

# The Beauty of Fate and Its Reconciliation

Hegel's *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*  
and Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*<sup>1</sup>

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Oh! the grievous necessity of such violations of the holy! The deepest, holiest, sorrow of a beautiful soul, its most incomprehensible riddle, is that its nature has to be disrupted, its holiness sullied.<sup>2</sup>—FRIEDRICH HEGEL

OVER THE COURSE OF MANY YEARS and several publications, Walter Kaufmann analyzed Hegel's early writings with a view toward better understanding the philosopher's mature thought. While scholars searching for the sources of Hegel's philosophy tend to emphasize Kant's influence, Kaufmann highlights the impact of poets like Goethe and Schiller—but especially Goethe—on Hegel's thought. Kaufmann sees that influence manifested in several ways. He credits Goethe with leading Hegel to think more holistically and dynamically. With Goethe's help, that is, Hegel comes to recognize that one cannot understand theory apart from practice or thinking subject apart from thought object. Opposing positions, moreover, must be grasped in their relation to each other so that the limitations of each stance on its own might be made known and thereby overcome. In that way, Hegel insists with Goethe that

each viewpoint represents a stage in the development of spirit. Thus, in reading Hegel's extensive lectures on history and on the history of aesthetics, religion, and philosophy, we do not merely trace a sequence of changing events, cultures, or ideas across time. Rather, we come to learn of the human mind in its very becoming.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond this more general influence, Kaufmann claims multiple times to have uncovered a more explicit connection between Goethe and the young Hegel.<sup>4</sup> He identifies Hegel's early work *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* as a turning point in the philosopher's development, in particular through the explicit critique of Kantian *Moralität* by means of the *Sittlichkeit* articulated by Jesus. Kaufmann here points to the influence of Goethe's play *Iphigenia in Tauris*. He argues, "Hegel, who had previously put Kant's *Moralität* into the mouth of Jesus, now makes Jesus the prophet of the *Sittlichkeit* represented by Goethe's Iphigenia."<sup>5</sup> On Kaufmann's reading, Hegel has adopted Goethe's understanding of the human being as a harmonious ethical whole, in contrast to Kant's sundering of reason and the inclinations. Furthermore, Hegel's Jesus articulates a nontranscendent concept of faith that is basically "the love and trust between two free spirits."<sup>6</sup> Goethe's Iphigenia, for her part, shows such humanistic faith toward her brother Orestes, who is thereby freed from the torments of his conscience and his fate, and toward King Thoas. By that latter faith, Iphigenia atones the fate of her ancestral house.

Yet the theme of fate alerts us to ways that, in fact, Goethe's Iphigenia differs notably from Hegel's depiction of Jesus in *The Spirit of Christianity*. Both texts describe a distinctive figure—the beautiful soul—who struggles against his or her fate. In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century moral thought, the beautiful soul was an important figure that emerged in response to the need to establish a new system of ethics based not on Christianity but on human reason. Yet many thinkers realized that reason alone might not suffice to ensure moral action, so they also invoked the notion of beauty. The virtuous soul became beautiful, exhibiting such features as balance, proportion, and harmony. On this view, beauty, based as it was on universal principles but appealing also to the emotions, could unite human reason and sensuality into a harmonious whole.<sup>7</sup> By the time of Goethe and Hegel, however, the figure of the beautiful soul was strained and beginning to succumb to its eventual fate. This fate is exemplified in the contrast between Goethe's Iphigenia and Hegel's Jesus. Whereas Iphigenia is able, through her love and humanity, to achieve a reconciliation with her fate and with those around her, the story Hegel tells of Jesus is a tragic one. The Galilean's beauty of soul clashes with

the subservient nature of his surrounding Jewish culture and ultimately leads him and the Christian Church after him to fall victim to their fate.

In this chapter, my primary objective is to show the limits of the identification Kaufmann makes between Goethe's *Iphigenia* and Hegel's Jesus. Then I would like to gesture briefly toward the ways Goethe's play reappears in Hegel's mature thought, especially in relation to Hegel's reinterpretation of Jesus and Christianity. In that regard, we will see how Hegel thinks the Christian religion surpasses the aesthetic in the cultivation of *Sittlichkeit* and a humanity at home with itself, society, and the world.

### **Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris***

Kaufmann credits Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, written and reworked several times between 1779 and 1787,<sup>8</sup> with helping the young Hegel move beyond the *Moralität* of Kant toward his mature concept of *Sittlichkeit*. "Like nobody before him," Kaufmann claims,

Goethe succeeded at one blow in bringing the Greeks to life in eighteenth- and nineteenth century Germany. Winckelmann and Lessing had talked about the Greeks and taught their countrymen, including Goethe, to think about them in a different way, but Goethe made a new generation, including Hegel and Hölderlin, see and hear them. Suddenly, Sophocles' *Antigone* ceased to be merely the heroine of a tragedy written in the fifth century B.C.; her spirit was present even now and represented a live option and an alternative to Kant's *Moralität*.<sup>9</sup>

The Greek playwright Euripides had written a play of the same name in 412 BCE, and the differences between his work and that of Goethe are instructive. In Euripides's play, Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades deceive King Thoas and spirit away the statue of the goddess Artemis—a requirement set forth by Apollo so that Orestes might atone for killing his mother Clytemnestra. When Thoas seeks revenge, Athena appears and instructs him to yield to the divine will. In Goethe's play, by contrast, Iphigenia reconciles with Thoas through honesty and love. These prove, moreover, to be the sufficient *human* means of solving the dilemmas that arise in the story. Let us examine these features of Goethe's work in greater detail.

