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## HEGELIAN RENDITION OF THE *DEUS REVELATUS* OF CHRISTIANITY

Hegel, rarely ahistorical and never an advocate of the 'innocent' phenomenon, recognizes that the question of the essence of Christianity is a matter of interpretive decision in a hermeneutical field where one's selection competes with other possible choices. The hermeneutical field has both historical depth and contemporary spread. Indeed, the Enlightenment and immediate Post-Enlightenment situation is one of interpretive metastasis, and the resulting conflict of interpretation urgently demands adjudication. Hegel's specific act of adjudication constitutes an interpretation of extraordinary complexity, appealing on different occasions to distinct aspects of the Christian tradition for support, at one time St. Paul, another Luther, another the varieties of mysticism represented by Eckhart, Joachim de Fiore and Jacob Boehme.<sup>1</sup> While Hegel's appeal is historically dense, it is also discriminating. In particular, detailed differentiation of the object 'Christianity' presupposes a primary circumscription constituted by the exclusion of any ontotheological orientation that does not take revelation to be absolutely crucial to the definition of Christianity. Hegel finds much of post-Reformation theology and almost all post-Kantian ontotheology lacking for this reason. If revelation means anything, he argues, it means that the divine bridges the gap between infinite and finite and makes itself known. Unfortunately the basic tendency of modern theology is just the contrary: the stress falls heavily upon the absolute transcendence and radical unknowability of the divine.

Hegelian determination of the object Christianity is further specified when Hegel rules that the revelatory essence of Christianity implies that at its center is a God who reveals, makes known. If Christianity, as with other religions, is defined by its object,<sup>2</sup> this object is defined by transparency and knowability. The self-revealing God of Christianity finds its adequate discursive expression in the term *Spirit* (*Geist*). For Hegel, Spirit does not denote a particular aspect of the divine, either a particular person of the Trinity as theological

orthodoxy would have it<sup>3</sup> or a specific set of acts, but rather the divine considered in its entirety and exhaustive compass of its acts. More succinctly and more positively expressed, Spirit is the title Hegel gives to the divine considered as an encompassing act or process of revelation. Quite obviously this view is not standard: if it does not subvert, it certainly torques the ontotheological tradition or its Judeo-Christian mainstream. Positing process of the divine does not in principle, however, reduce the divine to time and history, even if it is, in fact, crucial to Hegel's ontotheological proposal that the divine be seen in a much closer relationship to time and history than traditionally conceived. What the positing of process does imply is that, at an infra-structural level, the divine is plot, story, or narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>4</sup> Thus, whatever Hegelian criticisms of narrative varieties of thought in the ontotheological tradition in general and the Judeo-Christian theological tradition in particular—and these criticisms are perspicacious and eloquent<sup>5</sup>—with appropriate reserve Hegel can be said to read Spirit as designating a narrative elaboration in which the divine moves from an initial state of indetermination to a state of full determination by means of a process understood more as a drama than quiescent evolution.

Confessing himself a Christian philosopher, Hegel opines that the Christian story of creation, incarnation, redemption, and sanctification is at the core of the drama of divine elaboration, is central to any theological account of Christianity, and is inexpungible from any philosophical redescription, what I would prefer to call "speculative rewriting." But Hegel rows against the then contemporary current of hostility to dogma in insisting not only that the doctrine of the Trinity—albeit subject to emendation—is a useful symbol of the self-revealing God confessed in Christianity, but that it should, in fact, be construed as both its key symbol or representation (*Vorstellung*), and the pivot for Christianity's positive, rehabilitating relationship with philosophy. For Hegel, then, the narrative process of the revelation of the divine, inclusive of, but not exhausted by, the revelatory matrix of the Christian story, is best understood in trinitarian terms, or best understood as a trinitarian unfolding.

The three elements of circumscription touched on above will occupy us in this chapter. Section 1 focuses upon Hegel's basic circumscription of Christianity as the religion of revelation and his drawing a decisive line of demarcation between his own understanding and modern interpretations that champion the unknowability of the divine and absolutize the distinction between the infinite and finite. Sec-

tion 2 thematizes the narrative, process character of the *Deus Revelatus* Hegel espies at the center of Christian faith and confession. Section 3 touches in a preliminary way on Hegel's appeal to the Trinity as the lens through which the narrative unfolding of the divine must be seen.

### **Section 1.1 Against Negative Theology**

For Hegel, the Romantic Intuitionists define a modern thought-current that is, at the very least, latently anti-intellectual and, he would argue, ultimately antitheological in inspiration and commitment. His debate with Romantic Intuitionism, or with key intellectual figures which he will later see as a group sharing common assumptions, gets an airing as early as *Faith and Knowledge (FK)* (1802). By the time of *PS* (1807), Hegel has determined both the full compass of inclusion and his primary targets. The *Enc* (#61–78), *LPR* (1 & 3), and to a lesser extent, *LHP* 3 do no more than to bring to full explicitness arguments that found a more rhetorical and tendentious expression in the Jena text. Regarding thinkers as apparently distinct as Jacobi, Schelling, and Schleiermacher as each offering at a fundamental level the same rendition of Christianity, theology, and philosophy, he feels called upon to demur. He objects on both subjective and objective grounds to what he regards as Romantic Intuitionism's basic axiom: no knowledge, that is, no discursive knowledge, of God is either actual or possible. Hegel retorts: "That one can know nothing at all of God is an empty standpoint" (*LPR* 1 1824 E 266, G 173); it is empty because it ignores, or, at the minimum, fails to take adequate account of, the full stretch of reason. To the degree to which Romantic Intuitionism understands itself as confirming and translating Christianity for and into the modern cultural milieu, Hegel diagnoses Romantic Intuitionism to be in complete contradiction to the central thrust of the Christian message it is philosophy's task to safeguard. Hegel loudly insists that the thesis of the noncognizability of God to have no foundation in Christianity:

