


CHAPTER 1

The Sundering Imagination of the Absolute (Hegel's Earliest Works)



Hegel's earliest published works, *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Differenzschrift*, offer an imperfect account of the imagination, but one that nevertheless gets us beyond some of the problems present in Kant's and Fichte's view of the role of the imagination. Hegel's account is couched in his adoption of Schelling's Identity Theory, and in his critique of, among others, Kant and Fichte.

The thesis of the Identity Philosophy that concerns us is that the imagination is a sundering activity that creates the opposition between subject and object. This thesis is argued for by Schelling and the early Hegel, in opposition to the "one-sided" views of Kant and Fichte, who make the subject the original principle. In order to adjudicate the benefits and failures of this view, we have to look at how this thesis of the originary sundering imagination takes shape. We begin with Hegel's assertions against the philosophies of subjectivity (Kant and Fichte among others). Then we look at some problems with the theory of original sundering.

IMAGINATION AS THE SUNDERING ABSOLUTE

In *Faith and Knowledge* Hegel writes triumphantly that

the metaphysic of subjectivity has run through the complete cycle of its forms in the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte . . . [and it] has brought this cultural process to its end. Therewith the

external possibility directly arises that the true philosophy [i.e., Speculative Philosophy] should emerge. . . . (*Faith*, Conclusion, 189; *GW* 133)

It is in this work, in his criticism of Kant and Fichte, that the imagination's role as Hegel perceived it starts to become apparent. In both this work and the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel contrasts grasping truth through the intellect (the wrong way of grasping truth) with the recognition of Reason's self-making through Speculative Philosophy (the right way of grasping it). Kant and Fichte belong to the first kind. According to Hegel, Kant fails to recognize the Speculative Idea in the transcendental imagination; Fichte fails to see the Speculative Idea in the practical ends of Reason.¹ Let us look at these criticisms more deeply in order to understand what role Hegel attributes to the imagination. Since Hegel developed these ideas in close association with Schelling, our analysis here involves Schelling's account as well.

According to Kant, there is a difference between reason and the imagination. They are distinct faculties, with different products. The products, respectively, are ideas and the syntheses of the imagination.

All knowledge for Kant is based on the latter. The syntheses of the imagination under concepts of the understanding provide us with empirical and pure judgments about the world. The former, ideas of reason, can never lead us to true knowledge because for Kant ideas are pure intuitions: "Ideas are not concepts, rather they are pure intuitions, not discursive, but rather intuitive representations."² Only a divine mind could be capable of true ideas (intellectual intuitions). As a result, any attempt to prove the truth of ideas leads to antinomies and paralogisms.

This epistemological division in Kant between reason and imagination, and between ideas and syntheses, means that there can never be an absolute reconciliation between our ideas and our experience, or between thought and being. We may postulate the existence of a divine mind in whom true ideas exist, but we can never know it or its inner possibility. Likewise, we may postulate a future world in which our moral worthiness to be happy corresponds to our actual happiness, but that world image remains necessarily an ideal. This failure to unite thought and being, and this alienation from the absolute were unacceptable to Schelling and Hegel.

For Schelling and the early Hegel, there can be no question of a hypothesized intuitive understanding. Kant's division between reason and imagination does not hold: according to them imagination *is* reason. In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling explains this view. Using the language of Fichte but to a different end Schelling writes:

[W]hat is commonly spoken of as the imagination is in fact such a wavering between finitude and infinity; or, what comes to the same, an activity mediating the theoretical and the practical. . . . This power, therefore, which we refer to meanwhile as imagination, will in the course of this wavering also necessarily produce something, which itself oscillates between infinity and finitude, and which can therefore also be regarded only as such. Products of this kind are what we call *Ideas* as opposed to concepts, and *imagination in this wavering is on that very account not understanding but reason*; and conversely, *what is commonly called theoretical reason is nothing else but imagination in the service of freedom*. . . . [O]nce they are made objects of the understanding, they lead to those insoluble contradictions which Kant set forth under the name of the antinomies . . . these Ideas must assuredly be mere products of imagination, that is, of an activity such that it produces neither the finite nor the infinite. (*STI* 176, my emphasis; *Sys.Tr.I.*, 228–29)