At the beginning of the play, Iphigenia bemoans her empty, lonely existence. Her father, the Greek king Agamemnon, had been underway to Troy with his armies when the winds became unfavorable, and their ships stalled

at Aulis. The goddess Diana declared that if Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia she would be placated and allow the winds to carry the Greek ships onward to Troy. Before the sacrifice could be completed, however, Diana rescued Iphigenia and bore her off to serve as her priestess in the barbarian land of Tauris. Iphigenia thus tells Arkas, messenger of the Taurian king Thoas, that an alien curse has befallen her, and she has been separated from her family and nation. Now, she claims, she is nothing but a shadow of her former self.<sup>10</sup>

Since, moreover, it was the goddess herself who allegedly took Iphigenia from her family and enlisted her as a priestess in Tauris, Iphigenia's relationship to the deity appears ambivalent. Iphigenia acknowledges that Diana saved her from death on the altar, but the consequence of that salvation is now an existence of servitude in a land far from her home at Mycenae. In her opening monologue, Iphigenia laments that even after a long tenure of service her spirit feels strange and unaccustomed to the goddess' sacred forest.<sup>11</sup> She is ashamed to admit that she serves the deity reluctantly, although she still places her hopes in Diana for a second rescue—a return to her home in Greece.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the monologue, Iphigenia maintains an attitude of reverence; she will not contend with the gods. Nonetheless, she makes clear that in contrast to a man, who is able to help himself in a strange place, “The lot of women is a piteous thing. . . . But how wretched / If hostile fate drives her to alien lands!”<sup>13</sup> Already in the first scene, it is unclear whether one can attribute fate to divine or human agency. Iphigenia first claims that she is held in Scythia by “a high will,” to which she submits herself.<sup>14</sup> But later, immediately after decrying the difficulty of a hostile fate for a woman, she says, “Thus Thoas holds me here, a noble man, / In solemn, sacred bonds of slavery.”<sup>15</sup>

When Iphigenia subsequently recounts to Thoas her blighted pedigree, fate more clearly emerges as the consequence of human actions. The fate that plagues Iphigenia's household stems from the action of its progenitor, Tantalus. The gods had invited him to dine with them, and he stole some of their ambrosia and shared it—and some divine secrets—with mortals. Iphigenia mitigates the grievousness of the crime to an extent by arguing that it is natural for humans to become dizzy and act out of character when communing with the gods.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, a curse was placed upon Tantalus's house, and thereafter his descendants perpetuated their own fates by repeated acts of deceit and murder.

Although this narrative of accursed internecine bloodshed plays out prior to the events that motivate the dramatic conflict in *Iphigenia*, it still bears upon the immediate dilemma facing Iphigenia. Thoas, the Taurian king,

wishes to marry her in order to secure his dynasty and avert revolution by his discontented subjects.<sup>17</sup> But Iphigenia longs to return home and consequently declines.<sup>18</sup> Spurned, Thoas threatens to reinstate a custom that had been suspended ever since Iphigenia appeared on Scythia's shores: the practice of sacrificing all stranded foreigners to Diana.<sup>19</sup> Iphigenia is to offer up to the goddess two recent captives who turn out to be Iphigenia's brother Orestes and his companion Pylades. She is now torn. On the one hand, she feels that she owes kindness and gratitude to Thoas,<sup>20</sup> who spared her life and even halted the practice of human sacrifice on her account.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, if she refuses Thoas, as she is inclined to do, she will have to kill her brother and his friend, thereby extending fate's claim over her household.<sup>22</sup>

In her anguished deliberations, Iphigenia struggles to find a point of orientation. Arkas, Thoas, and Pylades each advocate a course of action that would accentuate division and hinder reconciliation: the former two say she should marry the king,<sup>23</sup> whereas the latter encourages deception and theft.<sup>24</sup> Thoas and Pylades, though endorsing incompatible paths forward, both insist that Iphigenia listen to reason.<sup>25</sup> But the fact that their adherence to reason would only aggravate division—by either separating Iphigenia from her people or by stoking the animosity between Thoas and the Greeks—suggests that Goethe indeed sees the predominance of reason over the inclinations as an injurious form of heteronomy.<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between reason and the inclinations further relates to Goethe's concept of the divine as found in the drama. Iphigenia and the other characters strive to ascertain the divine will: does Diana will that Iphigenia return to Mycenae?<sup>27</sup> Does she want human sacrifices?<sup>28</sup> Pylades insists that he and Orestes were instructed by Apollo to recover the statue of Diana from the temple in Tauris. When Orestes questions whether his friend is not confusing his own wishes with the divine will, whether he is not merely following his own inclinations, Pylades contends that human intelligence provides sufficient hermeneutic means: "What good is human shrewdness if it does / Not harken heedfully to that high will?"<sup>29</sup> The problem is that he thinks that by stealing the image of Diana they will serve both the gods and the world,<sup>30</sup> when in fact they would only widen the gap of misunderstanding between the Scythians and the Greeks.

