

**The Death of God in Hegel's Philosophy: Love, Speculation, Dialectics,
and the Unification of Absolute Extremes**

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Diego Bubbio for his encouragement, patience, and generosity of time. His comments and general advice have always been immensely helpful. I would also like to thank several fellow graduate students for their friendship during two difficult and isolating years of enduring a pandemic. In no particular order: Joshua Visnjic, Andrew Lac, Andrew Song, Lewis Rosenberg, Daniel Carey, Berkay Mete, and Daniel Wilson. In particular, I want to give special thanks to Joshua Visnjic for his helpful comments and generous volunteering to read an earlier draft of my thesis at a rather inconvenient time.

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Master of Research at Western Sydney University

01/02/2022

Statement of Authorship

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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February 2022

Abstract

The majority of recent Hegel scholarship on the death of God focuses on issues such as the cultural problems of subjectivity and agnosticism about religion and philosophy that Hegel diagnosed in his day, the reality status of the God who has purportedly died, the notion of tragedy in the death of God, the mutability or plasticity of the God who dies, and other related themes. This thesis takes a different approach to Hegel on the death of God, one which focuses on the unification of opposites as central to Hegel's account of the death of God, more specifically the unification of the most extreme opposites of God and death in love. I provide a close reading of Hegel's remarks on love as unification beginning in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* and ending in Hegel's final 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III: The Consummate Religion*. In-between this early and late work, I situate the remarks on the death of God at the end of *Faith and Knowledge* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and argue that the unification of opposites found in speculative philosophy and dialectical reason is deeply connected to his notion of love brought out more explicitly in his work which addresses religion more directly. I argue that the death of God for Hegel is the highest and most extreme instance of spirit at the heart of his philosophy, namely the unification of opposites, in which love, speculation, and dialectics all play a role.

Abbreviations

ETW *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox, introduction and fragments translated by Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

SCF “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” in *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox, introduction and fragments translated by Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). 182-301.

DFS *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, translated by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977).

FK *Faith and Knowledge*, translated by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977).

PS *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated and edited by Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

LPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III: The Consummate Religion*, edited by Peter C. Hodgson and translated by R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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“To isolate death from life—not leaving each one intimately woven into the other, with each one intruding upon the other’s core [*coeur*]*—this is what one must never do.*” – Jean-Luc Nancy¹

Introduction: The Death of God in Hegel

Throughout virtually the entire span of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s published works, references to the death of God appear, often seemingly out of nowhere. This is surprising, for while the death of God is a familiar theme in continental philosophy, it is almost wholly traceable to the later impact of Friedrich Nietzsche. Hegel’s thought on the death of God takes a back seat to Nietzsche’s, attracting far less attention and influence in European philosophy. This is so despite the fact that the theme of the death of God in Hegel’s work shares significant similarities with Nietzsche—albeit maintaining some major differences. What both share in common is diagnosing the historical situation of nineteenth century Europe as one in which God has effectively died: belief in God no longer played the central role it once did in European culture or thought, and the substitutes for God—Reason, Nature, or any other fixed principle authoritatively guiding meaning and truth from outside the human subject—are becoming increasingly problematized and devalued. Hegel does not rest content, however, with the death of God as ending the importance of the concept of God, for either culture or philosophy. On the contrary, Hegel sees death as something inherent to the concept of God and holds that this God is that which philosophy and religion both have as their object. Thus, Hegel sees his philosophy as related to the moment in which God—and thus both philosophy and religion—are raised above such death, in Hegel’s terminology, the negation is negated, and death is sublated, although the way that this death is sublated is worked out in innovative and often surprising ways.

Hegel does not want to separate the *content* of religion and philosophy too strongly, and thus his understanding of the death of God has both a religious and a philosophical side to its content. On the religious side, the death of God is far from a return into theological orthodoxy,² but is a position situated between orthodoxy and modern atheism, indeed one premised on the death of God (whether atheism or agnosticism) as constituting a *moment* in God. On the philosophical side, Hegel promises his own philosophy as an overcoming of the death of philosophy brought about by Kant’s revolutionary critique of the philosophical tradition up

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “*L’Intrus*,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 2, no. 3 (2002) 1-14; 6.

² Orthodoxy is itself a contestable concept, but for our purposes it just means what is dominant in mainstream Christianity—Protestant most importantly in Hegel’s context, but also Catholic and Eastern Orthodox.

until his own work, mostly but not limited to his critique of metaphysics and speculative theology.

