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“The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”

Toward a Reconsideration of the Role of Love in Hegel

INTRODUCTION

HEGEL'S "SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY AND ITS FATE" (SC), written in 1798–99, constitutes his most extensive consideration of love and his attempt to work out why a community based on the immediate bond of love is not possible for modern individuals. Although Hegel himself never published it, because it involved the articulation of a problem for which he had not yet conceived a solution, it is nevertheless important as a philosophical text in its own right.¹ It is important because in it, Hegel is attempting to come to terms with what it means to be a modern individual, with the defining feature of modernity at the level of individual subjectivity. In exploring why a community of love, which he sees historically manifest in the early followers of Jesus, could not be sustained by modern individuals, Hegel is seeking to come to grips with what it is about us as moderns that *necessarily* makes such a unity impossible to sustain; he is coming to terms with the loss of *immediacy* that characterizes moderns.² The essay can be read, thus, as Hegel's confrontation with the nature of the modern subjectivity.³

Rather than as a philosophical text in its own right, however, this early essay by Hegel has received attention mainly in terms of its place in the development of Hegel's thought.⁴ It represents a phase when he believed that love was the highest kind of knowing for humans, a knowing that could only find objective expression in the religious symbol. And the inadequacy of love in terms of satisfying the modern principle of abstract reasoning and achieving a true reconciliation between the self and its world is what initiates

Hegel's move toward, first, a philosophy based on intuition,⁵ and subsequently, the philosophy of the concept.⁶

I do not, with the examination offered here, wish to dispute this view of Hegel's development, so much as to raise the question of *what happens* to love as he makes his movement into the mature philosophy. That is, what is the relationship between the *experience* of love and the mature ethical thought and philosophical system? Such a question is important because it remains so ambiguous in much of the commentary on Hegel's development. Some commentators actually seem to point toward the *loss* of the knowledge of love as Hegel moves into his mature philosophical system.⁷ For others, the relationship remains unclear.⁸ Clearly Hegel did come to disavow his earlier emphasis on love as the highest knowledge and sought to find a conceptual understanding of it. But what this means about the role of love in life remains unclear. Only George Adams fixes his attention specifically on this question and provides a satisfactory answer to it.⁹

The idea that Hegel leaves behind intuitive knowing in his move into the concept, or the failure clearly to address the relationship between experience and concept, has serious implications for our understanding of his mature system. For example, it lends tacit support to the criticism of certain feminist scholars who, in observing Hegel's analysis of the movement from ancient to modern communities, or from family to civil society, point to the apparent dialectical "loss" of the feminine principle of "blood and hearth," or "reproduction" (Benhabib 1996, O'Brien 1996). Love, it is said, in Hegel's mature work is restricted to the limited realm of the nuclear family, constituting only the private life of men, while reason becomes the true bond of the political community. This theme of the loss of other forms of knowing has similarly been a concern for postmodern (e.g., Connolly 1988, Derrida 1982) and Christian (Desmond 1995, 2001) commentators on Hegel.¹⁰ The idea is that, while Hegel might acknowledge love and intuitive knowing generally as a moment in one's life, this is seen to be absorbed by a conceptual knowing that stands above it.

From a less critical standpoint, the emphasis on Hegel's development as being one from the standpoint of love to the standpoint of reason has lent support to prominent Marxist appropriations of Hegel, where the emphasis is on the idea of subjects creating their own world from the perspective of a critical rationalism.¹¹ The notion of a deeper substance or knowledge of unity informing—and limiting—the will, a knowledge experienced in intuitive form, is abandoned, just as Marx strips the substance out of Hegel's ontology in his own attempt to anthropomorphize it.

Against such views, the consideration of "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" given below aims to begin to make the argument that, while Hegel did indeed move away from a philosophy based on intuition and a commu-

nity based on the immediate bond of love, the central place that he assigns to love in this early work is not something that he ever really abandons at the level of life. The movement toward a community based on reason and constructed through the human will and toward a philosophy based on the concept rather than upon intuition should not lead us into thinking that Hegel meant to leave the intuitive knowledge of love behind. Rather, as a knowledge of unity, love remains the source of the modern will in its drive to realize its unity in the world, *albeit a source that becomes unconscious*. And the philosophical system, while it does seek to provide a higher form of knowing than Hegel had earlier conceived was possible, does not thereby seek to replace the knowledge of love. Rather, the deep antagonism between love and reason with which Hegel tries to come to grips in this early essay points toward his mature system as an attempt to protect and preserve love against the divisive and eclipsing effects of a narrower, abstract rationality. By considering how Hegel understands love in this, his most extensive elaboration on the topic, as well as the problem of the inherent antagonism between love and reason, we can begin to move toward a better understanding of the role of love in his mature philosophy.