Schelling defines the imagination as a wavering between the finite and the infinite. We see here a shift from the Kantian notion of synthesis, to what in Hegel will be a dialectical motion. This wavering is at the heart of identity. So all identities are in fact moving, in flux. The wavering is between the finite and infinite, so there is no question of a fundamental incommensurability between the finite and the infinite: they are united in and through the imagination's wavering between them. In fact, the conceptual identity of "finite" and "infinite" is purely a function of the wavering imagination's having appeared to stop at a point that in actuality is not a static point but is rather itself a wavering between finite and infinite. There are different levels or kinds of these nodal points, but they all share this characteristic of being a wavering of imagination. There are no entities outside of thought, but thought is nothing other than the generation of entities. Thought does not lie in waiting, it is those creations. And thought's activity is a wavering imagination.

For Schelling, there is no question of ideas existing beyond the wavering, or of a divine mind in which ideas reside, existing beyond the wavering: any idea, including that of a divine mind, is produced by the wavering imagination. Ideas are higher forms of the wavering between finite and infinite than occur in empirical and pure intuitions. Only when fixed does an idea generate seemingly unsurmountable contradictions with other ideas. So it is the fixing of the wavering that is the cause of the (false) division between ideas and experience. The true relationship to ideas is the one that views them as forms of the imagination's wavering.

Now, there are clearly problems with this view, problems that Hegel will eventually recognize and try to solve. Let us look at the problems first. One of them is clear in Hegel's version of what Schelling says above. In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel claims, like Schelling, that the imagination is not separate from reason; like Schelling he claims that, in fact, it is the same as reason:

[W]e must not take the faculty of [productive] imagination as the middle term that gets inserted between an existing absolute subject and an absolute existing world. *The productive imagination must rather be recognized as what is primary and original, as that out of which subjective Ego and objective world first sunder themselves into the necessarily bipartite appearance and product, and as the sole In-itself. This power of imagination is the original two-sided identity. The identity becomes subject in general on one side, and object on the other; but originally it is both. And the imagination is nothing but Reason itself.* (*Faith* 73; my emphasis)

The problem becomes clear in a qualification Hegel goes on to make: “[I]t [imagination] is only Reason as it appears in the sphere of empirical consciousness.” The imagination is reason, but not the “absolute, *self-intuiting* Reason” (*Diff* 174); it is self-shaping, but not the “*intuiting* of th[is] self-shaping or objectively self-finding Absolute” (*Diff* 171). In other words, there is a difference between the sundering imagination and reason's consciousness of itself as this sundering. The problem is that the latter is also supposed to be the action of the imagination. Thus, there appears to be a contradiction: the imagination is the “sole-in-itself,” the Absolute, and yet it is also only one moment of the Absolute. Reason and imagination are the same, and yet they are different. How are we to reconcile these two claims?

In the move from Kant's view to Schelling's and Hegel's, we appear to have merely shifted from one kind of rift to another. In Kant there was a rift between the syntheses of the imagination and the ideas of reason. Schelling and Hegel try to move beyond this by saying that in both syntheses and ideas, what is operative is the sundering imagination. But we fall into another rift in that there is still a difference to be accounted for between the sundering of imagination into empirical, finite entities and the self-knowing sundering of the imagination as the Absolute, infinite entity.

Schelling and Hegel's problem seems to go away if we turn it on its head and say that the real problem is thinking in terms of entities at all: what we should be focusing on is the common factor of the imagination's sundering. But this still leaves us with the problem of accounting for the distinction between the different kinds of entities that the imagination produces in its wavering. It also leaves us with the problem of distinguishing the imagination

in its empirical guise from the imagination as the self-knowing absolute, which is not empirical.

The problem is provisionally solved by looking at the development of the sundering absolute from its originary moment up through varied levels of being. This is what Schelling and the early Hegel advocate. For them the genetic history of self-consciousness is the natural history of the Absolute's coming to be self-conscious. Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* gives the stages of development: his ideal reconstruction is the account of the various graduated powers (*Potenzen*) of consciousness.