Our task in its broadest sense is a philosophical investigation into Hegel's thought on the death of God. This covers many areas of Hegel's philosophy and several of his written works, including a heavy focus on his theological writings and philosophy of religion. Thus, the controversy surrounding Hegel's relation to religion and theology is an unavoidable set of issues that must be addressed. As is well known, Hegel's followers split into factions after his death, typified by the famous Young or Left Hegelians who argued for a non-religious and politically radical interpretation of Hegel and his legacy, and the infamous Right or Old Hegelians who argued for an orthodox Lutheran and politically conservative interpretation of Hegel and his legacy. Less well known are those Middle or Center Hegelians who argued for an interpretation of Hegel which attempted to avoid either extreme and saw in Hegel a theologically innovative position which was neither orthodox nor purely atheist. According to Peter C. Hodgson, Hegel would have neither sided with the Right or the Left when it came to the philosophy of religion, but rather, "In the controversies following his death, Hegel would have aligned himself with the theologians of the Hegelian middle who sought to carry forward the agenda of a scientific theology."³ This middle position is one I endorse in my reading, seeing Hegel as providing a third way between orthodoxy and atheism in religion which incorporates elements of both. Thus, the death of God is a *real* moment of negation—atheism for a moment—while not providing the final word, since it is *only* a moment, albeit a profound one that is central to Hegel's entire philosophy. God, philosophy, and religion must rise from this death, transformed as a result. This is the main difference between Hegel's account of the death of God and Nietzsche's account, who sees the death of God more as an end and a new beginning, rather than a moment within a positive understanding of God, religion, and philosophy.⁴

³Hodgson names "Karl Daub, Philipp Marheineke, Karl Rosenkranz, [and] Ferdinand Christian Bauer." Peter C. Hodgson, "Introduction: G. W. F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit," in *G. W. F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1-39, 6. See also chapter 4 of Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 349-396.

⁴ Several book length studies have examined the relationship between Hegel and Nietzsche; for two thinkers important for this thesis who stress a significant amount of continuity despite the obvious difference, see Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and The Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel & Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

I shall argue that Hegel's unique take on the death of God provides a window into core aspects of his speculative philosophy as well as contributing to broader discussions on what the death of God means for philosophy in those parts of the continental tradition that are willing to take Hegel's thought seriously. The *primary* aim of this thesis, however, is to investigate Hegel's thought concerning the death of God in order to provide a new interpretation of Hegel's many-faceted concept of God's death in relation to the role of negation and death on the one hand and unification and love on the other in Hegel's philosophy. I aim to do this by bringing together central ideas on love, unification, and the death of God in *Early Theological Writings*,⁵ *Faith and Knowledge*,⁶ *The Phenomenology of Spirit*,⁷ and the third volume of his later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.⁸ In particular, I shall argue for a strong connection between Hegel's notion of the death of God in the *Lectures* as infinite love that leads to the "monstrous unification" of the extreme opposites of God and death and his earlier ideas concerning love, speculative philosophy, and dialectical reason. I argue that this focus on the death of God as a moment of infinite love is continuous with his focus on the unification of opposites that characterizes his work and develops from his *Early Theological Writings* onwards. While the death of God as a philosophical theme emerges in his 1802 *Faith and Knowledge*, love as unification first receives explicit treatment in his *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* and other related fragments in the late 1790's. Although Hegel abandons love as the key to providing the unification of opposites that he was seeking and replaces it with speculative philosophy and dialectical reason from the early 1800's onwards, I shall argue that traces of this early focus on love remain, and his late reflection on the unification of God and death in love is the culmination of this lifelong interest and is a neglected theme on the trajectory and nature of Hegel's thought. Indeed, it is a neglected theme and "speculative intuition"⁹ that is arguably a window or hermeneutical key into Hegel's thought as a whole.

Literature Review

⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox, with an introduction and fragments translated by Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977). I also briefly touch on some issues in Hegel's other most important work from this Jena period, namely from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977).

⁷ George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. and ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III: The Consummate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹ This phrase will be explained in chapter 4.