I declare such a point of view and such a result to be directly opposed to the whole nature of the Christian religion, according to which we should know God cognitively, God's nature and essence, and should esteem this cognition above all else. (Ibid. 1821 MS E 88, G7)

From the section on revealed Religion in the *Enc* comes a collateral asseveration:

These assertions (and more than assertions they are not) are the more illogical, because made within a religion which is expressly called the revealed; for according to them it would rather be the religion in which nothing of God was revealed, in which he had not revealed himself, and those belonging to it would be the heathen 'who know not God'. (#564, Miller p. 298)

Not only is Romantic Intuitionism in contradiction to scriptural injunction (Matthew 5:48) (*LPR 1* 1821 MS E 87–88, G 6–7), but also to classical theology which, whatever its other failings, wholeheartedly endorses scriptural affirmation of the potential for knowledge of God (ibid. 1824 E 299–300, G 203–204; E 309, G 213). No such *sacrificium intellectus* can be condoned (ibid. 1821 E 107, G 26). If the passage cited above from the *Enc* (#564) in large measure connotes a structural contrast between a positive theology faithful to Christianity and its revelation center and a negative theology unfaithful to it, Hegel also places romantic Intuitionism within the historic field of Christianity and its emergence and diagnoses Romantic Intuitionism as constituting a deformation, indeed a regression. Romantic Intuitionism attempts to avoid the consequences of the revolution of Christianity (*LPR 1* 1824 E 300, G 204). In essence, the theology or ontotheology of Romantic Intuitionism is nothing more than a form of idolatry rendered passé by the emergence of the confession of Christianity. The *Enc* is clear on this point:

If it were needful to win back and secure the bare belief that there is a God, or even to create it, we might well wonder at the poverty of the age which can see again in the merest pittance of religious consciousness, and which in its church has sunk so low as to worship at the altar long ago that stood in Athens dedicated to the 'Unknown God' (*dem Unbekannten Gotte*). (*Enc* #73, Wallace p. 107, *GL8*:179)

Almost invariably Hegel is at his most sarcastic and vituperative when Jacobi is under discussion. For Hegel, Jacobi is a *bête noire* who symbolizes all the excesses of Romantic Intuitionism. The attack is relentless and unsparing. Jacobi assumes the status of victim in *FK*,<sup>6</sup> and is still a victim in much later texts such as the *Enc* (#61–78) and *LPR 1* (1821 MS E 254, G 162). In *PR* and *LPR* Jacobi is less exposed to the raw chill of Hegel's polemics as he appears to function as one example among others of what Hegel presumes to be the consensus negative

theology view. All of Hegel's most significant objections to Jacobi are elaborated in the early text. Hegel finds Jacobi's aphoristic esprit thoroughly uncongenial (E 117) and agrees with Kant respecting proper philosophical style and method. More importantly, he disagrees with the content of Jacobi's work. Already setting the stage for his later criticism of Schleiermacher, Hegel deplors Jacobi's substitution of feeling and instinct for reason (E 118). The consequences of this substitution from Hegel's point of view are disastrous. We are asked to make a sacrifice of intellect, forbidden any knowledge of the infinite or God. Hegel is anything but urbane in making these fundamental criticisms. In what appears to be a homologization of the relation of Hölderlin's *Empedocles* to fire as the *prima materia* and Jacobi's suggested relation of subjectivity and the divine infinite,<sup>7</sup> Hegel snidely refers to the burning of the midges of subjectivity in the fire of the Absolute (E 141). Hegel has no taste for such Empedoclean-like annihilation on the level of cognition and thinks it betrays the real purpose and necessity of philosophy. The real purpose and necessity of philosophy—and here Hegel is already forging an alliance between philosophy and theology—is, as Epictetus declared, to praise God, and knowledge of God is the highest form of praise (E 118). Hegel will make essentially the same point later in the *Enc* (#62, 63) and in *LPR 1* (1821 MS E 84, G 4; 1827 E 153, G 63–64) when he twins worship (*Gottesdienst*) and knowledge. Knowledge, i.e., discursive knowledge, is assigned by Jacobi exclusively to the finite horizon, with a kind of nonrational cognition going into emergency operation with respect to the transcendent beyond. Even here, however, no genuine contact between finite and infinite is achieved, just the bare conviction of existence. The *what* of the divine infinite is not and cannot be disclosed (*Enc* #73). To be persuaded otherwise is to ignore, according to Jacobi, the definitive restrictions to the limits of knowledge established by Kant. In general for Hegel, then, Jacobi's irrationalist proposal sunders epistemological continuity and vitiates ontological coherence. Jacobi's position is, in principle, an ontotheology of *Jenseits* in which the divine infinite is unreachable and unknown. When Hegel in the *Enc* denominates Romantic Intuitionism as negative theology, or theology of the Unknown God, it is probably the case that Jacobi is foremost in his mind, for it is Jacobi who sets Romantic Intuitionism's reductionist baseline, and Hegel is increasingly unwilling to grant that other, more subtle, more creative, Romantic Intuitionists escape this baseline's inertial pull.