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF REFLECTIVE RATIONALITY

While Hegel ultimately embraced the rationalism of the Enlightenment, a study of "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" reveals his deep awareness of the negative effects of what today would be termed "instrumental rationality." Hegel is hostile to the dominant strand of Enlightenment reasoning at this time because he has not yet conceived his larger, dialectical thinking, which will seek to incorporate but transcend the claims of the more limited reasoning of the Enlightenment. In this essay, he understands reason largely in terms of the static and disengaged character of the modern scientific standpoint. This is a thinking that is characterized fundamentally by the act of reflection—reflection away from the body, away from our direct engagement with the world, to the distant and neutral perspective of the scientific observer. This is the thinking that registers the external world in terms of the static and "neutral" judgment of "facts." And it is the kind of thinking that Hegel will later derisively refer to as "the Understanding" (*Verstand*).

In "The Spirit of Christianity," Hegel sees reflective rationality as fundamentally bound up with the atomism of rights-based societies, with the incapacity to establish and comprehend a meaningful and satisfying basis of community. Traditional societies such as ancient Greece are prereflective, according to Hegel, in the sense that they are not marked by the radical separation between thought and existence. The ethical order is rather built upon

the natural morals and sentiments of individuals; it is an extension of their being, and so their commitment to it is implicit and unreflective. But with the emergence of reflective rationality in the modern individual, we have the radical separation between thought and being, self and ethical substance, abstract thinking ego and concrete individuality. The basis of the new political community, in such a scenario, becomes the “abstract Ego,” which Hegel sees historically manifest in ancient Rome. Nature is no longer accorded a place in the moral order, as rights developed on the basis of this “unfeeling, non-spiritual unit” (PH 288/351).¹²

The political philosophy that embodies this reflective separation of thought and being is found in the early moderns such as Hobbes and Locke, who were dominated by the spirit of scientific rationality. The isolated self, viewed as an object of science, can be seen to be driven merely by appetites and aversions. It realizes itself in the expression of these passions, in the taking of what it wants from the material world. Furthermore, these passions are seen to be fundamentally idiosyncratic, since nature is no longer regarded or experienced as the locus of one’s social identity, the way it had been in traditional communities. Hence the establishment of self in the world through property is a fundamentally isolated act, the assertion of an absolute particularity of self in which others cannot share. This is the character of private property and of how it is bound up with the self of self-reflection.

While there is a conception of unity involved in a society based upon the “abstract Ego,” it is a conceptual unity only, a putting together of a multitude of individuals according to a principle of right that is external to nature, that exists purely in thought. In contrast to traditional societies and customary morality, there is nothing in the *nature* of individuals that ties them together, no inherent bond of feeling. Rather nature is understood only as idiosyncrasy and raw desire, an absolute particularity of self in relation to the other. As Hegel says of Rome, it had “no spiritual centre which it could make the object, occupation and enjoyment of its spirit” (PH 311–12/378) Furthermore, while there is a conception of justice here whereby individuals must respect each other’s rights, the experience of fulfilling one’s obligation to the other is inherently divisive. One limits one’s own rights in order to respect the rights of the other. This may indeed constitute a kind of ethics, based on a unifying principle of equality, but, says Hegel, it is only an “equality of enmity” (SC 218/270). One’s own interests are always conceived as separate from the interests of others and in perpetual tension with those others. At best what can be achieved is a mere balancing or overlapping of fundamentally separate self-interests rather than a unity in something truly common.

The inherent relationship between reflective rationality and an atomistic political community finds its religious counterpart, according to Hegel, in the Jewish separation of God and man. The notion that God exists in the beyond,

and that this world is condemned to finitude, is a *product* of the reflective separation from nature and the viewing of that nature from the standpoint of abstract rationality.¹³ Such a viewpoint can *only* see finitude in nature and in human existence and in order to preserve any notion of universality must project it into the beyond, as God. Thus reflective rationality is bound up not only with the separation of human and human, self and other, as reflected in the society of Rome but is also integral to the separation of finite and infinite.

Furthermore, because the Jews projected the universal or divine aspect of the self outside into the beyond and submitted to the dictates of a law coming from that beyond, he sees the religion as bound up with the further separation of law and being, of what in Greek society had been united in the being of the individual. In this sense Hegel saw Judaism also as a religion of positivity, of unfreedom, involving the submission to a law given and external to the self rather than generated from within, just as he had earlier criticized Christianity for its positivism.¹⁴

Hegel is hostile to positivity, to a law given outside of the self, because he is committed to the modern principle of freedom. In spite of his idealization of ancient Greece, and in spite of his concerns about the negative effects of reflective thinking, he recognizes even at this early stage that such thinking is bound up with the principle of freedom. While in its negative sense thought had torn the individual away from the unity she experienced in her ethical substance, such a tearing free also had a liberating effect. No longer bound by nature to their ethical substance, and accepting its demands in an unreflective manner, individuals had to find a *rational* confirmation of what is right. But reflective thought itself was incapable of generating such a content of right. The Roman commitment to the universal that lay over against their natural self, the abstract ego and the equally abstract universality of the state that held them all together, was clearly an unsatisfactory basis of right and of community for Hegel.¹⁵ And the Jewish and later Christian projection of the universal into the beyond was seen as an abdication of the position of freedom.

While Hegel had earlier looked to Kant's philosophy, to his notion of a larger moral reason, as providing a more meaningful basis of autonomy and unity for the modern self in "The Life of Jesus" fragment, by the time of the "Spirit of Christianity," he sees Kant's position as itself bound up with the divisive limitations of reflective rationality. Indeed, it posits a new division within the self, between reason and emotion. As Hegel argues in a now-famous polemic, the apparent progress of Kant's position is simply one of a transition of the master from the outside to the inside of the soul.

