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Response to Doctor Marti

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Responses to Marti

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Doctor Marti is to be commended for compressing such a rich variety of historical reminders and flashes of philosophical insight within the scope of his brief and suggestive paper. Among the important reminders culled from the tradition are, first of all, the pivotal importance of St. Augustine's fusion of philosophical inwardness and Christian doctrine, then a correct and careful estimation of Kant's location of the ethically active self within the noumenal order, and finally a lucid synthesis of Schelling's insights into the possibility of a philosophical religion. Marti understands that to repeat the tradition philosophically is to renew and restore it. But he also brings novel insights to bear upon the Kantian-Hegelian tradition, the most striking of which are the assertions that the work of ratiocination (*Verstand*) is guesswork, and that obligation becomes objective only in and with the act of taking responsibility. Each of these gems deserves to be cut, polished, and set within its own extended treatment.

Marti's "Last Objectivism" is an allusive paper, a tissue of glimmering insights, not an argumentative exposition. Accordingly, I find I must, perhaps contrary to Marti's spirit and method, prosaically list what I take to be his claims before I can reply. I am not perfectly

confident that I have understood all the nuances of his position, but the following seem to be his major contentions:

(1) Both the self and God are "entities" of the same sort, that is, non-entities, non-substances, non-actors. Each is a creative agency, a relationality, and an outcropping of spontaneity, and each is fundamentally for the other.

(2) The self lives "in God." Its freedom, inwardness and self-identity are apparently limitations of, instances of-or better-qualities and events evoked by their divine counterparts.

(3) Ratiocination or analytic intellect can only reify both self and deity in its attempt to explain, analyze, and establish conditional relationships between conditioned objects. Reason can intuit or "sense" in a non-objectivistic manner, and is thus fitted for cognizing the unconditional.

(4) A "religion of reason" ought to be confined to the individual self's recognition of divine or creative acts and its creative response to them (for example, will to truth in thinking, acceptance of moral responsibility), accompanied by the recognition of ultimate spontaneity or freedom as in some sense their source.

Ad (1): A dialectic of devotion and idolatry is involved in every attempt to name the divine, for the human spirit simultaneously feels itself elevated above itself and yet tempted to understand and control the power that tears it out of the ordinary. Marti rightly stresses the moment of negative theology in the pious use of intellect, as did Aquinas and Cusanus. But perhaps he is extreme. Schelling's notion of the infinite non-objectivity of the absolute makes sense only in the context of a philosophy of nature and of spirit wherein the absolute is seen to objectify or give form to itself and thus become a subject that suffers and enjoys a finite world. Marti's negative theology seems to divorce the object of religious devotion and intellectual contemplation from any specific or describable relation to worldly being, precisely as the price for not blasphemously ascribing conditional predicates to the divine. In simply and ultimately contrasting the conditional and the unconditional, Marti veers toward the paradox Plato voiced in

Parmenides 133a-134e; if we simplistically conceive the divine as sheer otherness, then religious phenomena such as trust in providence, care, and devotion go out the window - things which Marti, I suspect, would find essential to religion.

As for his suggestion that we abolish the grammar of "self," "person," and "spirit," allowing only "I," "you," and the devotional pronoun "God" in their stead, I find the idea not only awkward but misleading. The pure "I," Fichte's spontaneous self-positing, Kant's noumenal agent which comes to itself only in recognizing and accepting moral responsibility, exists nowhere but in a finite setting, and apprehends and acts only within a finite history of objective circumstances. The "I" of Fichte's and the young Schelling's transcendental idealism is indeed not "of this world," but it certainly is *in* this world. Hegel rightly saw that spirit first comes to itself as a return from and out of a world that is both objective and, at least in its general features, rational. To divorce "reason" and the objectivity of the world in so pronounced a manner as Marti does perhaps invites the equation of religion with emotionalism and anti-intellectualism.