While Thoas suggests reason, and Pylades human craftiness, Iphigenia listens steadfastly to her *heart*. Thoas at least implicitly identifies this tendency with submission to her inclinations, but the significance of the heart in the drama suggests something more. In response to Thoas's insistence on reason,

Iphigenia claims that the heart is the true oracle of the divine will: “Through our hearts only do [the gods] speak to us.”<sup>31</sup> She is at once listening to the command of the divine—not to marry Thoas, not to sacrifice Orestes and Pylades, not to deceive the king who has been her kind benefactor—and to the particular pulsation of her feelings. In her heart they are one and the same.<sup>32</sup>

Goethe thus imbues his drama with a sense of divine benevolence and the unity of the gods with human beings. The drama, for one, clearly rejects a slavish obedience to positive laws and traditions falsely elevated to the absolute will of the gods. Thoas argues that Diana is angry because he has withheld the human sacrifices from her since Iphigenia’s arrival. He therefore wishes to reintroduce the tradition—an ancient law, as he calls it.<sup>33</sup> Iphigenia counters that so-called traditions often merely serve as expressions of personal passion.<sup>34</sup> She insists that one erroneously interprets the divine will if he conceives of the gods as bloodthirsty tyrants, when it is really only humans who desire to kill one another. Did not Diana prove this, Iphigenia asks, when she saved me from the priest’s hand at Aulis?<sup>35</sup> The shedding of blood would only bring down fate’s horrid curse upon the head of the one wielding the knife.<sup>36</sup>

In the midst of her dilemma, when the continuation of her family’s fate seems inevitable, Iphigenia naturally struggles to accept the notion of divine benevolence. She recalls a song that her nanny used to sing when she was young, a song of the Fates, which depicts the gods as capricious overlords who bless and curse human beings according to their whim.<sup>37</sup> However, Iphigenia is not adhering to a negative concept of the divine. It is important to note that the song is sung not by Iphigenia herself but by someone else. The song serves as a reflective exercise whereby she can gain a greater awareness of her own moral agency in contrast to the traditional understanding of the gods.<sup>38</sup> Her real desire is for the gods to confirm her notion of benevolent divinity: “Save me and save your image (*Bild*) in my soul!”<sup>39</sup> The request is later granted, but with a crucial twist: Orestes and Pylades had thought they needed to save the statue of the goddess and return it to Greek shores, when it turns out that Apollo had not meant his sister Diana but Orestes’s sister Iphigenia. The image of the divine that proves central to Goethe’s play lies in the beautiful human soul.<sup>40</sup>

Iphigenia thus decries Thoas’s inhumane manner of ruling, which resembles that of a distant, tyrannical god who issues positive commands to kill but allows someone else to bloody his or her hands and incur (half of the) fate by executing the order. In this case, there is a distinction between the command or law as a concept and its execution in reality.<sup>41</sup> But Iphigenia’s comparison implies that, while commanding something inhumane, Thoas

wishes *in vain* to hover (*schweben*), untainted, above the fray of human life and that true divinity is marked not by its distance from humankind but by its free and loving unity with it.<sup>42</sup>

Iphigenia accordingly strives to affirm a positive image of the divine, indeed, to affirm gods who do not favor one people over another but who rather love all humankind: “For the immortals bear love unto / The good and far-flung races of men.”<sup>43</sup> Although the language of the drama sometimes reflects a distinction between the divine and human spheres, in dramatic “reality” there is a unity. This is most evident in the heart’s mediation of the divine will. Iphigenia listens to her heart when she refuses to marry Thoas.<sup>44</sup> She appeals to the heart when she tries to liberate Orestes from his guilt-ridden insanity.<sup>45</sup> Orestes listens to his heart when he is finally healed and recognizes his sister.<sup>46</sup> Thoas, I would argue, does likewise when he offers Iphigenia and her compatriots a farewell blessing.<sup>47</sup> All these actions effect reconciliation, the true end that the gods desire. Moreover, with the exception of Diana’s rescue of Iphigenia from the altar at Aulis, which does not take place in the drama itself, all the action is carried out by human beings. Fate is the product of human actions. And just as human deeds give rise to fate, so too do they lead to its reconciliation. In this way, the words of Arkas ring true: “[The gods] tend toward human means to rescue humans.”<sup>48</sup>

Over the course of the drama, Iphigenia comes to learn the truth of Arkas’s statement not in the sense that humans solve their problems by mastering the world around them but rather by sensing their unity with the divine. Her recognition of this unity and her ability to reconcile her family’s fate manifest her beauty of soul. Goethe makes direct reference in the text to Iphigenia as a beautiful soul. When she resists marrying Thoas, who has shown her great kindness, Arkas asks, “Can a beautiful soul (*eine schöne Seele*) feel such repugnance for / A kindness that a noble man extends?”<sup>49</sup> In response, Iphigenia states that such a beautiful soul feels reluctance when the noble person attempts to possess not her gratitude but her person.<sup>50</sup> A beautiful soul cannot see herself under the domination of an alien power.