[B]etween the Shaman of the Tungus, the European prelate who rules church and state, the Voguls, and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own command of duty, on the other, the difference is not

that the former make themselves slaves, while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave. (SC 211/266)¹⁶

Hegel's desire in "The Spirit of Christianity" is to find a basis both of individual autonomy and of political community that overcomes the limitations of reflective rationality, with its harsh separation of reason and emotion, law and being, self and other, and finite and infinite. And it is in love that he finds such an overcoming. An examination of Hegel's view of love in this early essay shows in just what sense it constituted transcendence of reflective rationality.

LOVE AS THE OVERCOMING OF REFLECTIVE RATIONALITY

For the Hegel of "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," love constitutes the highest kind of knowing, higher than reflective thought. This is because love captures a deeper unity of existence, a unity of self and other, consciousness and being, finite and infinite, that is primordial and from which reflective thought has alienated itself.

The Hegel of the late 1790s had come directly under the influence of his old friend, the poet Hölderlin, and the latter's developing "Identity" theory. Hölderlin and some of his contemporaries such as Schelling and the romantics were concerned to articulate a deeper source of knowledge than that accessible to modern Enlightenment reasoning, one that could overcome the negative, divisive effects of this rationality and reveal the one-sidedness of its views. Such a task was coming to fruition in the Identity theory, with its roots in Spinoza's notion of substance, and in particular Hölderlin's notion of an Identity that exists in Being (Henrich 1970, Harris 1993). According to this theory, the experience of being separate from the world and of viewing it as a neutral, external object—the standpoint of modern consciousness—is derivative and corruptive of a more primordial identity that exists in nature. This primordial unity of subject and object is the divine, for Hölderlin. And it is the condition of the modern subjectivity that, in its very being, it is constituted by a rupture from this primordial Identity.

Reflective thought itself is incapable of capturing the deeper unity of existence because it is constituted by the separation of subject from object, of concept and being. Hence it must be a different faculty or mode of knowing, an intuitive one, that grasps the deeper unity. It must be a knowing comprised by unity of reason and emotion, of mind and body. While thinkers such as Schelling believed that only those blessed with the appropriate poetic genius could encounter this knowledge, this conscious reexpe-

riencing of the primordial identity, Hegel locates the intuition, more democratically, in the experience of Christian love.

As such, for Hegel, love is not a mere "emotion." To view it so would be to view it from the perspective of the reflective understanding. Rather, love is the experience of the *harmony* of mind and body, of thought and being, of consciousness and existence, of reason and emotion. But it speaks in the language of emotion rather than in the language of concepts. This must not provoke the view of it as "irrational," however, for it also embraces the side of the rational. Love is a *transcendence* of the position of reflective rationality, a *refinding* or *reexperiencing* of a primordial experience of unity that had been lost due to the separative influence of reflective rationality. It is the overcoming of the subject-object divide.

What is so significant about this conception of unity, as opposed to the unity manifest in societies governed by custom, such as ancient Greece, is that love is a coming back to unity after the suffering of diremption. And because of this, love is a unity of acute awareness. It *is* the self-consciousness of the unity, a self-consciousness that is felt. And most significantly, because it is a self-consciousness achieved after separation, love is to be compatible with the principle behind that separation, the principle of freedom implicit in reflective thought. Love is to be the finding of what is right in one's own self, not as the abstract ego, nor as the rational moral law divorced from feeling, but as a higher unity of the universal and finite being. As this unity, and as the transcendence of the negative separations of reflective rationality, love is to be the ultimate realization of the principle of freedom.¹⁷ It is in Hegel's specific interpretations of the teachings of Jesus in the "Spirit of Christianity" that we can see more clearly the way in which love constitutes the overcoming of the divisions of reflective rationality.

Christian Virtue: The Unity of Reason and Emotion

Christian virtue, according to Hegel, was consonant with the modern principle of autonomy, with the idea of adhering to a principle of right that is found within one's own self. But it went beyond the Kantian notion of adhering to the moral law within, while subordinating one's sensuous desires. Indeed, it is the "fulfillment" of Kantian morality, in that through love we realize the Kantian moral law not only with the rational side of our being, but with the whole of our selves. Love is the overcoming of an authority that sets itself over against actual being and the transcendence of a morality founded on mastery.

Hegel finds this notion of virtue in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where virtue is described as being a "modification" of the subjective disposition of love. Rather than ignoring or repressing the sensuous side of the individual, in virtue this is to be raised up into a higher unity, while the moral rule in turn

becomes something living. Thus it is not a subservient response to a "command" coming either from outside or within the self. Instead, one is pulled toward the virtuous action with the whole of one's being.

While indeed the Christian virtues are expressed in command form by Jesus in Sermon on the Mount, as in "Thou shalt not kill," this is only because the language of reflective thought is inherently incapable of adequately expressing the kind of unity that virtue represents and that the actual individual experiences. It was the figure of Jesus himself that was the inspiration for Christian virtue, for he was the concrete embodiment of it. Thus it was not in obedience to his commands that one was to practice virtue but rather because he himself "evoked love and a spontaneous desire to imitate" (Harris 1972:402).