Ad (2): Marti reproduces most of the ambiguities of Schelling's doctrine of God, which cannot conveniently be labeled either theism or pantheism, or said to stress consistently divine immanence over transcendence or the reverse. But ratiocinative convenience is not what is at stake in philosophy of religion, as Marti correctly sees. Schelling's theology was anthropological in its method: In one sense, self qua spirit lives "in God," or it is God that acts in the self; in another sense, what makes the self *its own* self blinds its vision of its divine ground of possibility and tempts it to its fall into singularity. But in the moment of religious recognition, the self wills that it not be God, that God be more than its philosophical idea, that God be the "Lord of being," that is, the absolutely free one, consequently the liberator. All of this follows from the interrelation of the human and the divine which Schelling builds into his doctrine of the Creation: "Created from the source of things and kindred to it, the human soul has a con-science (*Mitwissenschaft*) of the Creation. This knowledge encloses the supreme lucidity of all things, and it is not so much the cognitive (*wissend*) agent as it is science itself." (*Nachlassband 5*).

If we object that these Schellingian assertions all fudge on the question of the identity or non-identity of the self and the deity, Marti would maintain, I think, that the religious *relation* is what is central to religion, that God is pure relation, secure of self and caring of others, and so radically free and malleable as to be free from being anything at all. As Charles Hartshorne has argued so clearly, divine transcendence is not well described in terms of immutability, identity and disrelation, but is better defined as an unsurpassable degree of sensitivity to, care for, and harmonious interadjustment of, finite beings. But while process theologians thus define the consequent deity as the limit case of *affectivity*, Marti seems more successful in preserving the traditional notion of God's infinity with his insistence that *freedom* is the mark of transcendence. His inspiration, Schelling, despite his persistent taste for metaphysical monism, had managed to preserve the "distance" required of orthodox theism and the centrality of the concept of the Creation to Christian thinking when he observed of the God-human relation, " ... there is love neither in indifference nor where opposites are combined which require the combination in order to be; but rather . . . this is the secret of love, that it unites such beings as could each exist in itself, and nonetheless neither is nor can be without the other." (7 :408).

Ad (3): Throughout the paper, Marti employs the Kantian distinction of reason and ratiocination in many varied, and some distinctly non-Kantian, senses. In general, they parallel Schelling's distinction between "intellectual intuition" and discursive intellect, or Hegel's more subtle distinction between reason and reflection. At various points Marti contrasts *reason* and *ratiocination* as, respectively:

thinking with necessity	versus guessing at possibilities
Platonic <i>epistémé</i>	versus Platonic <i>doxa</i> and <i>orthé doxa</i>
action	versus comprehension
sensing or intuiting	versus explanation
will to truth	versus guesslllg
grasping what ought to be	versus grasping what is

With all this terminological slippage, it is not clear whether reason's function is to think, or to intuit, or to act, nor whether ratiocination's

task is really to explain or ignorantly to latch onto the first pseudo-explanation available. One can infer that for Marti the telling contrast is between the "reason" that intuits the unconditional (self, freedom, God) and the ratiocinative processes suited to explaining finite things. Yet when Marti says things such as, "the real question is not whether I dream or am awake, but whether or not I am alive," he seems to simply juxtapose reason and ratiocination as the practical and the theoretical spheres. He aims, in good Kantian (but nonetheless philosophically disputable) fashion, to isolate his claims about the uniqueness of the mental, freedom, and God's existence from all theoretical inspection. Paradoxically, the objects of reason are made incomprehensible, located beyond the reach of thought. In 1802 Schelling himself denounced such moves as "fear of reason." (4:308).

It is plain that I do not find the whole of Marti's critique of objectivism compelling, but I am struck by the wisdom of his remark that ratiocination *guesses*. Indeed it does, but cogently, consistently, and methodically—yet somehow always merely hovering on the surface, for causal or nomic interrelation is ultimately non-knowing, non-comprehension, the flight from one item to another, a merely conditional cognition of the conditioned. But such cognition guesses and errs in another way as well. The will to explain is often accompanied by the will to accept an explanation, and the history of philosophy is littered with repetitions of the same basic fallacy, the acceptance of a partial or one-sided account as a complete explanation. Since Hegel we have become a bit more suspicious and Popperian, but "all-sidedness" is an elusive goal—for philosophy as well as for science.

