

## From Hegel to Nietzsche

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*I bought the book around 1973 and it remained unread in my library for almost half a century. Finally I sat down to read it. It was in many ways a disappointment, presenting a catalogue of names and contributions, which in no way engaged the imagination. I forced myself to finish it, and to write a readable review of it, I would have been forced to reread it more carefully, trying to find the interesting parts and put them into some engaging structure. I decided that it was not worth the necessary effort, so what follows are just some unedited notes I made during the reading, included to give some idea [May 30 2022]*

Goethe & Hegel. To find the midpoint between the subjective and the objective. The objective world being the construction of the subjective (idealism, top-down, taking your thoughts as a basis), the subjective world being part of the objective (materialism, bottom-up, given a mechanical basis for thought). Science according to Popper is an interaction between theory and speculation (subject) modified by empiricism (objective). The imagination is subjective but in order to be properly stimulated it needs the constraints of the objective world, kicking back at you.

According to Goethe Hegel incorporated Christianity into reason, but according to him philosophy and theology should be kept separate, theology has as little need of philosophy as philosophy has of religion. His own attitude towards Christianity is split, on one hand he sees it as ridiculous, but he does not want to appear pagan, and does appreciate its allegorical fertility and sees Christianity as the basis of humanism. Yet, if there has been no Jewish Bible but Hnersßs [what? Goethe's, Hegel's ?] work would have constituted our Bible, how different would not the world have been.

Both Hegel and Goethe being disturbed by the Revolution of 1830 convinced that it would herald new times, whether of good or bad. Both died shortly thereafter, active until the very end,

Hegel's idea of reality, essence and rationality equal to reality. Critics of his notion of reality too abstract, has to be immediate and empirical, and as Kierkegaard claims it has to be a reality of concern, as an individual for his own existence.

Marx talks about alienation of man, the contradiction between the individual and the social-political, one private and concrete the other public and abstract. Marx was not satisfied with Hegel's resolution. Marx brings up the effect of the commodity, the mercantile. Modern labor is not a slave, as no one can force him to part with his labor, but he is by forces of circumstances forced to submit his labor in order to stay alive, and labor is all he has.

### **Hegel on Christianity**

Hegel's early philosophical writings concern religion. According to him the historical task of Jesus was to restore the totality of life, the inner being as opposed to the outer one characterized by the Jewish religion based on law (*Gesetz*) what Hegel calls *Gesetztheit*.

This was to be effected by 'love' which was to triumph 'law'. Love both in relation to a God, but also between man and man, specifically between the 'I' and the 'Thou'. This unified life of love is the only total life or life of being, because only what is unified being is genuine being. An individual becomes himself only through another being, by supposedly being unified through a relationship of love. The miracles of Christianity only appear as such from an external view of *Gesetzheit*, from the point of the inner view those contradictions disappear. Looking at the Eucharistic doctrine, externally bread and wine are mere bread and wine, but spiritually there is no distinction between Jesus body and the bread, his blood and the wine. In his treatise *Glauben und Wissen*(1802) Hegel tries to abolish the distinction between faith and knowledge, which can only be made in the realm of *Gesetzheit*, by moving to a higher spiritual plane. If reason would be incapable of having knowledge of God, then neither faith nor knowledge could exist genuinely and truthfully, only the contrast between them. Originally reason was subordinated to faith, being its handmaiden so to speak, (one may compare with Hume's assertion that reason is the slave of passion), but philosophy has rejected it. Hegel wants to absorb religion into philosophy, the effect of which seems to be a merger as true philosophy is a form of worship (of truth?). Hegel refers to the common opinion that to comprehend the plan of providence is presumptuous which must be a consequence of the almost universal axiom that man can have no knowledge of God, and if this is the desperate position reached by theology, one must take refuge in philosophy if any knowledge of God is to be had. Hegel wants to consider religion to be the object of philosophy as space is the object of geometry. This would be an objective stand of *Gesetzheit* making a spurious distinction. In fact the interest of philosophy is the same as that of theology, namely the eternal truth of its own objectivity. He repeatedly emphasizes that religion and philosophy are both forms of worship but conducted in their particular ways so it can appear that they are different things. The Church fathers were neoplatonists and Aristoteleans and for some conversion to Christianity was a consequence of philosophical study. Systematic theology is philosophy as scholastic philosophy illustrates. The difference between philosophy and religion is not a case of content but just form. Hegel distinguishes three forms:

- a) A merely casual and subjective feeling
- b) sensual imagination
- c) philosophical thought

The last being the most appropriate for spiritual content and universal by its very nature. Those who like Schleiermacher takes feeling to be the basis for knowledge of God, remains stranded in the fortuitous realm of empirical events, this is the worst. When contents come through feeling, everyone is reduced to his own subjective view. And so it goes on, it is not easy to make out what Hegel is driving at, but apparently he seems to speak about a translation of religion into philosophy, but it does not seem clear what this amounts to. In fact it gave rise to a split of the Hegelian school into a left and right wing. Was God a person or a process, was immortality universal or personal?

Strauss:(1808-1874) He was a student of Schleiermacher and Hegel. Known for his life of Jesus - *Das Leben Jesu* (1835) treated Jesus as a historical figure not a divine one and discounted all the miracles as mere myths. The book caused a furor. In his last work *Der alte und der neue Glaube* he gave up Christianity (and Hegel) but not really religion and

tried to find a modern form for it.

The Enlightenment meant the rejection of religion, especially Christianity, and the reliance of man on man himself, according to Kant, and in his words: of man growing up and becoming an adult. So the perspective on Christianity changed from being a divine guidance transcending man to a mere aspect of humanity and hence of interest as a purely historical study, in particular involving a detached scholarly criticism of the Bible.

### **The problem of Christianity**

Philosophical criticism of Christian religion began in the 19th century with Hegel and reached its climax with Nietzsche. They were all Protestants and thus it can be seen as a German movement

Overbeck, an opponent to Hegel, had a more radical view on Christianity, and became the founder of the Tbingen school. He was a friend of Nietzsche, but did not join his attack on Christianity but furnished him with scholarly references. His work can be found in his book *Christlichkeit der Theologie*, of which we will try to make a brief summary.

Theology is a science opposed to the primitive and literal meaning of Christian faith. This antagonism between faith and knowledge cannot, pace Hegel, be reconciled they are absolutely irreconcilable. Thus no theology can arise unless there are other interests than the religious, thus a primitive Christianity could not develop a church and a systematic theology, that it happened was a consequence of the prevalent pagan culture which it could not destroy and hence had to find its support in. Gnosticism destroyed the infant faith and when it itself was defeated it was as a result of a rising theology, thus more interested in the formal aspects of faith than faith itself. Once theology borrowed the methods of criticism of secular science, theology was doomed to become the grave digger of Christianity. Critical and historical study can indeed destroy religion but not reconstruct it. Protestantism does not mean the consummation of religion but its dissolution. The Reformation had no meaning it was defined purely as a protest against the Catholic Church. Christianity is engaged in a process of realization i.e. secularization. Pascal was the last real Christian in the Modern world. He rejected Kierkegaard's attack as insincere, rhetorical and paradoxical. The contribution of the Greco-Roman paganism to the growth of the church has been underestimated. Our understanding of Christianity has diminished as the ancient world has vanished from our lives. Christianity is itself a part of the ancient world, so a modern Christianity is a contradiction in terms. If Christianity is to be overcome it must be by a culture higher not lower than that which Christianity overcame in its turn. The essence of Christianity is not a sequence of dogmas and myths but the fiat that Christ will return and the end of the world as it now exists. Christianity is by nature eschatological and ascetic. The most interesting aspect of Christianity is its impotence, it cannot rule the world as its wisdom is not of life but of death. The contrast between the eschatology of primitive Christianity and our future-oriented mood is fundamental. After Christianity was granted official sanction the ideal of martyrdom was lost and everything great and vital in the church proceeded from the cloisters. The Reformation stopped that. According to Lwith, Overbeck lacked the genuine hatred of Christianity, but also the lack of the absolute affirmation of the secular world which makes the atheism of Bauer, Feurbach and Strauss superficial. Overbeck numbered himself among the unbelievers by virtue of subordinating theology to philosophy, but recognized its moral value. December 22,25, 2020