In Jesus, the disposition of love is the unity that grounds the action, just as in traditional morality the law is the ground. But unlike the abstract, external nature of law, that simply imposes itself on particular circumstances, love "modifies" itself to respond to the particularity of the context. This is no domination, no response to an external command, for the action emanates from a unified self, at peace with itself. The sensuous side of the self is not repressed in the name of moral fulfilment but is engaged as precisely the motivation for that fulfilment.

Fidelity in marriage, for example, is not rooted in mere respect for duty independent of one's desires. Nor is it based on a particular inclination for one person, making the fidelity dependent upon constancy of desire. Nor indeed is it a question of a fortuitous correspondence between the moral rule of fidelity and particular desire for one person (an accidental balancing of the universal and the particular). Rather the action must emanate from a higher synthesis of the self, from a disposition of love: "[T]his sanctity alone makes a man capable of checking any one of his many aspects which may wish to make itself the whole or rear its head against the whole; only the feeling for the whole, love, can stand in the way of the diremption of the man's essence" (SC 217/270). Love integrates any competing desires and thus resolves moral conflict.

Love furthermore overcomes the inevitable clash of duties that emerges under rule-bound morality. For if moral rules or commands are considered as absolutes, in the multifaceted reality of concrete situations we will be faced with the paradoxical situation of having a plurality of absolutes. If this is dealt with by ranking specific duties as to which is most important, the lower duties take on the status of vices. Love, however, is "the one living spirit which acts and restricts *itself* in accordance with the whole of the given situation" (SC 245/294). Against the elevation of particular duties as absolute, we have love as a "*living bond* of the virtues," their "all-pervasive soul": "[I]t does not set up a determinate virtue for determinate circumstances, but appears,

even in the most variegated mixture of relations, untorn and unitary. Its external shape may be modified in infinite ways; it will never have the same shape twice. Its expression will never be able to afford a rule, since it never has the force of a universal opposed to a particular" (246/295). The root of the virtues is thus not their universality of form, but the unified self, the self of love, from which the virtues emanate as love "modifies" itself according to its context. It is this love, this unity of self, that informs the practice of virtue, that allows for the many-sidedness of the situation and calls forth an action. Rather than consciously invoking one absolute and imposing it on particular circumstances, thereby destroying other absolutes that might also find some rights therein, the virtuous action represents a fusion of the universal and the particular *in life*.

Love, then, as the fusion of law and inclination, is meant to overcome the abstract form of theories of moral law, without transgressing the rational content of that law. The notion of virtue as a modification of love finds a way to reconcile sensuous being with ethical action. It humanizes the morality of Kant without compromising the moral seriousness of his project, the seriousness of what he expected from us as rational beings. The moral law is fulfilled not out of mere obedience, but willingly, with one's whole being. This, says Hegel, is the most genuine "fulfillment" of the moral law. The rational content of law is no longer set over against being. Rather it now exists as the real harmony of reason and being that love represents.¹⁸

"Reconcilability": The Unity of Self and Other

Christian love also overcomes the atomism of the standpoint of abstract right, in Hegel's interpretation, by revealing the deeper unity between self and other from which abstract thought, and the political philosophy founded upon it, has separated us. It is upon Jesus's command to "Love one another" that Hegel develops this notion of a community based on love. For this "command" contains the idea of a virtue of "reconcilability," a modification of love that is to govern one's relations to others.

Reconcilability constitutes an escape from the inherent divisiveness entailed in rights-based justice. It constitutes an annulling of the "equality of enmity" that Hegel had complained of in relationship to this justice. In reconcilability, if one asserts one's right against another, there must be no hostile reaction in act or feeling. For reconcilability, "even anger is a crime" (SC 216/269). For to feel anger is to feel wronged and to want to do wrong in return or to assert one's rights in the face of the other. Reconcilability on the contrary wants to give up the notion of a right as something held against another. Only then can one treat the other from a disposition of love; only then can one feel the true bond with the other that transcends the atomistic relation.

A heart thus lifted above the ties of rights, disentangled from everything objective, has nothing to forgive the offender, for it sacrificed its right as soon as the object over which it had a right was assailed, and thus the offender has done no injury to any right at all. Such a heart is open to reconciliation, for it is able forthwith to reassume any vital relationship, to re-enter the ties of friendship and love, since it has done no injury at all to life in itself. On its side there stands in the way no hostile feeling, no consciousness, no demand on another for the restoration of an infringed right, no pride which would claim from another in a lower sphere, i.e., in the realm of rights, an acknowledgment of subordination. (SC 236/286)

If one continues to assume one's place in the competitive world regulated by a system of rights, then one will always be involved in an injury to "life,"¹⁹ to the fundamental unity with the other. But if one withdraws from this system of justice, from the profanity of the public world, if one stops making claims on others, then there will no longer be feelings of resentment, hostility, and pride to deal with. By clearing the self of these emotions, the way is opened up to love, to the "sensing of a life similar to one's own" that takes individuals back to the truth of their life and to the real bond of community with others (SC 247/296).