Ad (4): As for Marti's contention that "the religious soul is satisfied with the *acta Dei* and with the recognition of God as 'Lord'," I shall merely translate some remarks (which Wallace failed to provide us and) which Hegel made in introducing the second and third editions of the *Encyclopaedia*. Hegel was as concerned as Marti is about the damage that abstractive intellect could do to religious life, yet he was equally adamant about rejecting an anti-theoretical "religion of the heart" as an alternative. In the second Preface Hegel says:

In recent times religion has ever more contracted the expansive domain of its contents and withdrawn into the intensive

dimension of piety or feeling, oftentimes indeed into such a form as manifests a very impoverished and barren substance. But as long as religion has a creed, a doctrine, a dogmatics, it has the same concerns as philosophy has, and the latter is as such capable of being united with religion in these concerns. . . . Genuine religion, the religion of spirit, must have such a creed, a content; spirit is essentially conscious, so its content is fashioned from the objective; on the level of feeling, spirit is the content itself, but not objective (it is simply *anguished*, to use a phrase of Jacob Boehme); feeling is but the basest level of consciousness, indeed one located in the form of soul common to the animals. *Thought* first transforms soul, with which the animal too is endowed, into spirit, and philosophy is just a consciousness of this content, spirit and its truth, precisely in the form and manner of this its essence; for it is thought which distinguished spirit from the animal and makes spirit capable of religion. The contracted religiosity which is narrowed down to the one point of "heart" must make broken-heartedness and brokenness essential moments of its rebirth; at the same time it must remember that religion's concern is with the heart of a spiritual being, that mind is ordained to be master of the heart, and that this mastery is possible only insofar as spirit itself is reborn. This rebirth of spirit out of natural ignorance and natural error takes place through instruction and through the sort of belief in *objective truth*, in the substantial contents, which follows upon the testimony of spirit. (Nicolin and Poeggeler edition, pp. 12-13; translation mine).

In the third Preface, Hegel discusses the general state of contemporary religious life and links the decay of religious life with the decline of philosophy itself:

This poverty of scientific and, in general, intellectual content is what separates this piety from the position it directly makes the object of its accusation and condemnation. The enlightenment of the understanding emptied religion of all content through its formal, abstract, contentless thinking, just the way that piety does with its reduction of the Faith to the watchword, "Lord, Lord." Therein neither position has any advantage over the other and, inasmuch as these antagonists coincide, there is nothing substantial at hand wherein they could come into contact with one another, find a common ground, secure the possibility of investigating this ground, and finally bring it to the point of knowledge and truth Enlightenment theology remained entrenched in this formalism of the negative and of

freedom, and filled out the content of this freedom according to its whim and fancy, so that, on the whole, it was unconcerned about its own contents. But for that very reason, Enlightenment can do no violence to the content of the Faith, since the Christian community must be and evermore ought to be united through the bond of a doctrinal outline, a creed. In contrast, the generalities and abstractions of the stagnant, not living, waters of rationalistic understanding will not admit the specificity of a self-determined and articulated Christian content or body of doctrine. Meanwhile, the other position, relying on its cry of "Lord, Lord," bluntly and outspokenly rejects the completion of the development of faith into spirit, substance, and truth

Because the rich, profound content of the most sublime and unconditional interests of human nature has decayed and religiosity, the pious together with the reflective, has sunk to the point of discovering its greatest satisfaction in lack of content, philosophy has become an accidental and subjective need. These unconditional interests have been conformed by both sorts of religiosity to nothing more than superficial explanation that it no longer requires philosophy to satisfy these interests; indeed, philosophy is held, and rightly so, to be destructive of these newly created satisfactions and of such a finely cultivated sort of gratification. Philosophy is thus entirely left to the voluntary and subjective desires of the individual. (*op. cit.*, pp. 26-27; translation mine).