Kant's hidden (*verborgene*) imagination, is therefore mistakenly viewed by Kant as a subjective spontaneity in the service of an already present understanding. According to Schelling and Hegel it is hidden, yes, in the sense of being, at its deepest level, unconscious. But it is an originary sundering of the Absolute into subject and object. Intuition is the first division of this absolute, epistemological genesis. The understanding is a second, more differentiated level of the Absolute's self-reflection. Both have the same principle—the sundering into opposition. Thus, Hegel writes:

This original synthetic unity [the Absolute] must be conceived, not as produced out of opposites, but as a truly necessary, absolute, original identity of opposites. As such, it is the principle *both* of *productive imagination, which is the unity that is blind*,³ *i.e., immersed in the difference and not detaching itself from it; and of the intellect, which is the unity that posits the difference as identical but distinguishes itself from the different.* This shows that the *Kantian forms of intuition and the forms of thought cannot be kept apart at all as the particular, isolated faculties* which they are usually represented as. One and the same synthetic unity—we have just now determined what this means here—is the principle of intuition and of the intellect. (*Faith* 70, my emphasis; *GW* 17–18)

As we have seen,⁴ Schelling says much the same in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* of poetry making, which is the concluding, highest *Potenz*:

What we speak of as the poetic gift is merely productive intuition, reiterated to its highest power. *It is one and the same capacity that is active in both*, the only one whereby we are able to think and to couple together even what is contradictory—and *its name is imagination.* (*STI* 230; my emphasis)⁵

This principle means that the intellect, although creating difference, is nevertheless creating a difference that is a level of the Absolute's self-reflection, and it only ever generates the difference as a result of the originary

indifference point sundering itself. Thus, the subject's positing at the level of intuition, or at the level of intellect, *is* Being. The view is of Being.

This view distinguishes itself not only from Kant's, but from Fichte's as well. According to Schelling and Hegel, the Absolute's sundering is not (as in Fichte) the action of a self striving toward its infinite completion. Let us take a moment to look at this more carefully.

Fichte's subject suspends the imagined perfection in front of itself, and thus the view is never of absolute Being. For Fichte

the idea of an infinity to be thus completed floats *as a vision* before us, and is rooted in our innermost nature. We are obliged, as it enjoins us, to resolve the contradiction [of realizing the infinite]; though we cannot even think it possible of solution and foresee that in no moment of an existence prolonged to all eternity will we ever be able to consider it possible. But this is just the *mark in us* that we are destined for eternity. (*Sc.Kn.* I, 270; my emphasis)

As we have seen in our introduction, for Fichte, the principle of the intellect is the check that the subject imposes on its own activity, thereby initiating the wavering of the imagination between the self and the beyond toward which the self strives. In that opposition there is no reconciliation with the infinite, only a striving to reach beyond the finite. It appears, therefore, as though the self both posits itself and exceeds itself. The consequent history is therefore an ongoing construction required and motivated by the intellect, an intellect that is never able to cash in its check.⁶ The self is never one with the world. In one of Hegel's more sardonic criticisms of Fichte he writes:

[W]hat is most horrifying and saddening for Fichte's I is being one with the universe, having the universe live and act in me, being obedient to the eternal laws of nature and to the hallowed necessity. Since difference, or the bad, is so incorrectly conceived, the reconstruction cannot be authentic either. For the infinite is posited as originally un-unified and un-unifiable with the finite: the Ideal [*das Ideelle*] cannot be united with the real or pure Reason with existence. (*Faith* 182; *GW* 126–7)⁷

If, on the other hand, the foundational principle is an originary sundering, then what evolves out of it is the history of that self-reflective Being, a history of the infinite. Rather than Fichte's line, which extends from the subject out toward infinity, for Hegel the Absolute's history is an infinite cycle of sundering, opposition, and self-conscious return, each return being a new level.

This difference between Fichte on the one hand and Hegel and Schelling on the other can be seen in terms of categories. According to Fichte, the category that underlies all the other categories in Kant's table is the third category of relation—that of *Wechselwirkung* (interdetermination). This *Wechselwirkung* is the wavering of the imagination between the finite and the infinite. It lies at the basis of all the other categories because all the other categories presume opposition. (For example, quantity: one cannot isolate a quantity without having an object over against one.) Furthermore, in Fichtean epistemology, the imagination is the *subjective* synthesis at the heart of all the categories.