But already, in this conception of love, we can see that its character is bound up with a morality of retreat from the modern world. It is impossible for love to find any existence on the terrain of atomistic individuals who express themselves in private property. The standpoint of atomism already presupposes the moment of reflective separation from self and community. Reflective rationality is the knife that severs, that cuts into and distances us from any previous experience of unity we might have had. And private property is the expression of that separated self, and its nature considered only as appetite and idiosyncrasy. Even if common possession is posited—"community of goods is still only the right of one or other of the two to the thing" (FL 308/382). What the lovers genuinely share as a unity cannot be the relation to the external, dead objects that belong to them. As a living relation, love cannot penetrate the lifeless world of things. Seeking to find its relation to the other, it encounters the impenetrable wall of property, the boundary of the other's ego in which it can share nothing, and retreats.

Thus to find unity again love must go *behind* the separative principle of reflective thought and its expression in private property. Unlike the unity of individuals in ancient Greek society, in the shared ethical substance that constitutes their being, the unity of love is implicit and undeveloped, lying *beneath* the actual existence of individuals in the world of property relations. To attain the unity of love, then, is necessarily to strip away the world of property that hides and smothers the true relation to the other. And because the world of

which the followers of Jesus were a part was so completely dominated by property relations, because there seemed to be no space for love to express itself there, opposition to that world became a fundamental feature of the community. The purity of the union could only be preserved by withdrawal. Hence "Jesus required his friends to forsake father, mother, and everything in order to avoid entry into a league with the profane world" (SC 236/386).

Nevertheless, by such a retreat, the early Christians *could* find the unity they were looking for. And it is in Hegel's discussion of the "culmination" of the community in the notion of the "Kingdom of God" that we can understand how such a community of love was achieved and how it represented the experience of the divine in the finite lives of individuals.

"The Kingdom of God": The Unity of Finite and Infinite

For Hegel, Jesus is not to be understood literally as the son of a transcendent God, but as representing the unity of the finite and the infinite, the idea that there is an infinite principle that exists in this life, a principle of unity with which we can come into contact and through which we can find the deeper truth and meaning of existence. But because individuals were so broken from any experience of the infinite in the Roman world, because they could not find any divine in their own selves, they required the figure of Jesus as a way of coming to consciousness of the divine within, as an intermediary step in the achievement of genuine love. Faith in Jesus is this intermediary step.

Belief in Jesus as an embodiment of the divine stems, on the one hand, from a felt absence in one's own life, from the feeling of being broken from the whole of life, and on the other hand from a recognition that Jesus represents this unity of life, this infinite principle that exists in a finite form. This was not a procedure of the rational understanding; rather the individual must "grasp the communication with the depths of his own spirit" (SC 256/306). Faith is "a knowledge of spirit through spirit," a sensing of the infinite in the other (SC 239/309). But such a recognition presupposes also a sensing of the infinite in oneself. Indeed, faith is "only possible if in the believer himself there is a divine element which rediscovers itself, its own nature, in that on which it believes, *even if it be unconscious that what it has found is its own nature*" (SC 266/313 [my emphasis]). Jesus is the concrete embodiment of an existence that is separated and over against us, and yet that is implicitly within us.

Beyond this intermediary step of the love of Jesus is envisioned a "culmination," an achievement of complete oneness among the followers. This final stage is an achieving of independence from the objective existence of Jesus. Jesus went against the notion of himself as "personality," an "individuality," "for the ground of such an individuality would be an absolute particularity of his being in opposition to theirs" (SC 271/316). The living link of faith that

must be strengthened is one that allows no exclusive individuality, no difference. The culminating relationship that Jesus sought with his friends was that complete overcoming of the subject-object, self-other separation in love. It is in this unity of individuals with one another that the true meaning of Jesus is realized: "Where two or three are united in my spirit . . . then I am in the midst of them, and so is my spirit" (ibid.).

A further illustration of this notion of unity is found in the unity of lovers. The joining of the two persons is not a conceptual unity, a putting together of two separate egos, but a becoming as one: "It is a *living* link that is said to be something divine" (ibid.). The lovers are separated only in the sense of their individuation as mortal bodies. But even this they strive to overcome in the act of love.²⁰

What we see in this notion is that a complete love requires the moment of separation and difference, which must be worked through if love is to achieve its highest development. In his "Fragment on Love" Hegel expresses this most clearly. Love entails the encountering and overcoming of differences in the other, a mutual giving up of personality. The more differences, the more particularities the lovers encounter in one another, the more aspects of themselves they can reunify and the deeper love can become. "[Love] seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life. What in the first instance is most the individual's own is united into the whole in the lover's touch and contact; consciousness of a separate self disappears, and all distinction between the lovers is annulled" (FL 302–08/Nohl 378–82).²¹

We can see here the distinction from Platonic love, which is love of the beautiful only and which ultimately seeks to leave the realm of finite embodiment behind. In Hegel's notion of love the finite realm is not a mere stepping stone to the infinite but is its ultimate dwelling place. This is why physical love plays a central role in Hegel's conception, whereas for Plato it is an inferior expression.