The critique of the Romantic Intuitionists extends further than Jacobi. In the scintillating preface to *PS*, in addition to Jacobi,

Schelling is a central object of attack. Hegel is not unaware that distinctions could plausibly be made within Intuitionist thought, for instance, that Schelling's *intellectual intuition* is not equivalent to Jacobi's *empirical intuition*, and, indeed, appears to controvert Jacobi's premise of metaphysical incommensurability. A distinction Hegel would have been prepared to grant in the period of *FK* and *DE* is rescinded in *PS*.<sup>8</sup> With the discovery of his own philosophical voice, difference, for Hegel, is much less significant than similarity. In the context of Schelling's transcendental Idealism, the controversion of the premise of incommensurability is, in any event, more apparent than real. Intellectual intuition does not issue in knowledge. Moreover, the postulated identity of the reflective self and the Absolute rules out the possibility of both distinction *from* and *within* the Absolute. It is the latter debit of intellectual intuition that spawns the unforgettable one-liner: the Schellingian Absolute, or more generally the  $A = A$  of Identity Philosophy, is the night in which all cows are black (*PS* #16). If the estimate of Schelling's philosophy is here arguably unfair, as Werner Marx has contended,<sup>9</sup> it is, nonetheless, interesting to note Hegelian identification of Identity Philosophy's theological tendency. As Hegel sees it, Identity-Philosophy definitely belongs within the negative theology manifold. The divine infinite is hidden; knowledge is ignorance. Consequently, there is no meaningful transcending of the finite-infinite gap of separation. The theological or ontotheological situation is, from a Hegelian point of view, ultimately no different than in Jacobi for whom faith at once authors and authorizes the transition from one self-enclosed sphere to another. The leap into the beyond under the aegis of intellectual intuition establishes no intrinsic connection between orders of reality hermetically sealed from each other. Schelling, then, it is implied, leaves the basic parameters of Jacobi's negative theology intact. And such a theology has no warrant as an interpretation of Christianity which discloses the truth of reality, even if the modality or form of disclosure is capable of being surpassed. Though the tone is more respectful in later works, especially in *LHP* 3,<sup>10</sup> nothing written there suggests that Hegel has withdrawn his basic criticisms of Schelling's ontotheological position. Ignoring the later post-Identity-Philosophy work of Schelling, Hegel in *LHP* 3 simply focuses on the earlier Schelling much indebted to Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. If from the vantage point of his later ontotheological production Schelling christens his earlier work negative philosophy, Hegel at first implicitly, then explicitly, names it the worship of the Unknown God.

Schleiermacher, too, is increasingly identified as remaining within the negative theology parameters of Romantic Intuitionism, and over a period he replaces Jacobi and Schelling as Hegel's main debating partner with respect to the definition of Christianity, theology, and the relation of philosophy to both. Already in *PS* in the section on the Unhappy Consciousness (*das unglückliche Bewusstsein*) Hegel takes a swipe at the nondiscursive archeology proposed by Schleiermacher in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1800).<sup>11</sup> He turns Schleiermacher against himself in suggesting a negative connotation to religiosity construed under the aegis of music as both its basic metaphor and key modality of expression. If Schleiermacher is understood, and to some extent understands himself,<sup>12</sup> to be forging an alliance between a kind of mysticism and a dogmatically thin Christianity, Hegel sanctions neither the kind of mysticism, the brand of Christianity, nor their relation. The section on Revelatory Religion (sect. 7) in *PS* could be construed as Hegel's constructive counterproposal.

Hegelian criticisms both broaden and deepen in the Berlin lectures on religion (*LPR*). The broad ideological drift of these lectures is responsive to Schleiermacher's stature in the academy, with the 1824 lectures responding directly to the publication of Schleiermacher's *magnum opus*, the *Glaubenslehre*.<sup>13</sup> It is Hegel's general opinion that, whatever its intention, Schleiermacher's theology of feeling (*Gefühl*) effectively displaces thought from the center of Christianity. And paralleling his tactic of refusing to clearly distinguish between Schelling and Jacobi, Hegel refuses to differentiate Jacobi and Schleiermacher. Given Hegel's clearly elaborated distinction between feeling (*Gefühl*) and intuition (*Empfindung*), as Hodgson reminds us,<sup>14</sup> this strategy of homologization, perhaps most clearly in evidence in the 1824 Lectures (*LPR* 1 1824 E 266 ff), must be construed as rhetorical. Having assimilated *Gefühl* to *Empfindung*, Hegel then accuses Schleiermacher's position of the debits of Jacobi's, i.e., empiricism, passivity. Hegel is here deliberately ignoring the radical level of apprehension claimed for *Gefühl* by Schleiermacher. In neither *On Religion* nor the *Glaubenslehre* is 'feeling' construed as an 'ontic' act or passion.<sup>15</sup> If feeling is characterized by receptivity, nevertheless, its proper domain is the depth rather than the surface level, the ontological rather than the purely ontic—to invoke an influential Heideggerian distinction. Feeling may, perhaps, be symptomed by and deciphered from passions (and actions) on the ordinary level of experience and response, but feeling, specifically the feeling of absolute dependence upon a divine whence, cannot as such be identified with a specific discrete passion. In the

Hegelian misreading of Schleiermacher's axial principle, the dogmatic theologian is in the business of countenancing passivity as both an intellectual and ethical value. Hegel believes it self-evident that, posited as an intellectual value, passivity reneges on the autonomy of thought that is definingly human and religious, just as its positing as an ethical value represents a betrayal of modern culture with its emphasis upon activity.

Schleiermacher is also under attack in the Introduction to *LHP*. But perhaps the most sustained attack of all is to be found in Hegel's foreword to the rationalist apologist H. Fr. W. Hinrichs's *Die Religion in inneren Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft* (1822).<sup>16</sup> The fundamentals of Hegelian disagreement do not differ in substance from those advanced in *LPR 1*, and the opposition of perspectives is again drawn in quite broad strokes. The flaw in Schleiermacher's position is that it does not and cannot extend beyond the self (pp. 231–232) and can offer no real description of the object or objective correlative (i.e., God) intuited or felt. Feeling, in any event, effectively excludes reason whose traditional status in philosophy and theology as the differentiating and truly specifying characteristic of human being cannot, Hegel thinks, be challenged (ibid. p. 229). Indeed, if Schleiermacher is correct, Hegel concludes then "a dog would be the best Christian for it possesses the feeling of its dependence in the highest degree and lives merely in feeling" (ibid. p. 238). For Hegel then, the Schleiermachian theological scheme, if indeed it can be called theology in the full and proper sense (ibid. p. 242), is purely negative. Within such a scheme God as such is the unknowable (ibid. p. 232).