Yet Iphigenia is able to achieve autonomy while still reconciling herself with the surrounding world. This reconciliation obtains when love proves victorious over the demands of so-called necessity and of rights and duties. When Iphigenia hesitates to deceive the king so that Orestes, Pylades, and she can escape, Pylades argues that the urgency of the situation legitimates their subterfuge. Need, he maintains, demands their covert escape and the theft of Diana’s statue. Therefore, both gods and humans will overlook the

deceit such a course of action requires.<sup>51</sup> Pylades then adds that one cannot avoid sullyng his or her soul when one enters into relations with others in the world. Iphigenia should consequently not be so scrupulous:

So wondrously is mankind constituted (*gebildet*),  
So various are his knots and interweavings,  
That no one can stay pure and unconfused  
Within himself or with his fellow men.<sup>52</sup>

Pylades is right to see human beings as wondrously intertwined. It is thus true that Iphigenia cannot avoid acting in the world. She senses as much. Torn between saving her brother and being honest with Thoas, who has shown her such kindness, she soliloquizes,

Oh my soul, be still!  
Do you begin to waver now and doubt?  
The firm ground of your solitude you must  
Abandon now!<sup>53</sup>

The question is this: is it possible, contrary to what Pylades maintains, to act in the world and remain pure?

To be sure, Iphigenia must *withdraw* from the rational sphere of rights and duties in order to maintain her pure heart. Pylades advises her to claim her sacerdotal right to secrecy in order to facilitate their escape.<sup>54</sup> As Orestes's sister, moreover, she could very well make the case for defending his life.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Thoas has pledged to her free passage home if she is able to show that she has a reasonable chance of returning, which she now does.<sup>56</sup> But when Thoas confronts her about the delayed sacrifice, which she is intentionally stalling to win time, Iphigenia simply cannot bring herself to deceive the king any longer. She reveals the identities of the captives and their plans to escape with Diana's contraband image in tow.<sup>57</sup> In so doing, she is in effect relinquishing her rights as priestess, sister, and pledge recipient. Sensing that the king will not waver in his decision to stage the sacrifice, she throws herself at his mercy and pleads to be killed first.<sup>58</sup> Iphigenia cannot bear the thought of having to slay her brother and, as a result, perpetuating the fate of Tantalus's house.<sup>59</sup>

It seems possible, then, for Iphigenia to avoid contamination and the ensuing fate by sacrificing herself. However, she has in the meantime begun to discover the conciliatory power of love. She has already reached out in love to her brother, guilt-ridden for having killed their mother and unable to recognize Iphigenia his sister in his insanity:



O let love's pure breath, gently wafted, cool  
The burning deep within your breast. Orestes,  
My dear one, can you not hear what I say?<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, when Orestes begins to listen, to listen to his *heart*, he recognizes his sister and the bond of love they share, and the curse is lifted:

O let me too, clasped in my sister's arms  
. . . enjoy and keep  
With total gratitude what you grant me!  
The curse is lifting; my heart tells me so.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, Iphigenia does not restrict her love to itself or to her kinsmen. When Thoas and Orestes stand ready to clash swords to determine their fate, Iphigenia intervenes and overturns fate altogether with love and peace. As a beautiful soul, she is able to unite the realms of rights and duties and of the inclinations. To her brother and the king, she boldly speaks as priestess, sister, and adopted daughter of Thoas. All the while, she speaks directly from her heart as she persuades them to sheathe their swords:

Do not profane  
The goddess' dwelling place with rage and murder!  
Command your people to lay down their weapons,  
And hear your priestess, hear your sister.<sup>62</sup>

With these words she facilitates reconciliation with fate and loving peace between the Scythians and Greeks. Violence would breed only more division, and the curse of fate would persist. This would occur if Iphigenia were to sacrifice her brother or if Orestes were to fight Thoas. As Iphigenia prays to the goddess Diana,

O withhold then my hands from blood!  
Blessing and peace it never brings;  
the shape of one murdered by chance  
Will with terror stalk the sombre  
Unwilled murderer's evil hours.<sup>63</sup>

By the same token, Iphigenia's heart recoils at the prospect of gaining her freedom by deception. She realizes that she is leaving behind fellow human beings on Tauris,<sup>64</sup> and she is tormented by the thought of harming Thoas, who has been so good to her. Lies, like violence, would only strengthen fate's

grasp on her and her household. Once told, lies return to harm the one who spreads them:

O woe to lies! They do not liberate  
The heart as other words true-spoken do.  
They do not comfort us, they strike alarm  
In one who secretly invents them, and,  
Like arrows sped and by some god averted  
And made to miss their mark, they backward fly  
To strike the archer.<sup>65</sup>

For a pure soul the truth suffices.<sup>66</sup>

Violence, deceit, and theft would preclude reconciliation. Therefore, when Thoas threatens to reinstate the practice of human sacrifice, because he fears that the goddess is angry that they have failed to obey the ancient law, Iphigenia counters by invoking an even older law. This law is neither the positive command of a deity nor the Kantian universal command of reason. Rather, it is a law enacted by impersonal love: the law of hospitality.<sup>67</sup> In hospitality (*Gastrecht*), the categories of right and duty are taken up and transcended. Here there is no longer a division between races and nations; Iphigenia trusts that all people, barbarian and Greek alike, can listen to their hearts and recognize the bonds of humanity, love, and life,<sup>68</sup> such that no one is ever a stranger on another's shores. Accordingly, after Thoas has decided to keep his promise and permit Iphigenia to sail home with her brother and his companions, Iphigenia pledges that Taurians will always be welcome guests in her land. She will offer them hospitality and request news of the king from them.<sup>69</sup>

At first, however, Thoas only reluctantly and bitterly allows Iphigenia to leave. She protests immediately:

Not thus, my king! Without your blessing,  
With your ill-will, I shall not part from you.  
O do not banish us. A friendly guest-right [*Gastrecht*]  
Must be the rule between us: that way we  
Are not cut off forever.<sup>70</sup>

Just as she opens her arms in hospitality to Thoas and his people, she cannot leave him behind without his blessing and a reciprocal offer of welcome. Otherwise there is neither love nor reconciliation—just a grudging nod to her *right* to leave. In that case, Iphigenia and Thoas, the Greeks and the Taurians,

would remain forever divided. Ultimately, though, love prevails. Thoas listens to his heart and offers Iphigenia and the Greeks his blessing, a farewell that shows—and here I deliberately anticipate the next section on Hegel—that love has become life: “Lebt wohl!”<sup>71</sup>

### **Hegel's *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate***

Hegel's early writings on religion reflect his effort to uncover the spirit of his society and to ascertain why that spirit had resulted in the societal divisions he saw around him. Hegel believed that the relationship to nature that a certain people's spirit has decisively conditions their understanding of the world and the particular religious, historical, and philosophical categories through which that worldview is expressed. In Greek religion and society, Hegel finds an example of beautiful harmony, of a people at home with each other and the world.<sup>72</sup> However, when he strives to understand the divisions in the German society around him, he turns to his culture's Judeo-Christian roots for insight into its governing spirit and the relation this spirit has to nature and the world. This effort to understand his culture reveals a transformative motive, insofar as Hegel sensed that by grasping the proper relationship of spirit to nature and the world, one could attain true unity and freedom and lead a life in harmony with one's own essential character and the surrounding world.<sup>73</sup> One can properly understand Hegel's early works, then, only within the context of his search for unity and freedom.

In *The Spirit of Christianity* (1798–1800),<sup>74</sup> Hegel thus criticizes what he sees as the spirit of the Jews, who have, according to his reading of Jewish history, perpetuated disunity through alienation from nature and other peoples. Both in the reaction to the destructive flood<sup>75</sup> and in Abraham's departure from his native people to live on his own, Hegel detects an attitude that views nature as a hostile enemy to be conquered rather than as an environment and force with which a people must reconcile themselves. Abraham and his progeny, the Jews, are therefore not at home in the world. In an effort to maintain their autonomy, their freedom from the conditions of life in this world, they seek the unity of their people in an extrawordly God, a universal ideal, who controls for them the hostile elements and guarantees their continued, isolated existence in exchange for their obedience.<sup>76</sup>

The spirit of Abraham, which his descendants inherit, is one of seeming autonomy vis-à-vis the world. However, that autonomy is sustained by a deeper-seated, more deleterious subservience to the Jewish God and his

commands. This tenacious separation of the Jews from other peoples and from nature, along with the thoroughgoing dependence on their unifying principle, gives rise in Hegel's view to the Jews' distinctive fate: a perpetually wretched existence in isolation and slavish servitude to the positive laws of their religion. In describing the fateful Jewish existence, Hegel avails himself of aesthetic categories: "In other peoples the state of independence is a state of good fortune, of humanity at a more beautiful level. With the Jews, the state of independence was to be a state of total passivity, of total ugliness."<sup>77</sup>

This caricature of Judaism could be found elsewhere in Enlightenment thought. Immanuel Kant had argued that the true core of religion is ethical.<sup>78</sup> In his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he thus concludes that Judaism is not, properly considered, a religion at all: it is simply a political union whose laws are consistent with a state's concern with external action, rather than moral intention, and the state's use of coercive force to ensure compliance.<sup>79</sup> By contrast, Kant strove in his ethics to uphold the autonomy of the human person by emphasizing that reason, not a divine being, legislates the categorical imperative whereby one should act according to his or her maxim only if that maxim can serve as a universal law. This rational law, moreover, trumps any sensual inclinations in determining the principle of ethical action.<sup>80</sup> Yet even Kant's attempt to secure the human being's autonomy in an enlightened ethical religion, as opposed to all positive religions, falls victim to criticism in Hegel's search for a higher form of unifying freedom.