For the early Hegel, since the imagination is the indifference point's sundering, it gives rise to subject and object. Thus, the imagination is the basis of all thought. It is not only subjective synthesis. The basis of all categorial determinations is *substantive*. According to Hegel, the imagination is not causal in the Fichtean sense because, as we saw, the self does not require synthesis but rather itself arises out of the synthesis. The primary category for Hegel, at least at this point in his thinking, is therefore not that of interdetermination. Rather, "the true relation of speculation" is that of substance and accident (*Diff* 116 and cf. 161).⁸ As a result, for the early Hegel, "Both art and speculation are in their essence divine service—both are a *living intuition of the absolute life* and hence a *being at one with it*" (*Diff* 172).

ONE-SIDED RECONSTRUCTIONS

What I want to look at now is why Fichte and Kant got it wrong. First, let me explain the title of this section. Why "reconstruction"?

In Schelling's and Hegel's conception of the Absolute, the fact that we have experience at all is evidence that the sundering has always already happened, for we could not have a subject on the one hand, and an object of knowledge on the other, without that sundering having occurred. So their account of the different levels of the absolute sundering imagination is a reconstruction of experience. Schelling and the early Hegel, and according to their view, anyone else who was seeking the truth in this matter, had to go back to the original sundering and to conceptually reconstruct what experience is in terms of how it came about, from the original sundering forward.

According to the early Hegel, a reconstruction along Fichtean lines is "one-sided" because Fichte does not recognize a particular preponderance that consciousness has when it is making reconstructions. The preponderance is consciousness' tendency to suspend the truth outside as something beyond what is available to consciousness. According to Hegel, this is what both Kant

and Fichte do, the former by referring to a thing-in-itself and the latter by setting up the check, and by making absolute reconciliation something for which practical reason can only ever strive. The preponderance prevents the reconciliation of thought and being.

Schelling and Hegel believe that their speculative philosophy fully recognizes and overcomes the preponderance, and therefore does achieve the reconciliation. Thus, in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel explains:

[T]hough speculation certainly conceives the Absolute as becoming, it also posits the identity of becoming and being; and what appears to speculation as self-begetting is at the same time posited as the original absolute being which can only come to be so far as it is. In this way, *speculation can rid itself of the preponderance that consciousness has in it; the preponderance is in any case something inessential.* (Diff 172, my emphasis; *Differenz* 113)

The preponderance to one-sided reconstructions is a result of viewing things from the point of view of an understanding that has not been thoroughly, critically thought through and thereby recognized as only one level in the development of the Absolute's self-cognizance. According to Hegel, both Kant and Fichte make the mistake of privileging the understanding and determining the Absolute conceptually from that intellectual standpoint.

Having looked at the one-sided nature of Fichte's reconstruction, it is easier to see how one-sided Kant's reconstruction of the intellect is for Hegel.

The One-sided Reconstruction into Faculties

We recall Kant's statement in *The Critique of Pure Reason* that the two syntheses—that of the imagination and that of the intellect—are one and the same spontaneity “there under the name of the imagination, here under the name of the understanding.”⁹ As we saw, what Kant means by “under the name” is not clear. One might try to clarify the matter by asserting generally that the two names are proper to some one thing, and that in this case the thing is a faculty. But this is a far cry from explaining *how* the thing falls under two different names.

The problem is more complex than just finding out how something can be called two different things at different times and yet still be the same thing. *What* we are trying to get a handle on (synthesis) is the very thing responsible for our ability to make such a distinction between two names, as well as being that whereby we can name at all. One can't *give* a name (or names) to something and hope that that will tell us something about it or about how the process allows us to distinguish things by naming them. That which acquires the name *imagination* or *understanding* does so as a result of synthesis; synthesis

cannot simply be said to exist under those faculty names. Synthesis *is* in the very production of the names, but in a still unrevealed way. The names alone don't tell us anything.