The developed experience of unity with one's fellow human beings was the true spirit of Christianity according to Hegel and the culmination of existence that Jesus preached. A community of individuals who love one another is the true "Kingdom of God" and not some otherworldly or transcendent existence. Love, as an experience of the infinite, is an infinite that can live only in and through the finite. Even as each member of the community must die, the bond of love that unites them will live on. And it is this bond that gives truth and meaning to a mortal existence.

In Hegel's discussion of the kind of unity that Christian love achieves—the unity of reason and emotion, of self and other, of finite and infinite—we

can see the ways in which it constitutes, for him, the overcoming of a morality that subjugates feeling, of an atomistic society that ties us together through the cold principle of right, and of a religion that strips the world of any spiritual significance. And in portraying it with the beauty and the feeling that he does, it is clear that he has a profound investment in the notion that it might have worked. But already in the analysis we can see the seeds of its failure. For in retreating behind the world of private property relations, behind the self of reflective rationality that knows only its own idiosyncrasies and differences, love fails truly to overcome reflective reasoning. Rather it turns its back upon the latter. The principle of reflective rationality that love was meant to overcome, in fact turns out to be the "fate" that continues to plague it. And it is out of Hegel's confrontation with the clash between love and reason that we can begin to comprehend the motivating impetus of his mature philosophy.

THE FAILURE OF LOVE AS OVERCOMING

We have already seen that the community of love depended fundamentally on a retreat from the world of private property relations that dominated the early Christian era. Because there was no space for love to express itself in the world of things, where one encounters only the idiosyncrasy of different selves, the preservation of the bond of love required an ethic of withdrawal. The clash between the world of Christian love and the world dominated by private property relations has been emphasized by some commentators as the chief cause of the failure of the community.²² And certainly by their opposition to the world the Christian community of love did find itself conditioned by that world. By dismissing the world as polluted, they ironically gave it tremendous importance.

The problem of withdrawal, however, was not in itself the ultimate cause of the failure of the community. For the early Christians, in spite of this withdrawal, did have a positive life. They defined themselves by common ownership of goods, and the love of Jesus that bound them together expressed itself in their love for each other and in the single activity of spreading the faith, with its shared pleasures in praying, believing, and hoping. The real cause of the failure of the community thus was not so much withdrawal as it was the deeper antagonism between love and reflective rationality *within the modern self*. Ultimately, the escape from the divisiveness of reflective rationality and its expression in private property could not be sustained by a strategy of withdrawal. For reflective reasoning was not simply an external, governing factor in the world; it had penetrated their very selves, and it is this deeper penetration, this irrevocable change in the self of the modern individual, that was the chief cause of the failure of the community of love.

We have already considered how love was a rational emotion, a transcendence of the position of reflective thought because it is a real capturing of the unity of life, of which reflective thought had been incapable. Nevertheless, reflective rationality remains a reality for the subject who participates in a relation of love. In the eyes of reflective rationality, love is merely an emotion, something subjective, the other of thought. As Hegel says in his 1800 Fragment, the relation of reflection to emotion, however divine that emotion may be, “is only consciousness of feeling, in which reflection reflects on emotion but each is separate from the other” (FS 314/349). The reason imbedded in love feels this inadequacy, feels that it is conditioned by reflective thought in this way. If it is to be a true knowledge of the whole, then it knows that it must bring reflection into the experience of the unity. Reflective understanding, with all the oppositions it entails, has emerged as a part of the truth of life and must be accounted for.

How does love deal with the reality of reflective rationality and address its claims so that it can bring that rationality into the unity? It does so through the *objectification* of the feeling of love in a way that can satisfy the reflective understanding of the truth and reality of love; it renders love a knowable object. Otherwise, love’s knowledge will always be in competition with the knowledge of the intellect that cannot grasp it and will always be conditioned by that knowledge. To truly harmonize feeling and intellect, then, the divine must appear, “the invisible spirit must be united with something visible” (SC 291/333). This, says Hegel, is “the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge to religion” (SC 289/332). Thus the religious object is to be the objectification of the subjective experience of the infinite. Religion, and not philosophy, is to be the completion of the knowledge of love, its fulfillment, and preservation.

Religion is a rational objectification of the experience of the divine in life. But we are dealing in religion with a different kind of reason. It is not the same as a conceptual abstraction. It is not the reason of reflective understanding for which every object is a thing that can be united with others only under an abstract category, by means of a barren universal. The religious object is constructed “by means of fancy,” by reason in its *imaginative* use, a higher form of reason (inspired by Kant’s *Vernunft*) that transcends the categories of the understanding (ibid.). It is through the intellect in its imaginative use that the separation between reflection and emotion is overcome and that the truth of the religious object can be comprehended.

For the first Christians, the religious object was an immediate objectification of the feeling of love, a symbol of the unity of life. While they could not attain such objectification in the world around them, in relations that had been so despiritualized, according to them, they did achieve it in religious worship. It was in the figure of the individual Jesus that they initially found

such an object. He was the image of the unity, of the pure life in which believers implicitly felt the truth of their own life. And it was through their imaginative faculty that they could recognize him as such, that they could, even if it be unconsciously, know the unity between themselves and him.