The Kantian has, on Hegel's reading, merely assimilated an external overlord to reason, such that opposition between reason and the inclinations persists within the person and hegemonically precludes all other relations not determined by a sense of duty.<sup>81</sup> Hegel argues, furthermore, that a merely formal law of reason claiming universality in scope lacks the means whereby it can actualize itself in particular action. Such a law cannot compel someone in a particular situation to act without involving itself in a contradiction of universal and particular.<sup>82</sup> Through the teaching of Jesus, then, Hegel introduces the concept of love, which is life manifest in a specific mode, as a means of uniting the universal form of law and the particular inclinations of each person. In love there is no sense of duty to the law of reason which would demand suppression of the inclinations. Rather, the inclinations are in complete accord with the "commands" of reason; properly speaking, there are no longer any commands, "since duties require an opposition and an action that we like to do requires none."<sup>83</sup> When Jesus speaks of the fulfillment (*πλήρωμα*) of the law in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5.2-16),

Hegel interprets this to mean the addition of inclination to the concept of law.<sup>84</sup> Through the synthesis of universal law and particular inclination in love, Jesus “exhibits that which fulfils the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous.” As a result, subject and object and particular reality and universal concept shed all opposition and “restore man’s humanity in its entirety.”<sup>85</sup>

Jesus, according to Hegel, directs the brunt of his teaching against these forms of heteronomous opposition. With regard to Judaism, he opposes heteronomy in general as well as the infinite God who rules over the Jewish people. The divine, for Hegel, is accordingly not a universal ideal opposed to the world, as the Jews would have it. Nor is it something utterly finite and objective that would preclude one’s ability to sense him or herself as a part of the whole of life. To Hegel’s mind, the latter is the mistake the early Christians make. In their love for one another, they withdrew from the world, since they regarded all forms of life as consciousness of particular objects and as a result desired to avoid these restricted forms. Such withdrawal from the world, however, prevented them from actualizing their love in *life*, that is, in a sensing of one’s existence as a part and manifestation of the whole. Their Christian love therefore remained an ideal, the consciousness of which they could not now achieve apart from a positive command to love each other. The positivity of this command to love in turn drove them to specify dogmatic faith in particular doctrines, especially concerning the human person of Jesus, as the concrete indicator of the common love shared by the members of the group.<sup>86</sup>

Here we gain insight into the young Hegel’s concepts of God and religion. Above we saw how he attempts to achieve unity in the realm of morality through love. Just as Kantian *Moralität* affirms the human being’s autonomy in the realm of consciousness—that is, it replaces the concept of a divine lawgiver with a sense of duty to the categorical imperative which reason legislates for itself—so love overcomes the gulf between reason and the inclinations in the realm of *Moralität*. Love itself, however, fails to attain completeness for the human being in his or her sociality. While happy love enables people to live unreflectively in their joyful, albeit undeveloped union, unhappy love compels them to reflect upon the cause of their unhappiness, upon the finitude of the feeling of love. This reflection reintroduces opposition, insofar as one becomes conscious of the fact that the intuition of love, the representation of love that one has before his or her mind’s eye, necessarily has a delimited object—that group of relations to which the love extends

—and thus cannot encompass the infinite object of the divine. Hence Hegel observes that one must rise from love to the level of religion: “What is religious, then, is the *πλήρωμα* of love; it is reflection and love united, bound together in thought.”<sup>87</sup>

For Hegel, then, religion is neither simply an expression of rational operation nor just of feeling or sensation. Rather, it unites the two aspects of the human person and eliminates the opposition between them. Hegel describes this unification in terms of a process or development, and, in this description, he employs aesthetic terms. Love, he argues, is not equivalent to religion but must rather develop into it. As in the case of the early Christians, love is at first an ideal that must become objective in the imagination. Hence Hegel stresses the religious need for images that give shape to love. But these representations are not mere symbols of a common feeling, since symbolization requires mediation *in thought* by a third element that connects the symbol and its referent. They are instead manifestations of *living* bonds that surmount the opposition between the ideal and the objective and allow those who participate in them to sense their living, spiritual union together.<sup>88</sup> Thus while multiple, disparate religious images, in their objective form, introduce divisions by their restrictedness in the imagination, this division is a requisite part of love’s development into religion and life, which ultimately erases any opposition.<sup>89</sup> The religious group thereby comes to the self-consciousness, in the union of reflection and love, of their unity in spirit and life. They become aware of their harmony in “their developed many-sidedness.”<sup>90</sup>