Giving an account of the way each synthesis *is* (assuming that there is in fact more than one kind), is the task of proper reconstruction. For Hegel, not only names, but "faculties" are products of synthesis. Insofar as we have isolated them, we abstract ourselves from the absolute as becoming, thereby reifying cognitive activity. To remain contented with this is to end up with what Hegel later calls a "bunch of powers" and a view of the mind as a "skeleton-like mechanical collection."¹⁰ While reification is part of the self-determining process of the Absolute (as witnessed in consciousness' propensity), to fix on the abstracted products is to slip into a point of view that itself is abstract. It is to slip into a dualism that takes the place of becoming.¹¹ Kant's critical perspective suppresses the actuality of the synthesis in favor of unreflected nomenclature. His view thus suffers from intellectual one-sidedness.

Kant's Beautiful Reconstruction

Hegel does not deal with Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in his *Faith and Knowledge*, but it is worth looking briefly at this reconstruction too.

In Kant's explanation of the experience of the beautiful, and in the section on teleology in the same book, Kant discusses the notion of regulative ideas. These ideas are contrasted with constitutive ideas. While the latter constitute objects, the former are used to regulate our experience of objects. For example, according to Kant the real nature of the universe in itself is unknowable to us. If we are to think about that supersensible structure, we must somehow regulate our reasoning. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts that any attempt to explain the supersensible leads to antinomies of reason. But in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant attempts to use ideas to regulate our thinking about what we cannot know for sure. Thus, in that work Kant asserts that nature appears to act *as if* it were purposeful. The *as if* is regulative, not constitutive: it regulates how we experience natural objects when we think beyond what reason can know for sure; it does not play a role in constituting the objects of nature. But it does, somewhat underhandedly, let Kant entertain a relationship between thought and being.

According to Hegel, though Kant did not always fully understand them to be such, these ideas are intellectual intuitions of the absolute sundering indifference point.

Let us take an example. According to Kant,¹² when we look at something beautiful, a rose, say, we become aware of the fact that though we can isolate different aspects of the rose (the shape of a petal's curve or the intensity

of the color; the relation of the petals to one another; the necessity of the rose being as it is or the possibility of its withering), we are aware of how none of the isolated concepts are adequate to explain why the rose is beautiful. Beauty is the play between the imagination (which synthesizes the sensory input) and the understanding (according to whose categories the synthesis occurs). The play is a sustaining of the failure to conceptually grasp beauty, and this play of our powers is pleasurable to us.¹³

According to Schelling and Hegel, Kant was on the right track when he recognized the play as one between the finite understanding and the infinite possibilities producible in the contemplation of beauty.¹⁴ But Kant wrongly maintained the antithesis between subject and object. He did so, first, by asserting that in the experience of the beautiful it is *as if* nature were purposive; second, he intellectualized the product of that difference—the regulative Idea of nature as purposive; and third, he asserted that such an idea can never be complete precisely because it is (merely) an intellectual idea.¹⁵ According to Hegel, Kant was mistaken in asserting that this Idea could only sit on the side of the intellect. That is, Kant was mistaken in asserting that the Idea could never really be about the object in any knowable, true way. This one-sidedness was a result of Kant's holding to the antithesis between subject and object.

For Hegel, that antithesis is not structurally absolute (in the sense that the epistemological machinery won't work without it). Rather, the antithesis is *apparent*, a result, and something that can be superseded. It is the result of synthesis, and that synthetic activity is not just on the side of the subject. It is the very activity of being. Thus, the regulative Idea that nature is purposive need not be held strictly as arising on the side of the intellect. Any idea, like the apparent antithesis of subject and object, is *itself* a product of synthetic activity.

The irony for Hegel is that Kant's idea *is* true. But because Kant designs his epistemology in terms of fixed structures of the mind, rather than in terms of the purposiveness, he fixes that purposiveness as an idea of nature, an idea that can only be regulative, not constitutive, and one that is therefore never complete. For Hegel, to cling to the intellectual idea as fundamentally incomplete is to miss how it arose in the first place, and to miss how it is merely a product and not an a priori truth of consciousness. Thus, Hegel asserts (rather cryptically) that "the sole Idea that has reality and true objectivity for philosophy, is the absolute suspendedness [*Aufgehobensein*] of the antithesis" (*Faith* 68). For further insight into what this means, we must move beyond one-sided reconstructions and look at what he writes in *Faith and Knowledge* about proper reconstruction.

