⁶

So, and similarly, the whole creation is very good and hence also is the “fall of man”, if there is or was one. Or otherwise it is like being eaten alive by a shark or like the millions gassed at Auschwitz. Afterwards you are unable to believe it happened, unless, that is, you see it as falling within God’s plan and providence for our time, as, as central to Christian consciousness and belief, the Cross of Christ, God incarnate, hands and feet nailed through, falls exemplarily within it. This is the deeper meaning of the parable of the tares, why they are to be let to grow together with the good seed “until harvest”. They are sham-being anyhow, and just in that way indestructible, as the zero or ever-abiding negative, outside God, though here too “the Outside is the Inside”. Augustine had accordingly identified human freedom to “sin” as a limitation absent from angelic (established “in grace”) or divine freedom as necessarily *free from* sin. That is, such freedom (to sin) is no freedom at all but freedom’s limit. The apparent contradiction here must be resolved *pro parte objecti*, on the part of the object *or of sin*. A pointer here is Hegel’s placing of sin ethically, so to say, above innocence, in his interpretation of the Fall of Man narrative in *Genesis* (*Enc.* 24). Really he places self-consciousness “beyond good and evil”, sublates, again, rather than subverts “morality”. We may apply therefore to philosophy, in its supposedly esoteric character (*sic* Hegel), the saying: “Power is the morality of those who stand out from the rest” (L. van Beethoven, who adds, in his *Notebooks*: “and it is mine”), i.e. it is what they have *instead*. This is why, in art, the breaking of an established law can become the “right” thing, such *epieicheia* being thus indeed the *absolute* spiritual quality that makes art present. Hence virtue transcends law as *ius* transcends *lex*, the latter being accordingly characterised by Thomas Aquinas as *aliqualis ratio juris*. What matters, Aristotle had himself declared, is *to kalon*, the beautiful action in its concreteness, action of thought, word or deed indifferently, one might further specify, or generalise – the two are the same here. Meanwhile Hegel repeatedly makes it clear that he judges the evil act insofar as evil to be non-being, in his treatment of crime and punishment for example. If there is God, this is his position, then

¹⁶ See our “The *bonum honestum* and the Lack of Moral Motive in Aquinas’s Ethical Theory”, *The Downside Review*, April 2000, pp. 85-110.

there is no evil. A dualism here is impossible. What is *represented* in the Gospel, validly enough, as a hard-won victory pictures precisely the eternal reality of the sovereignty of good, which is thus “just not good”, there being no evil to offset it. “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all”, the “encircling gloom” a mirage; misperception is McTaggart’s term here. We pray “O God without whom nothing is strong”, whereas when we add “and nothing is very strong” we fall back into this misperception. The Buddhists are wrong, he implies, to make Nothing “the universal principle, as well as the final aim and goal of everything.” It “is the same abstraction” (*Enc.* 87).

We may here, if we will, recall the evangelical promise: “You will be clothed with power from on high”. The perfect and yet necessary justice of God, as we may also put it, may at times or even frequently appear *to us* as the height of injustice while sin, we should recall, as implying *infinite* offence (finite offence would be less than interesting), has conceptual roots in a magical or ritual mentality. If you stumble while carrying something sacred, such as the Ark of the Lord, then God will strike you dead. This is inseparable in fact from the teaching on forgiveness, that the person forgiven has not sinned. Hence the prophet declares that your *sins*, though they be as scarlet, shall *themselves* be white as snow. Love then not merely attracts forgiveness but itself “covers a multitude of sins” while, conversely, the only sin is the “sin against the spirit” which shall not be forgiven. As to what that sin is, we have not much of a clue, I judge. It is certainly not “resisting the known truth”, which everyone does as a prelude to being forgiven, in fact.

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There is an implicit resituating of all language here, in Hegel, of all “sentencing” (judging). The Mediator, we may recall, shall have written only in sand, thus indicating the essential momentariness of Spirit (*pensiero pensando*) as against the deadly letter (*pensiero pensato*). We may recall here the fierce opposition of Greek poets, as such priests of Absolute Spirit, to the first employment of the graphic art by younger colleagues. This, in fact, is the import of “the Speculative” as the “stage of Positive Reason”, resulting from Dialectic and fixity of Understanding taken together, apprehending unity in opposition, actively disintegrating propositions, but above all the proposition as such, “in their transition” (*Enc.* 82). All this is what was thus first called for, as elicitable from it, in the Augustinian and Thomistic theological position referred to above, that God determines the will to any and every free act, be it good or evil (this finally rests upon Thomas’s position that God has no “real” relation to man, since man is not

“real” as God is), a position the Pope of a later day refused to categorically endorse (for whatever motive: e.g. he needed Jesuit help against rising Protestantism at Venice) at the consultation *De auxiliis* held at Rome during 1607 between Dominican and Jesuit theologians. It was the resultant atheism in Europe, therefore, that Hegel can be seen as setting out to correct. At the same time one may comment that the episode illustrates the impotence of religion when taking up an isolationist position against the findings of philosophy, especially of philosophy of religion or theology (many today would identify these two).

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Self-consciousness emerges as the decisive representation of the Concept:

Spirit is Spirit knowing its own self. It knows itself; that, which is for it object, exists, or, in other words, its figurative idea is the true absolute content. As we saw, the content expresses just Spirit itself. It is at the same time not merely content of self-consciousness, and not merely object *for* self-consciousness; it is also actual Spirit. (*Phenomenology of Mind*, p.782).

Every objectified concept, it follows, is figurative or representation, is formally a sign (*signum formale*) in the language of the *Ars Logica* (Q15, *De signis*) of Jean Poinsot, Descartes’ contemporary (better known as John of St. Thomas), hence needing to be considered as object only *via* a second “sign” or concept of itself. This is what Berdyaev called “the tragedy of knowledge” and it is the element of truth in Kant’s position. Yet consciousness must “know the object as its self” (*Ibid.* p.759). The *otherness* of the object, viz. the world, reality, God, “ceases when the Absolute Being *qua* Spirit is object of consciousness”. This is Hegelian self-consciousness, where “the object is in the form of self” since, in truth, “the object it has is the self”. That is, these two propositions are equivalent as entailing one another. The Franciscan “My God and all things” would seem adequate representation of it in the devotional key. “My God and my all” is thus a mistranslation of the original, as reported, *Deus meus et omnia*, though this too is doubtless Latinised from the Italian.

As Fichte in modern times has especially and with justice insisted, the theory which regards the Absolute or God as the Object and there stops, expresses the point of view taken by superstition and slavish fear. No doubt God is the Object, and, indeed, the Object out and out, confronted with which our particular or subjective opinions and desires have no truth and no validity. As absolute object, however, God does not therefore take up the position of a dark