But the object was inadequate, because they focused on the fact of his separate individuality, on that which was irrelevant to the truth of Jesus. By their understanding they *saw* him as separate from their own selves, but by love they *felt* his true reality as the unity of divine and human, law and being, self and other. Thus with his death they were devastated by the understanding's belief that "[h]e had taken everything into the grave with him" (SC 291/333). But by the intuition of love they felt his truth persisting after death amongst them, and it was in the resurrected Jesus that they found their true religious object, that "love found the objectification of its oneness" (SC 292/334).

The resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the genuine union of spirit and body, the overcoming of the finite human form as a fundamentally exclusive particularity. The real truth of Jesus was his unity with life, the unity of the finite and the infinite, of this life with the divine. And this truth was realized in the living bond of the finite human community. The finite Jesus *had* to die, for it was not he himself that was the unity of God and human, of spirit and body; rather he only represented that. The personal, individual Jesus was not in the end what was to be immortalized, but his existence as the unity of love, the spirit of the whole that transcends the form of separate individuality (a form indeed imposed by reflection) and that goes on living in the finite community of which he had been a part. And with his death and resurrection, the individuals of the community could come to comprehend this. The resurrected Jesus was a better sign of the unity that Jesus represented, of his real existence as the love of the finite community, which enabled the members of his community to make the final transition to the higher truth, to the fully developed knowledge of love.

However, the religious object, the objectification of the knowledge of love, had an immanent tendency to become positivistic, to be understood as an *external* bond uniting them. Ironically, this tendency was partly a product of the temporary success of the community and it points to another intrinsic difficulty in sustaining a community of love—the problem of size.

It has already been discussed how a truly developed love entailed the encountering and overcoming of the differences in the other. The intensity and completeness of such a developed love means that it is exclusive and indifferent to others; it *necessarily* restricts itself to a small number of people. Yet the task of the Christians was to extend love to others, to proselytize and bring more people into the spirit of the community. A large group can live a shared life and experience a "common spirit." But it is not the spirit of love; rather it

depends on similarity of need, a common sharing of objects and a striving after common goals. And the early Christians would not compromise the spirit of love as the principle of their community by engaging in activities outside love's boundaries. As the group expanded there could be no hope of working through individual differences and incorporating them into a higher unity. "For the sake of a petty interest, a difference of character in some detail, love would have been changed into hatred, and a severance from God would have followed" (SC 281/323). The only way for them to ward off this danger, says Hegel, was "by an inactive and undeveloped love, i.e., by a love which, though love is the highest life, remains unliving" (SC 381/325). Rather than being "surrendered" in the higher unity of love, particularity must simply be removed from the possibility of expression.

Because the love of the Christians remained undeveloped, a mere "sensing of a life similar to one's own," as the group enlarged its love became more and more fragile, less and less alive. The undeveloped nature of this love was what caused the Christians to seek an external source of unity. "Love itself did not create a thoroughgoing union between them, and therefore they needed another bond which would link the group together and in which also the group would find the certainty of the love of all" (294/336). This bond was the "mundane reality" of the factual Jesus that the Christians continued to read into the purity of the symbol, "hanging on the deified one like lead on the feet and drawing him down to earth" (SC 293/335). They remained attached to the memories of the individual, his activities and his death. They could not sustain the certainty of the truth of love without clinging to the historical, factual reality of Jesus as the criterion for the recognition of their love. The harsh opposition between spirit and body, which the resurrected Jesus was meant to overcome, remained, in the tendency to regard the sign as a "vague hovering," "midway between heaven's infinity, where there are no barriers, and earth, this collection of plain restrictions" (ibid.). Rather than simply the love uniting them, they found in the religious object a factual reality, a common master and teacher, to bind them together. The divine was something given to them, an alien spirit, an external master, not what they themselves had become, not the true realization of freedom.

It remains ambiguous whether, for Hegel, any relationship of love, no matter how developed, could be strong enough to withstand the crystallizing power of reflective rationality. Any externalization of love, any attempt to express its meaning for thought, will be subjected by this reason to misconstrual, "because every form of life can be objectified by the intellect and then apprehended as its object, as a cut-and-dried fact" (SC 288/331). Reflective thought is inherently incapable of comprehending love. As Hegel later says in *Philosophy of Right*, "Love . . . is the most tremendous contradiction; the Understanding cannot resolve it" (§158A). And while love in this mature

work is seen to find objective expression in the marriage ceremony, in family capital, and most ultimately in children, even here reflective rationality is at odds with it; for it is the development of this principle in the child and its legal recognition that is responsible for the "ethical dissolution" of the family (PR §177). Furthermore, as the knowledge of the Absolute at the level of feeling, the bond of love in the family only ultimately finds its vindication through the rational knowledge achieved at the level of the state.