PROPER RECONSTRUCTION

Let us return to the question that inspires any reconstruction: How does the absolute, through its sundering, go from being unconscious to being empirically conscious to being self-conscious? And what role is the imagination playing throughout?

Faith and Knowledge offers a murky set of propositions about what the reconstruction is. Hegel writes that to be authentic

this reconstruction would have to unveil the essence of the spirit and [first] expound how nature reflects itself in spirit. Nature takes itself back into itself and lifts its original, unborrowed [*ungeborgt*] real beauty into the ideal realm, the realm of possibility. Thus nature rises as spirit. . . . [Secondly the reconstruction would have to expound] how the essence of nature, in the form of possibility, i.e., as spirit, has enjoyment of itself as a living Ideal in the visible and active reality; and how it has its actuality as ethical nature in which the ethical infinite, that is, the concept, and the ethical finite, that is, the individual, are one without qualification. (*Faith* 182; *GW* 127)

Though sketchy, this passage is important because it contains within it the seeds of the reconstruction as Hegel viewed it. These seeds are contained in his implicit criticism of Kant's notion of beauty: Hegel writes that "Nature takes itself back into itself and lifts its original, unborrowed real beauty into the ideal realm, the realm of possibility." Notice that it is Nature that does this, not the mind. It is not some epistemological machinery that, ordered to do so by the subject, lifts beauty from the rose; and the supposition that nature acts *as if* it were purposive is not, therefore, merely a regulative Idea. Rather, nature reproduces itself at the ideal level, in the mind. The implication is that in Kant what is really happening is that beauty is not generated by the subject, it is merely borrowed. In Hegel's reconstruction, on the other hand, it is not the subject per se that causes the experience of beauty, but rather Nature which "lifts *its original, unborrowed real beauty*" into the realm of the subjective, the ideal realm in which what is, becomes what is possible.

In the *Differenzschrift* and in *Faith and Knowledge*, the imagination is depicted as originary, as the point of indifference, as the unconscious original sundering into subject and object, as the "sole in-itself." For the answer to how reason becomes self-conscious one would have to go beyond these works to works in which Hegel develops the notion of Spirit. Spirit starts to take shape in Hegel's subsequent Jena works, in *The System of Ethical Life* (1802/3) and

in *First Philosophy of Spirit (1803/4)*. Ultimately, how reason becomes self-conscious Spirit will be what the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* teaches us.¹⁶

But the *Differenzschrift* and the end of *Faith and Knowledge* do provide the key to proper reconstruction. The propensity of consciousness to create a one-sided view is overcome by a demise of abstraction in(to) original sundering.

For the self generated by the one-sided reconstruction, this demise, however, means its own negation. It is a fall into the night. Let us therefore look at this fall into darkness.

THE LOGIC OF LOSS

In "*Das Absolute als Nacht, Nichts und Abgrund*,"¹⁷ Bonsiepen claims that in Hegel's early writings negation is connected more to destruction and death than it is in his later texts. Indeed, Hegel asserts that to become one with the imagination as Speculative Idea (i.e., to stop understanding it and to be [one with its] becoming), the self must throw itself into "the abyss," into the night. However, the night is not just a death. It is also the birthplace of truth. The loss is also originary. The relationship between loss and creation is like the perpetual circular turning of night into day. The night is the birthplace of truth, and the necessary ground to which all must go in order for birth to occur. Hegel writes soberly that "[t]he manifoldness of being lies between two nights, without support. It rests on nothing—for the indeterminate is nothing to the intellect—and it ends in nothing" (*Diff* 95; *Differenz* 26).

Although the night is one of the three moments of an absolute whole, in these early texts it is the predominant moment. "The Absolute is the night, and the light is younger than it; and the distinction between them, like the emergence of the light out of the night, is an absolute difference—the nothing is the first out of which all being, all the manifoldness of the finite has emerged" (*Diff* 93–94; *Differenz* 24–25).