Hegel's misreading of Schleiermacher occludes but, nonetheless, cannot fully hide issues of profound and direct importance to theology, philosophy, and their relation. Hegelian declaration notwithstanding, Schleiermacher is not in the strictest sense an antirationalist. Reason is affirmed and accorded a role. Though instrumental in character, reason can, and in fact does, express and translate the feeling of dependence and its privileged expressions into rational technical-discourse.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the issue between Hegel and Schleiermacher ultimately concerns, not so much excising reason, as setting limits to its legitimate deployment. Hegel presumes Schleiermacher to be much too restrictive in assigning to discursive thought merely an instrumental role, and the fear that guides Schleiermacher's restriction he regards as unfounded. Thought is only dangerous to Christianity when its species is that of *Verstand*, the freezing, hypostatizing, analytic understanding. Thought, considered under its most capacious,



flexible, and synthetic aspect of *Vernunft*, constitutes no threat to either Christianity or theology, and its functioning, therefore, does not have to be rigorously controlled. Thought, considered under this second aspect, Hegel suggests, is innocent of the charge of insensitivity to Christian confession and its relatively first-order reflection; indeed, it is intrinsically theological in essence. The disagreement between Schleiermacher and Hegel is here systemic. Yet, on a purely formal level, it can be said that both Schleiermacher and Hegel belong to the Anselmian tradition in theology.<sup>18</sup> Both posit continuity between faith and conceptual articulation, their disagreement being focused in the latitude accorded, or not accorded, to the functioning of conceptual articulation. This disagreement, in turn, can be regarded as a function of two other decisions: (1) a decision concerning whether the perspective from which the relation between faith and conceptual articulation is most adequately viewed is archeological or teleological; (2) a decision concerning whether the presence of conceptual articulation signifies necessity on the level of thought (*Denkennotwendigkeit*) or possibility (*Denkenmöglichkeit*).<sup>19</sup> Both of these decisions will be briefly analyzed, though the emphasis will fall heavily on the former.

The perspective from which Schleiermacher views the relationship of faith (in his case, feeling) and conceptual articulation is unequivocally archeological. While conceptual articulation is not unimportant, it is a decidedly secondary affair depending upon, and referring back to, a primitive religiosity that exists at the bedrock level of human being, Christianly formed and constituted human being in particular. The case is otherwise with Hegel. Hegel announces the Anselmian style of his theological-philosophical enterprise in *LPR 1* (1821 MS E 211, G 119; 1827 E 154, G 65–66) by playing upon the etymological connections between ‘devotion’ (*Andacht*) and ‘thought’ (*Denken*). Yet the emphasis falls not upon the archeological deposit of feeling but rather religiosity’s or faith’s teleological completion, first of all in the representations, i.e., *Vorstellungen*, of dogmatic theology and, ultimately, in philosophy which, Hegel suggests, is self-founding, self-constituting discourse (ibid. 1821 MS E 217–219, G 126–128). Teleologically required, the representations of dogmatic theology are, for Hegel, anything but secondary. Representations are an absolutely indispensable means of and for the expression of truth. In fact, according to Hegel, truth is not fully articulate in modes of expression more basic than dogmatic representation<sup>20</sup> and certainly is not fully articulate in Schleiermacher’s archeological deposit. The distinct emphasis and thrust Hegel provides his elaboration of the relation between the less

articulate and more articulate modes of expression is rendered with particular clarity in the following passage from *LHP*:

Devotion is a feeling of the unity of God and man but it is a thoughtful feeling. Thinking is implied in the word 'devotion'; devotion is a drive towards thought, a thinking, reaching out to unity; a frame of mind adapting itself to the unity.<sup>21</sup> (*LHP* 1 E 124)

Of course, Hegel and Schleiermacher also depart concerning the question of whether the discursive articulation can assume the modality of necessity. Contra Schleiermacher, Hegel suggests that it is precisely the goal of discursive formation to achieve autonomous self-grounding, and thus constitute itself as a discourse of necessity.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the possibility of such a discourse, Schleiermacher is convinced that such a discourse could not be hospitable to Christianity, given its claim of revelation and irreducible historicity.<sup>23</sup> For Schleiermacher, Lessing's broad, ugly ditch between accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason<sup>24</sup> is not crossed, and cannot be crossed, under the banner of Hegelian concept and the promise of preservation contained in Hegelian *Aufhebung*.<sup>25</sup>

There is one further point of dispute between Hegel and Schleiermacher I would like to rehearse here. (The conversation between these thinkers will be renewed in section 3). From Hegel's point of view, Schleiermacher's theology of feeling does not reach the divine as such. While Schleiermacher does posit relationality, the circuit of feeling is so narcissistically self-referential that relationship in any meaningful sense is ruled out. To insist that religion or theology be defined by the genitive (*LPR* 1 1821 MS E 188, G 55) is, in Hegel's view, to take a decisive step beyond Schleiermacher. Again Hegel is hardly being fair to his opposition. If nothing else, however, Schleiermacher serves as a foil by which Hegel's own views gain clarity and definition. Specifically, it is in and through his conversation with Schleiermacher that Hegel comes to see, not only in a sharper way than before the relational nature of religion signaled in the very word,<sup>26</sup> but the constitutive nature of relationality.