Here the strong social emphasis in Hegel’s understanding of religion and the divine becomes apparent. But we should remind ourselves that at this point in his development Hegel evaluates Christianity according to the standard of the harmonious religious and political experience of the Greek polis. In particular, he wants to show that because of its excessive subjectivity—its resistance to objective expression through the imagination—Christianity never rises from love to religion. According to Hegel, the entirety of the Christian religion, as taught by Jesus, is contained in the idea of the Kingdom of God. By the terms “love” and “life,” Hegel underscores the unity of the divine and the human spirit and, moreover, the unity of all human beings in that spirit:

In the Kingdom of God what is common to all is life in God. This is not the common character which a concept expresses, but is love, a living bond which unites the believers; it is this feeling of unity of life, a feeling in which all oppositions, as pure enmities, and also rights, as unifications of still subsisting

oppositions, are annulled. . . . This friendship of soul . . . is the divine spirit, is God who rules the communion.<sup>91</sup>

The faith that Jesus preaches has as its proper object (*Gegenstand*) this unifying divine spirit that the human being already contains in some way within him or herself and not any finite object (*Objekt*) distinct from the believing subject.<sup>92</sup> Hence Jesus tried, by Hegel's reading, to downplay his own personal identity so that his disciples would not place their faith in a finite object—the man Jesus. By the same token, Jesus opposed any notion of a personal God distinct from the persons who believe in him.<sup>93</sup> In an impersonal divine spirit uniting all human beings through the bond of love, where there is no subjection to an objective principle, Hegel discovers true freedom and beauty: “In the Kingdom of God there can be no relation save that which proceeds from the most disinterested love and so from the highest freedom, save that which acquires from beauty alone its mode of appearance and its link with the world.”<sup>94</sup>

As we have already seen, though, Jesus's teaching of beauty and freedom met with misunderstanding in the minds of his immediate followers. Their spirit, their withdrawal from the world and objectification of faith into doctrines for belief, have all determined their fate: namely, their inability throughout history to unite spiritual and worldly affairs.<sup>95</sup> But even before the early Christians bungled Jesus's message, the battle between beauty and fate raged in Jesus's own life. To understand Jesus as a fated beautiful soul, then, we need to explore Hegel's concept of fate in greater detail.

In *The Spirit of Christianity*, the contours of fate emerge quite lucidly when Hegel contrasts fate with penal law. Penal law, as a concept, stands diametrically opposed to life. The law is a formal, universal condemnation of all acts that violate it and thereby annul its content, namely, the affirmation of a right that has been denied another in the crime under consideration. The law knows no mercy or reconciliation because its universality of form always opposes the particularity of the transgressor and his or her trespass. Were the law to offer mercy in this instance or that, then it would no longer have the form of a *universal* law. The law's enforcement depends, however, upon a judge, who as a living being possesses the ability to carry out the universally deserved punishment or not. Consequently, a tension persists between the universal concept of justice embodied in the form of the law and the execution of justice in particular cases. Punishment meted out by a judge and endured by the trespasser cannot erase the reality of the past crime because

the universality of law remains, even after punishment, always opposed to the particularity of life. Punishment leads to reunification only in a concept, in terms of pure justice, but not in the realm of relations whereby the unity of life manifests itself, in virtue. Thus, if the universal law persists, so does the condemnation of the particular crime. The law relentlessly hounds the conscience of the transgressor, who is constantly reminded of his or her misdeed, a crime that is henceforth ignominiously and irreparably cemented in the past.<sup>96</sup>

But whereas the law, a mere concept, requires something real to enact the punishment it demands, fate in Hegel's view entails both the command and its execution at once, since in fate there is no division between the universal and the particular. This is the case because fate arises from a sundering of life. All life is unified. Consequently, any harm done to another life harms one's own life as well. A violation of life causes life itself to turn back upon the trespasser as his or her own enemy; the transgression gives rise to its own punishment. Yet the very fact that life punishes those who rupture its unity offers the possibility of reconciliation. Punishment by law always betrays a condition of heteronomy, as the law subjects the particularity of life to its domination. It is always some agent of a dominant power who exacts justice by executing the punishment demanded by law, but this punishment amounts merely to one particular violation of rights in response to another. As a result, the living person always views the law as a persisting alien force to which he or she is subject. But when one endures fate, when life itself has been rent in two, then the crime is not merely the annihilation of the content of a law, of a particular right, to which the law's universal form remains opposed. In the throes of fate, one senses not the domination of law but that the wound inflicted upon life forms a part of him or herself. And when one feels that he or she has severed the unity of life, when one yearns to recover the life he or she has lost, one already begins to share again in the unity of life. The division that is felt is, in a sense, necessary for the reconciliation with fate by love. With reconciliation, then, with the recognition that the life violated in another is also violated in oneself, justice is served and one's conscience assuaged. Unlike punishment by law, which forever spotlights the reality of the unchangeable crime, reconciled fate allows the transgression against life to fade into the shadows of memory.<sup>97</sup>