For the subject, the night is the negation of the antithesis of reflection, and therefore the negation of consciousness itself:

[I]n its highest synthesis of the conscious and the non-conscious, speculation also demands the *nullification of consciousness itself*. Reason thus drowns itself and its knowledge and its reflection of the absolute identity, in its own abyss. . . . (*Diff* 103, my emphasis; *Differenz* 35)

The "demand" of Reason here is entirely different from the demand in Kant and Fichte. For them the demand was made by reason of the imagination:

it was the requirement that there be synthesis. Here, the demand is that reason throw itself into an abyss, that reason submerge itself in the movement of synthesis. Only out of that loss can something be created, just as the day arises out of the night.

Negation is therefore not a return to unconsciousness, *point final*. It is a return that, in negating the antithesis, is the condition of Spirit's becoming. The negation happens within the circular movement of the Absolute's self-development. Instead of mere negation, one must speak of the *suspendedness* (*Aufgehobensein*) of the antithesis.

This is a substantial *as well* as subjective movement. Like any reflection, the "reflection of the absolute identity" implies the subject-object antithesis. In the negation of this antithesis which is reason drowning itself in its own abyss, what is given up is the singularity of the negation. In other words, the act of a single will is given up and becomes simply the negative moment of self-becoming substance.

It was this substantial side of things that Fichte missed. Fichtean negation (the *Anstoss*) is that without which we could have not have an object. Negation for him is also necessary if we are to feel morally compelled to exceed our limitations. But Fichte mistakenly thinks that it is we ourselves who, for the purpose of moral completion, propel ourselves beyond what is, toward the future. Had Fichte seen the *Anstoss* as a moment of being instead of appropriating it as a requirement which the self places on itself, if he had seen completion as reconciliation with being *through* negation (through the giving up of our finite selves into being from which we only appear to be separate), he would have been asserting what Hegel is asserting here. For in Hegel, despite being mere appearance, the horizon that has *become* abstract, mere appearance, is the material expression of the Absolute. The future beyond it is a projected object, an intellectualized figure of the negative moment of the Absolute. *That future* does not hold our moral completion; we mistakenly strive after it if we believe this to be so. Our moral completion lies rather in the "death" of the self—in the *mise en abyme* of any finite self-certainty.

Just as the understanding in Fichte is the *fixed* wavering of the imagination,¹⁸ in Hegel "mere reflection" establishes a fixed absolute opposition. That "antithesis" must be sublated, since that antithesis is a generated abstraction. It is like saying that day and night are the unreflected, empirical concepts of day and night, when in fact day becomes night and night day: one is defined by the other. Such a concept—even of what is immediately the case—is immediate but not actual. It is not actual unless the conceptualizing shares in the becoming. How that works remains to be clarified in Hegel's later works.

Through the *mise en abyme*, the immediate is mediated; the abstracted self becomes actual. For Hegel, “the task of philosophy consists in uniting these presuppositions [night and day], to posit being in non-being, as becoming; to posit dichotomy in the Absolute, as its appearance; to posit the finite in the infinite, as life” (*Diff* 93–94; *Differenz* 25).¹⁹ Positing being in non-being means mediating what has become immediate. Non-being is that which has no movement.

Because the night is equally the birthplace of all appearances, the night—as past, as potential, and as determining—is always already (full of) appearance. Absolute negation is absolute determination.

Hegel continues his sober thought: “Reason thus drowns itself and its knowledge and its reflection of the absolute identity, in its own abyss: and in this night of mere reflection and of the calculating intellect, in *this night which is the noonday of life, common sense and speculation can meet one another*” (*Diff* 103; emphasis).²⁰ Like Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, we are finitely infinite.²¹ The apparent incommensurability between the finite and the infinite is overcome, “suspended.”

For Hegel the night is “the noonday of life.” We can, therefore, assume that in the following cryptic passage, it is the night that is the “irradiating focus.” “To speculation, the finitudes are radii of the infinite focus which irradiates them at the same time that it is formed by them. In the radii the focus is posited and in the focus the radii” (*Diff* 111).²²

In his conclusion to *Faith* Hegel writes similarly:

Infinity is the pure nullification of the antithesis or of finitude; but it is at the same time also the spring of eternal movement, the spring of that finitude which is infinite, because it eternally nullifies itself. Out of this nothing and pure night of infinity, as out of the secret abyss that is its birthplace, the truth lifts itself upward. (*Faith* 190)²³