For Hegel, then, Romantic Intuitionism's theology of the Unknown God is a modern decadent phenomenon trespassing against the essence of Christianity which, he insists, is revelation. Jacobi, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, each in his own way, is guilty of this trespass. In large part, Hegel's point is descriptive: it is the case that Christianity speaks of a God disclosed to us in the finite and perceived

and received in the spirit. Pneumaticism is, for him, not separable from revelation but, taking his stance from within Lutheran confession, is seen to be a crucial aspect of the overall dynamic of revelation. The point is repeated again and again in Hegel's mature works, especially in *LPR 1*.<sup>27</sup> Yet, it is also the case that in combating the Romantic Intuitionists there are times when Hegel clearly moves beyond the descriptive. Talk of the revelation essence of Christianity shifts to talk of the metaphysical or ontological implausibility (read impossibility) of God *not* revealing Himself. Put more concretely, in the post-Enlightenment agon of definition, Hegel avails of the Platonic construct that God is not envious (*LPR 1* 1821 MS E 103, G 23; *Enc* #564) and cannot fail to disclose himself. Of course, in an obvious sense, Hegel's availing of the construct is purely tactical. In another, nonobvious sense, Hegel has transformed the level of discourse. Hegel is no longer merely arguing that, as a matter of fact, the divine reveals itself; he is engaged in offering ontotheological reasons respecting the *why*. This shift in the level of discourse will be exegeted further in section 2. Here, it is sufficient to make some note of it. What cannot be postponed is a somewhat fuller account of the genealogy of negative theology and its complete ambit.

From Hegel's perspective any account of the genealogy of negative theology's modern style must necessarily take account of Kant. The picture of Kant as the great iconoclast, *der Allzermalende*, is perhaps nothing more than an influential caricature, but there was nothing inconsistent in both accepting the sincerity of Kant's profession that he had limited the claims of knowledge to make room for faith and in seeing that the *First Critique* thoroughly undermined theology's truth claims, which no renovation of the scope and function of reason could correct. Practical reason could certainly function transregulatively, to use James Collins' term,<sup>28</sup> but for Hegel this provides no substitute for the loss of the transregulative use of *theoria*. Theologically, the consequences are disastrous. More serious (because more basic) than the undermining of the integrity of the proofs for God's existence is the skeptical consequence that in the strict sense nothing can be known about God.<sup>29</sup> God can still be affirmed, though now affirmation has the status of a postulate rendered by practical reason. The postulate character of the affirmation dictates among other things that the Kantian *Summum Bonum* cannot legitimately be considered the transcendental equivalent of God as Truth. And correlative to the unknowability of God on the level of *theoria* is the gap which opens up between the infinite and finite, the divine and the human. Hegel, at

least from *PS* on (the case is different in *FK*),<sup>30</sup> offered a critical reading of Kant that diagnosed him a worshipper of the Unknown God and unchristian, not because of the overestimation of thought (of which Kant was commonly accused), but because of his undervaluing of it. Nevertheless, Hegel remained more equivocal with respect to Kant than with the Romantic Intuitionists. He continued to have a sense long after *FK*'s paean of Kant that the synthetic a priori and synthetic unity of apperception were Hegelian intuitions in disguise and that Kant simply failed to accept fully the radicality of his discovery.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, in the mature Hegel, the critical stance is the dominant one. A theology of *Verstand* can only be a theology of the Unknown God. Moreover, it is right and proper to construe Kant as an essential link in the causal chain that has its term in the excess that is Romantic Intuitionism. This judgment is to the fore in *LHP 3*, as it is in Hegel's important foreword to Hinrichs's rationalist apologist text.<sup>32</sup> According to the latter text, the part played by Kant in the emergence of modern negative theology is considerable. At one point, Hegel is even tempted to make Kant the primogenitor (p. 235). Yet this does not represent Hegel's final view. Looked at more comprehensively, Kant himself is as much product as producer, a product whose seeds can be traced back to Enlightenment rationalism and Pietism. And, as Hegel argued first in *PS*, from a theological point of view, Enlightenment rationalism and fidelistic Pietism are very much two sides of the same coin. The happy consciousness of the Enlightenment, its claim of cognitive mastery, its vocation of complete discursive control, are spurious (#573). Seeing himself very much as a pathologist, Hegel diagnoses, not merely that rationalism is an insidious disease inherently unfriendly to Christianity, but that rationalism is the site of modernity's debacle of nonrecognition and misidentification. Nowhere in the modern cultured world is the gap between claim and realization, aim and achievement, larger. No less than for pietistic faith does the substance it so complacently presents as a possession lie beyond it. The Enlightenment differs from Pietism only in its pretense. Pietism honestly confesses what, at a depth level, is the essence of the Enlightenment, i.e., the despair of knowledge to reach reality and truth.

The genealogy of Romantic Intuitionism has the effect of displaying the full compass of modern deformation. Hegel's critical standard is Reformation, specifically Lutheran, Christianity. Yet, if modern theology is disadvantaged with respect to Reformation Christianity, it is also disadvantaged when compared with classical theology, both patristic and medieval. Medieval theology comes in for special praise

on a number of occasions (*LHP* E 125, 141; Hinrichs E 242). But here one should be careful not to read Hegel in a flatfooted way. As clearly shown in *LPR*, *LHP*, and *LPH*, Hegel endorses in large measure Lutheran criticisms of medieval scholastic theology. His support of medieval theology, therefore, should be regarded as rhetorical and strategic. Hegel must be read as saying: even medieval theology is superior to theology's modern counterfeit to the degree to which there is confidence in the power of reason really to know God. Comparatively speaking, medieval theology, especially in its refusal to countenance the doctrine of double truth (*LPR* I 1827 E 154, G 65; 1824 E 134, G 49–50), is profoundly confident of the ability of discourse to name the divine. Accordingly, medieval theology is to be found on the kataphatic side of the great theological divide, i.e., the divide between kataphatic or positive and apophatic or negative theology. Hegel, however, does not leave matters resting here. On a more fundamental level kataphatic designation—and thus approval—can be withdrawn from medieval-scholastic, as well as other theological, modalities that stress the power of cognition. In a move of some subtlety, Hegel extends the ambit of negative theology to cover precisely that kind (or those kinds) of metaphysical theology commonly thought to be the precise contrary. Hegel reasons:

When the notion of God is apprehended as that of the abstract and most real being, God is, as it were, relegated to another world beyond: and to speak of knowledge of him would be meaningless. Where there is no definite quality, knowledge is impossible. (*Wo keine Bestimmtheit ist, da ist auch keine Erkenntnis möglich*). Mere light is mere darkness (*Das reine Licht ist die reine Finsterniss.*) (*Enc* #36 zu, Wallace p. 58, *GL8*:114)

Wolffian Rational Theology is an obvious referent here. Perhaps Spinoza's articulation of God as Substance also lays itself open to the same charge. But the medieval-scholastic elaboration of the *Summum Esse* seems also to lie within the zone of criticizability. What Hegel appears to be suggesting is that, kataphatic appearance notwithstanding, ontotheologies other than Romantic Intuitionism and its immediate ancestors, when examined more carefully, disclose a degenerate negativity of content. And this insight, expressed in symbolic terms in the equation of light and darkness, could be regarded as receiving its nonsymbolic codification in the transition of Being to Nothing which opens the self-constituting movement of Hegelian logic. Being, Hegel

writes in the *Logic*, is the ineffable or unsayable (*ein Unsagbares*) (*Enc* #87, *GL8:208*), and Nothing represents the apotheosis of the unsayable. But, as Jean Hyppolite has persuasively argued, Hegelian logic, and Hegelian ontotheological discourse in general, is pitted against the hegemony of the ineffable in all and every manifestation.<sup>33</sup> Chapelle renders Hyppolite's insight specific to the theological field. For Chapelle, Hegel's theological enterprise is characterized by the attempt to banish assumptions of divine ineffability and unknowability that are deeply embedded within the ontotheological tradition.<sup>34</sup> At the very least, the obviousness of assumption must be banished, at the maximum—and here I play upon a figure of Wittgenstein—the spell of assumption must be broken. Hegelian theology, then, is nothing short of an apotropaic or spell-breaking activity. A token, even if a pretty formal one, of spell-breaking activity is the unmasking of the facade of the ontotheology of abstract being. If Hegel's deconstruction is correct, an ontotheology of Being cannot avoid hallowing Nothing, the most extreme of apophatic designations within the ontotheological tradition. Given the asserted intimacy between metaphysics and theology, the spelling-out of the Nothing implied in Being also spells-out the theology of the Unknown God lurking in the shadow of the apparent kataphaticism of a theology of the *Summum Esse*.

Confidence in the ability of thought to reach the divine infinite is therefore, for Hegel, a necessary but not sufficient condition for avoiding negative theology. Thought must be fully disclosive of divine reality; otherwise, haunted by the unsayable,<sup>35</sup> and limited by the ungraspable other, it is trajected beyond Christianity's horizon of full subjective and objective transparency. In Hegelian texts Christianity is considered under a number of different rubrics. It is spoken of as the absolute religion (*die absolut Religion*), the consummate religion (*die vollendete Religion*), the revealed religion (*die geoffenbarte Religion*), and the revelatory religion (*die offenbare Religion*). These rubrics dominate in certain texts, the last mentioned in *PS*, the second-last in the *Enc*, the first two in *LPR 1*. But whatever the rubric, it is Christianity's keynote that the very nature of divine reality is disclosed, and disclosed to a being capable of both comprehension and appreciation. Comprehension and appreciation demand an openness that is only present in a mode of cognition, both holistic and noninstrumental. To this modality of cognition Hegel sometimes gives the name of reason (*Vernunft*), but equally often he names it Spirit (*Geist*) and self-consciously places it within the Lutheran manifold.

By way of concluding the opening section of this chapter, it might be worth commenting briefly on a feature of the Hegelian treatment of the Christian theological tradition that may seem especially puzzling, namely, Hegel's quite affirmative appraisal of the mystical and, by implication, mysticism as a specification of Christianity. At the beginning of this section we noted Hegel's avowal of the normativity of the Pauline view of Christianity. This, however, is interesting not only because of Paul's emphasis upon revelation but also because of the latter's revision of the meaning of mystery. In St. Paul's hands, mystery is read antithetically to mean revealed. As Chapelle has hinted, the Hegelian reprise of Paul extends to this revision.<sup>36</sup> The mysterious, or the mystical (*Enc* #82 *zu*), is not the undisclosed but rather the disclosed. The reprise of the Pauline revision makes Hegel at one with the attitude characteristic of the early Church Fathers who associated *to mysterion* with the definitive soteriological revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> The reprise has the effect that, notwithstanding all the evidence against the mystics, Hegel does not apply the label of negative theology to them. Nowhere does he suppose they are the worshippers of the *Deus Occultus* as Luther claimed.<sup>38</sup> Here Hegel clearly departs from Luther and, perhaps, the dominant attitude in the Lutheran tradition. Though Hegel parallels Luther's attack on, and impatience with, negative theology, he does not unearth the same targets. Neither Pseudo-Dionysius himself or the Dionysian tradition in theology come in for attack; Meister Eckhart, who cannot but be understood as an exemplar, even if original translator, of this tradition comes in for high praise. This praise is such that one hardly suspects that Eckhart is the initiator of apophatic vocabulary in the German ontotheological tradition,<sup>39</sup> prepared to go to the very extreme apophatic reaches and call God "nothing." Hegel ignores the apophatic vocabulary of Eckhart, as he also tends to ignore its presence in other mystics. Given the evidence of excision of such vocabulary from his own discourse,<sup>40</sup> there is reason to suggest he ignores it deliberately. Reflective of an operation that he seems to perform on his own discourse, Hegel exercises on the discourse of the mystics what might be called *apophatic erasure*.<sup>41</sup> For Hegel, it appears, what is truly significant is the epistemological and ontological brazenness of mysticism (*Enc* #82), which, Lutheran orthodoxy's criticisms notwithstanding, remains thoroughly faithful to the revelatory essence of Christianity. Hegel is neither disingenuous nor strategic when he writes:

For the mystical (*das Mystische*) is not concealment of a secret (*ist nicht Vorborgenheit eines Geheimnisses*), or ignorance (*oder Unwissenheit*), but consists in the self knowing itself to be one with the divine being or that this therefore is revealed (*dieses also geoffenbart ist*). (PS #722, Miller p. 437, GL2:550)

There can be little doubt that in his typification Hegel has highlighted a much neglected aspect of mysticism—what might be characterized, following Joseph Maréchal, the realization of *presence*.<sup>42</sup> For Hegel, however, the presence of the divine to the human does not constitute merely a core feature of mysticism but *the* core. Mysticism in the full and proper sense, therefore, is not merely different to any and all varieties of negative theology; it represents negative theology's antitype.

### **Section 1.2 Narrative and the Deus Revelatus**

In the previous section we saw Hegel's reprise of the Pauline reading of Christianity. Nevertheless, revelation ascription does more than situate Christianity as one example among others of a species of religion called "revealed religion." For Hegel, Christianity does not stand on the same footing as Judaism or Islam, which given certain understandings of revelation (e.g., Enlightenment, Fichte) could be paired with Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Accepting and, of course, exegeting the Pauline definition of Christianity implies, for Hegel, the claim of Christianity's incommensurability, since what is characteristic of revelation is not that it is a truth spoken from beyond about the beyond to an immanent other devoid of its own power or authority, but rather a genuine act of 'nearing' in which the divine becomes fully rendered, fully present in the nondivine. Yet, as hinted already, ascription in Hegelian texts is ambiguous between two different understandings: (1) a descriptive, first-level understanding; (2) an interpretive, second-level understanding. Appeal to Paul or Luther does not always guarantee that a merely descriptive understanding is being supported. General shifts in the level of discourse, specifically from focus upon the event of revelation to definition of the divine, undermine the descriptive, first-level understanding of revelation. Hegel's use of the platonic construct "God is not envious" provides a token of just such undermining. But the discursive shift specifies itself, announces itself even more loudly, in the shift of understanding with regard to revelation. It is the view of the *Enc*, for instance, that God defines himself as an act of revelation or manifestation (#381 zu). Here Hegel clearly moves from understand-



ing (1) to understanding (2). In doing so, Hegel places himself in a tensional relationship with Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy. Yet, Hegel cannot be assimilated without further ado to his patristic and medieval predecessors who comfortably shift from the descriptive to the interpretive, ontotheological level of reflection and discourse. For Hegel, the secret of Christianity is the god of Christianity, or simply God. But God is not adequately rendered in such constructs as divine grace, divine freedom, or divine love, though Hegel neither denies that these constructs are theologically useful—particularly the last two<sup>44</sup>—nor neglects to make use of them. Rather, he takes it as evident that the fact that God is disclosed is not accidental to God's definition, indeed, is central to it. To point to the distinctiveness of the Hegelian move is not to suggest absolute originality. Ernst Benz, who has if not single-handedly, at least most ably, painted the mystical backdrop of German Idealism, could point to Oetinger's construal of God as *Ens manifestativum sui* as a precursor of the Hegelian *Deus Revelatus*,<sup>45</sup> though he would, perhaps, agree with Alexandre Koyré that in his construal Oetinger is simply annotating, maybe even anointing, the vision of the divine held by the earlier German speculative mystic, Jacob Boehme.<sup>46</sup>

To delineate the divine as an act of revelation is, for Hegel, to insist that God is Spirit (*Geist*). To elaborate the one is to elaborate the other. As an act of revelation or manifestation, Spirit involves movement, process (*Enc* #378 *zu*), and differentiation which is at once let be, yet overcome and assimilated (*ibid.*; *LPR* 1 1824 E 119, G 36; E 142–143, G 56–57). A text from the 1827 Lectures on religion offers a fairly comprehensive description:

Spirit, if it is thought immediately, simply, and at rest, is not spirit; for spirit's essential character is to be altogether active. More exactly, it is the activity of self-manifesting. Spirit that does not manifest or reveal itself is something dead. "Manifesting" signifies "becoming for an other." As "becoming for an other" it enters into antithesis, into distinction in general, and thus is it a finitizing of spirit. (*LPR* 1 1827 E 176, G 85)

On the level of description the *Enc* adds little to the above. Hegel again joins together differentiation and manifestation (#383–384). But one can sense the addition of a criteriological note: without differentiation or manifestation, Spirit does not achieve full actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), or otherwise stated, full personhood or subjectivity. Even the divine,

or perhaps especially the divine, is a result, not a given, not an 'immediate' in Hegel's own technical terminology. It is *PS* which introduces the image complex that subsequently accompanies much of Hegel's discourse about God, i.e., images of journey, exile, and homecoming, though the ideas of which these images are the compact, symbolic expression are present in his earliest thought. While the main concern of *PS* is human becoming in its individual and social-historic aspect, its epistemic and culture-forming aspect, the text as a whole, especially in the Preface and sections 6–8, suggests a larger horizon of becoming than the anthropological sphere. Spirit and divine subjectivity are equated in #23 of the *PS*, just as the identity is implied elsewhere, e.g., #20. Thus, when Hegel subsumes the process or, to use Mark Taylor's word, the "wayfaring,"<sup>47</sup> character of Spirit under the meta-image of the circle (*der Kreis*), he cannot be thought to have merely human subjectivity as his referent. Spirit, or Subject, Hegel writes:

is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal (*als seinen Zweck*), having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual. (Miller p. 10, *GL2:23*)