Fate further differs from penal law in that it also afflicts the innocent. One need not be guilty of a crime to sense divisions in the unity of life. Here Hegel traverses the rugged terrain of the tragic, where the guilt of innocence



arouses fate, where a beautiful soul cannot avoid harming life in order to maintain his or her autonomy and purity.<sup>98</sup> Yet if Hegel considers fate to arise from one's own actions, what about so much of life, in which a great deal is done or happens to someone? Is this also a source of fate? No, Hegel answers, another's action simply serves as the occasion for fate. What is decisive is how one chooses to react to that which befalls him or her.<sup>99</sup>

Hegel delineates three possible reactions to an assault. One could choose to fight back and defend his or her right against the aggressor. Or one could passively yield. In the latter case, one is still insisting upon his or her right. Such a person merely lacks the power to defend it and suffers grief over this impotence. Both reactions subject one to fate: in both there is a conflict between the claim to a right in thought and the reality of that right in life. On the one hand, courageous self-defense perpetuates fate by submitting the conflict of rights, an opposition of universal concepts, to resolution either by physical might or by a judge's arbitration. Heteronomy obtains in the case of self-defense because each combatant must yield to determination by sheer strength, which has nothing to do with right, or to an outside arbiter. Opposition likewise persists because neither force nor a third party can reconcile opposing claims to right or life turned against life. In grieving passivity, on the other hand, one bitterly succumbs to fate and the domination of the other while nonetheless clinging, in one's mind, to one's own right.<sup>100</sup>

Only the third alternative, that of the beautiful soul, enables one to maintain his or her autonomy and transcend the power of fate. The beautiful soul removes him or herself from the sphere of rights altogether; he or she relinquishes his or her right voluntarily and accepts the fate as just. In this way, courage and passivity are united. Life remains because the beautiful soul withdraws from heteronomous relations in order to preserve his or her purity, but the opposition with another living being no longer exists. Moreover, unlike the one who bitterly yields to an aggressor, the beautiful soul accepts his or her fate and can endure it, since the sufferings are now the result of his or her own choice and not of some other being that would exert dominance over him or her.<sup>101</sup>

Hegel seems, then, to be examining what we might call an aesthetics of suicide, which has autonomy and purity of soul as its highest values: "To save himself, the man kills himself; to avoid seeing his own being in another's power, he no longer calls it his own, and so he annihilates himself in wishing to maintain himself, since anything in another's power would no longer be the man himself."<sup>102</sup> Wishing not to injure life through heteronomous social relations,

the beautiful soul chooses instead to withdraw from life. By giving up a part or whole of life, however, the beautiful soul must endure the fate of his or her own destruction. Yet this destruction is no longer fate to the beautiful soul because it is voluntarily chosen. The beautiful soul has transcended fate.<sup>103</sup>

It is clear that Hegel regards Jesus as precisely this beautiful soul who removes himself from impure Jewish society. Yet in Hegel's treatment of Jesus as a beautiful soul, several tensions emerge which indicate that, in *The Spirit of Christianity*, Hegel reaches an impasse, if not with the figure of Jesus as the founder of the Christian religion, then at least with the concept of the beautiful soul. Hegel describes how the negative attribute of the beautiful soul's withdrawal is a tremendous freedom, since by relinquishing all ties he or she gains complete autonomy. The pure heart that has fled life in order not to harm anyone is thus fully open to reconciliation with kindred spirits. With respect to Jesus, this is evident in the exhortation to forgive sins. By the standards of justice, when one endures a violation of his or her person, he or she obtains rights over the one who has committed the affront. In forgiving the other's sin, however, one renounces his or her claim to that right. A stringent claim to rights, in Hegel's view, betrays a mistake akin to the one Kant makes: namely, dutifully clinging to universal standards, to concepts, which one has set up in his or her mind and by which he or she is now judging others. Consequently, this subjection of the particular individual to universal standards of right arouses fate. This fate, as a reaction of the whole, of life, turns against the one who judges the other, who sees in the transgressor only a sin made universal by law, rather than a whole person who is more than the sum of his or her errors. Forgiveness, contrariwise, reconciles one with fate and leads to consciousness of the unity of life and spirit with the other person.<sup>104</sup>

The difficulty in Hegel's text lies in the fact that, although Jesus possesses a heart completely open to reconciliation, he is unable to actualize that reconciliation in life because he has withdrawn from his surrounding society. This problem in turn leads to the question of undeveloped beauty in Hegel's reading of Jesus's life and the history of the early church. In Jesus's life, fate comes into direct conflict with beauty:

The fate of Jesus was that he had to suffer from the fate of his people; either he had to make that fate his own, to bear its necessity and share its joy, to unite his spirit with his people's, but to sacrifice his own beauty, his connection with the divine, or else he had to repel his nation's fate from himself, but submit to a life undeveloped and without pleasure in itself. In neither event would