Hence while Hegel does point to the problem of size as a central one in the demise of the Christian community, while it is clear that a true community of love must be small and developed in nature, a look at the later work confirms that the deeper antagonism that love could not resolve is the antagonism of reflective thought. This is evidenced in "The Spirit of Christianity" by the implications of the progress of reflective rationality for the fate of the community. The early Christians *did* find the objectification of their love in the resurrected Jesus. They *were* capable of understanding the truth of that symbol as their love given shape. But this is only because they were less intellectual than we. The crudeness of the union between divine and human in the symbol, a seemingly direct connection between Jesus's actual body and the ascendance, was compensated for among the early Christians by this lower development of reflective rationality. "They were breathed upon by the oriental spirit; the separation of spirit and body was less complete for them; they regarded fewer things as objects and so handed fewer things over to intellectual treatment" (SC 297/334). Their imagination was more capable of finding in the resurrected Jesus the true unification of spirit and body, feeling and objectivity, and thus of satisfying the rational self. But even for them the cleft in the symbol between God and man was there, so the grasp on the unity was very tentative. The longing for religion, for a completion of the sense of unity with life, remained. "[E]ven in its highest dreams, even in the transports of the most finely organized love-breathing souls, it is always confronted by the individual, by something objective and exclusively personal. In all the depths of their beautiful feelings those who felt this longing pined for union with him, though this union, because he is an individual, is eternally impossible" (SC 300/341).

The continuance of the opposition between God and man experienced by the early followers of Jesus has plagued the entire history of the Christian church, who in its consciousness, if not in its feeling, has seen God variously as friendly, hating, or indifferent to the world, but always as opposed. And as we grew more intellectual, the incapacity to see any spiritual truth in life was extended to our incapacity to see it in the religious object. The opposition between God and human in the symbol was deepened by the imposition of reflective thought, until that, too, became simply a spiritless object.

Hegel's recounting of the ultimate failure of religious objectification, its tendency to become positivistic, confirms that the deeper problem that love

faced all along, in an era of modernity, was the confrontation with reflective reason. While love did constitute an overcoming of the negative divisions of reflective rationality, it was never a complete overcoming. Because reflective rationality ultimately separates itself from love and stands outside it, unable to comprehend or do justice to the deeper truth of existence, love cannot finally transcend that rationality. Yet this reason, and its centrality to the modern subject, cannot be denied.

CONCLUSION: LOVE, WILL, AND THE TASK OF THE MATURE PHILOSOPHY

The fate of the Christian community appears to be of tragic dimensions, reflecting the fundamental clash between love and reflective rationality in the modern self, and the apparent triumph of the latter, with all of the loss that this entails. For Hegel, however, this clash and this triumph are not ultimate. While he must turn his back on the notion of a community of love, this rejection is not, in the end, an abandonment of the truth of love but only an abandonment of its immediate *form*. Love now becomes only the beginning point. To reclaim life, to actualize its fundamental unity, is to be a task of the *will*.

It is in this early essay that Hegel is being forced to come to grips with the modern principle of will. For will is precisely what makes its emergence with the reflective separation of thought from nature, of individual from ethical substance, and with the concomitant demand of the individual for self-determination. In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel is explicit that will must not be considered separately from thought, as if it were another faculty, but that the two are one and the same (§4, 4A). For will is the self-assertion of the individual that legitimizes itself according to the notion that we are rational, thinking beings. And the assertion of self in private property, which appears so inimical to the bond of love, is the first, most primitive expression of that will. In his mature work, then, Hegel will not only reluctantly acknowledge the will, as he does here, but will actively embrace it as a mode of realization of the Absolute. And it is this reality, that the Absolute must include the expression of difference and particularity, one mode of which exists as private property, that he is already coming to embrace in his famous statement in the 1800 "Fragment of a System": "Life is the union of union and non-union" (FS 312/347).

But after witnessing Hegel's deep attachment to the principle of love as the fountain of autonomy and the overcoming of the division between reason and nature in the modern self, it should be very difficult to believe that he so easily abandoned it to the concept of a will driven purely by the logic of necessity or by the need to actualize its own natural potentialities.²³ Rather, love is

implicitly behind the movements of the will that we witness in the later works. The drive of the feudal consciousness in *Phenomenology* toward a unity with its objective world, the achievement of reconciliation between the judging and the acting conscience in that same work, the expression of the modern will in private property and in the subsequent manifestations that Hegel traces in *Philosophy of Right*, the need of that will to objectify its certainty of itself in the world, and the drive of the individual of civil society towards the knowledge of its unity with others, all these can *only* be understood if the will already has some deeply rooted conviction of its own inherent significance, of its implicit unity with the world and with other individuals around it. And these convictions presuppose the knowledge of love. For as we have seen, love is precisely the knowledge of the unity of self and other, of self and world, and of self with an infinite principle.

Thus while the will, in its very coming into being, may have separated itself from the knowledge of love, it is nevertheless unconsciously driven by it. And this unfolding of love is precisely the process of "History," according to Hegel: "The process displayed in History is only the manifestation of Religion as Human Reason—the production of the religious principle *which dwells in the heart of man*, under the form of Secular Freedom. Thus the discord between *the inner life of the heart* and the actual world is removed" (PH 335 [my emphasis]). It is to a consideration of the ongoing role of love in Hegel's mature works, then, of its fundamental place in his philosophy of the modern will, that we must now turn.