While Hegel is clearly at pains to emphasize the connection between beginning and end, process and result, aim and destination, he is not to be thought in his advocacy of the circle to be promoting a figure of self-cancelling movement. 'Return' is an intrinsic element of circularity, but Hegel does not say that in every material respect the end is the same as the beginning. The true (*das Wahre*), Hegel is anxious to announce in the same paragraph, is not the simple unity of beginning but the complex, differentiated unity of an end constituted by doubling, opposition, and negation. In Hegel's circle the line (process) is not destroyed. Both the *Enc* and *LPR* substantiate and amplify the ontotheological insight of *PS*. Beginning and end are locations which are understood to apply to the divine (*Enc* #379 *zu*, #381 *zu*; *LPR* 1 1821 MS E 84, G 4; E 221, G 130; E 225–7, G 134–136), and the fact that they apply signals a significant ontotheological departure. Whereas in the classical ontotheological tradition God is alpha and omega as the still point of reference for the restless, troubled world of becoming, in Hegel, alpha and omega specify the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of a divine process of self-constitution. Revision, however, has a much broader scope than this.

Hegel wishes to situate himself within the mainstream ontotheological tradition, and to facilitate doing so he is prepared, at least for the purposes of protocol, to accept the identification of Being and God. But this acceptance, perhaps most to the fore in Hegel's two major logical works, is, as most students of Hegel are willing to confess, quite preliminary.<sup>48</sup> Identification will turn out not merely to be inadequate but false, unless immediate, abstract Being gives way to Being as process, and issues in Being enriched, deepened, and fully comprehensive. Hegel is eloquent in *SL*:

The richest is therefore the most concrete and subjective, and that which returns (*Zurücknehmende*) into the simplest depth (*die einfachste Tiefe*) is the most-powerful and all-embracing (*Ubergreifendste*). The highest, most concentrated point is the pure personhood (*ist die reine Persönlichkeit*). . . . (*SL* 841, *GL5*:349)

Hegel is here speaking of the divine Idea. He might have been speaking of Spirit which represents the optimum of subjectivity and personhood. If the Idea or Spirit still can be meaningfully included within the discourse of Being, as Gerhard Schmidt after Heidegger claims,<sup>49</sup> nevertheless, Being in Hegel cannot be understood after the traditional manner. In Hegel, the last thing God is is simple, immediate, static Being (*Enc* #87–88). For Hegel, Being is the emptiest of all categories and thus in itself insufficient as a characterization of the divine. But what is denied to abstract Being is not denied to Being considered in the most concrete sense. In the spirit of reconciliation, Hegel redefines Being in such a way that it fits his description of the divine as realized end, achievement, and, of course, process.<sup>50</sup> In both the *Enc* and *LPR* passages can be found where God is called Being, but not Being *tout court*. Being is qualified by adjectives such as active, restless (*Enc* #378 *zu*).

While Hegel attempts to remain within the received coordinates of the ontotheological tradition, it is clear that he is engaged in an act of subversion in which the hegemony of Being is effectively challenged and overcome by Act. Undoubtedly the move is overdetermined and reflects no one influence. If we are to take Hegel at his word, his revision is called for by Christian optics regarding the nature of God. To cite Fichte's intuition concerning the primacy of Act (*Tathandlung*) over Being as a proximate precedent is not to say that Hegel is grossly mistaken with regard to the cause of revision,<sup>51</sup> but simply to suggest that this foundational move of the *Wissenschaftslehre* provides warrant,

credibility, and reinforcement for a move Hegel feels justified in making on other grounds. The radicality of Hegel's move is not lessened by recalling that the classical ontotheological tradition, particularly the medieval scholastic tradition which claimed Aristotle as a philosophical support, was able to conceive the divine as pure act (*actus purus*). Just as Hegel can speak the language of Being, he can speak the language of pure act (*LPR* 3 1821 MS E 78, G 16). But as with the meaning of Being the meaning of *actus purus* has shifted dramatically. In the classical ontotheology of Aquinas,<sup>52</sup> for instance, *actus purus* points to the nullity of potentiality in God and, thus, the nullity of becoming. For Hegel, by contrast, God is only as the movement from potential to actual, that is, God is only as the process of actualization.

There are two ontotheological views in particular against which Hegel posits his dynamic process view of the *Deus Revelatus*, i.e., Schelling and Spinoza. We have already commented upon Hegel's pastiche of Schelling's Identity Philosophy in *PS*. While *PS* represents the definitive public rupture between Schelling and Hegel, *DE*, in its modest rehabilitation of the status of Fichte vis-à-vis Schelling, represents a portent of such a rupture. On the reading of *PS*, Identity Philosophy is a rigid monism which rules out movement, activity, and becoming in the divine precisely because difference and negativity are ruled out. Hegel's reading is not flattering: Schelling's vision of God amounts to viewing God as a tautology (#23). Caricature or not, Hegel is vehement in combating any vision of the divine which does not include moments of exile and return. The deficiency of Identity Philosophy can also be considered from a more specifically gnoseological point of view. Hegel diagnoses that not only does Identity Philosophy exclude the possibility of infinite knowledge of the divine, it also excludes divine knowledge of itself. If manifestation is possible only through differentiation, such also is the case with regard to knowledge.<sup>53</sup> Thus, despite Schelling's assertion of the coincidence of thought and being<sup>54</sup> and the actuality of knowledge, Hegel denies coincidence and denies knowledge as prerogatives of the initial state of the divine. Coincidence is a terminal reality, as is knowledge. Yet it is not improper to speak of the divine from the point of view of the realized state.<sup>55</sup> *PS* certainly does. So also does the *Enc* (#564).

Spinoza is the other foil against whom Hegel defines his own Christian allegiance to God as Spirit. In a certain sense Spinoza is *the* foil, for at least in the view of *PS* (Preface) Schelling's Identity Philosophy is reducible in the last instance to Spinoza's philosophy of Substance. Conciliatory gestures such as the declaration that Spirit is not