For Hegel, that which underlies all opposition is equally substance and subject. *Aufhebung* is substantial and rational. In *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel’s view of that rational whole takes Christian form. The dialectic of night and light and their becoming is referred to on occasion in the *Differenzschrift* as the Trinity. The original sundering of the imagination is the night, the Father; the product is the Son, the Logos; and the figurative reconstruction, the reconstruction of “nature as possibility,” is the Holy Ghost.²⁴

But for Hegel, the religious casting is not the final “form” of the sublation. What has gradually emerged in these early texts is Hegel’s early view

of the Speculative Idea. It is the *philosophies* of subjectivity that have been the object of criticism in *Faith*. In the concluding section of *Faith and Knowledge* the *religious* expression of loss is raised to philosophical understanding.

[T]he pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed, must signify the infinite grief [of the finite] purely as a moment of the supreme Idea, and no more than a moment. Formerly, the infinite grief only existed historically in the formative process of culture. It existed as the feeling that "God Himself is dead," upon which the religion of more recent times rests. . . . By marking this feeling as a moment of the supreme Idea, the pure concept must give philosophical existence to what used to be either the moral precept that we must sacrifice the empirical being (*Wesen*), or the concept of formal abstraction [e.g., the Categorical Imperative]. Thereby it must re-establish for philosophy the Idea of absolute freedom and along with it the absolute Passion, the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic Good Friday. *Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its God-forsakenness. . . . the highest totality can and must achieve its resurrection solely from this harsh consciousness of loss. . . .* (*Faith* 190–91, square bracket additions are Harris's, italics mine; *GW* 134)

Had Kant used the metaphor of the night it probably would have referred to the inaccessible noumenal world. Had Fichte, it probably would have referred to the intellectual intuition as the basis of all knowledge,²⁵ and to intellectual intuition of the beyond toward which we strive. Each allows for a failure of their respective versions of the self to achieve completion. Nonetheless, neither Fichte nor Kant point to an *experience of loss*. The experience of the sublime in Kant, while an experience of the loss of the ability to comprehend, is rather an opening onto the supersensible, and so is not really an experience of the loss of reason. And Fichte's experience of never arriving is appropriated representationally: Fichte writes that it "is just the mark in us that we are destined for eternity" (*Sc.Kn.* I, 270).

But for Hegel, the experience of loss is the logical conclusion of the subjective attitude. A proper critique of subjective philosophies must therefore bring about the consciousness of such loss.²⁶ Since for Hegel, "the True is the whole," (*PoS* 11),²⁷ loss is part of the whole. The failure of Kant and Fichte to know this loss is a sign of their failure not only in the critical enterprise, but also therefore, a failure to know the whole, or in other words, to reconcile thought and being.

CONCLUSION

I mentioned earlier that the solution offered by Schelling and Hegel was only provisional. This is because *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Differenzschrift* leave us several difficulties. By way of conclusion, I want to focus in particular on the difficulties that Hegel's early writings present for a theory of the imagination.

The Identity Philosophy claims that the imagination is an absolute original sundering. One problem with this is that the original identity of subject and substance is too baldly asserted to make much sense. We must adopt their starting point if we are to follow their development from it. But the starting point is not adequately argued for. This gives rise to a second problem. Hegel never clarifies how the intellect develops out of substance.²⁸ Hegel shows why one-sided—merely intellectual or subjective—reconstructions must suffer the logic of loss: the loss is a plunge of reason into the abyss of the sundering imagination. But his adoption of the Identity Theory in *Faith and Knowledge* does not yield an account of how that loss is related to the genesis of the intellect or to the history of Being. This makes the role of reflection in the reconstruction unclear. It remains unclear until Hegel develops the concept of Spirit over the next few years in Jena. The first account of the genesis of intellect occurs two years later, in Hegel's 1803–04 *Geistesphilosophie* lectures, and then again in a further developed form in his *Geistesphilosophie* lectures of 1805–06. In 1807 Hegel's labors do yield the reconstruction of both intellect and the history of Being as the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents the dialectical history of speculative reflection.

To understand this development, let us turn to the first of the two *Geistesphilosophie* lectures.