Several scholars have made important contributions to the literature on Hegel and the death of God. I shall consider contributions from the 1970's up until today which is contemporaneous with the blossoming of Hegel scholarship in the English-speaking world (this being more important for my purposes than the French scholarship which blossomed from the 1930's to 1960's).¹⁰ Charles Taylor, who is perhaps the most notable contributor to the English-language Hegel renaissance of the 1970's, is known for his metaphysical view of Hegel, interpreting Hegel's God as a rational Spirit that posits the universe.¹¹ Taylor notes another phenomenon that should also be mentioned, namely the "death of God" movement in theology from that time, which "are [Hegel's] spiritual grandchildren. ... And in a sense, Hegel was the first 'death of God' theologian."¹² This theological death of God movement was spearheaded by Thomas J. J. Altizer¹³ and, while temporarily attracting much attention (like the question of Hegel's metaphysics) is outside of the scope of this thesis which focuses on the philosophical interpretation on the death of God.

Eberhard Jüngel is one of those rare theologians writing on Hegel to whom contemporary philosophical interpreters of Hegel have paid significant notice. In his major work originally published in 1977, *God as the Mystery of the World*,¹⁴ Jüngel views Hegel as providing a link between the Christian understanding of the death of God and the modern feeling that God is dead which opens up the modern path of atheism that we find in Nietzsche and which continues in contemporary thought. Jüngel also raises an absolutely fundamental point which we must keep in mind: "The Hegelian use of the concept of the death of God, which does belong to the content of revealed religion, is correspondingly two-sided, if not ambiguous."¹⁵ This two-sided nature of the death of God refers to the death of God as a moment in philosophy and culture and the death of God as a moment within God. Stephen Houlgate sums up Jüngel's take on Hegel as one in which Hegel has "overcome the abstract Enlightenment conception of God as the *ens realissimum* and to have given philosophical expression to the theological truth that

¹⁰ See Frederick Beiser, "Introduction: The Puzzling Hegel Renaissance," 1-15 in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 1-15; 1-2.

¹¹ See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 345, n. 2.

¹² Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 495.

¹³ Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (London: Westminster Press, 1966).

¹⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

¹⁵ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 84.

negation, finitude and death are essential moments of divine life itself.”¹⁶ This is a major theme I shall follow throughout this thesis, given its prominence in Hegel’s texts.

Cyril O’Regan has provided a particularly important contribution in his influential study on Hegel’s relationship to heterodox religious traditions.¹⁷ According to O’Regan, “Hegel contends that Christianity, especially in its Christological aspect, reveals, albeit in the deficient mode of *Vorstellung*, the agonic center of reality.”¹⁸ O’Regan deems this “Hegel’s existential-ontotheological rendering of passion and the death of God” which “does not in itself imply a distantiation from the Lutheran understanding.”¹⁹ While most of these claims are outside the scope of this thesis, the claim that Hegel contends that the Christological aspect of Christianity reveals the agonic center of reality is one that I shall address and affirm in my own analysis.

Catherine Malabou has stressed the concept of divine plasticity in Hegel in her book *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*.²⁰ Malabou neatly sums up the double aspect—the cultural philosophical side and the religious side—of the death of God that is in Hegel’s work and is often separated by others, namely that if Hegel’s talk of the death of God “indicates the event of God’s negation of himself, it equally brings us back to the situation of modern philosophy with its absolutizing of finitude.”²¹ This absolutizing of finitude in modern philosophy constituting the death of God is a theme we shall see clearly in both *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Diego Bubbio has recently focused on the relation the death of God has to the recognition of the self.²² Bubbio represents the most recent substantial treatment of the death of God, providing an overview of the central themes involved in Hegel’s thought concerning the death of God, with particular emphasis on the relation between the God and the *I* (or self) such that the overcoming of subjectivism with regards to the concept of God implies an overcoming of subjectivism with regard to the *I*. I embrace this theme that Hegel’s philosophy of God is related

¹⁶ Stephen Houlgate “General Introduction” in *The Hegel Reader*, edited by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 1-23; 2.

¹⁷ Cyril O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

¹⁸ O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 211.

¹⁹ O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 211.

²⁰ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²¹ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 108.

²² See, Paolo Diego Bubbio, “Hegel: Death of God and Recognition of the Self,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23. no. 5 (2015) 689-706 and Paolo Diego Bubbio, *God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017).

to his philosophy of subjectivity, but I shall rather emphasize the effect Hegel's understanding of the death of God has for his speculative and dialectical understanding of spirit.

We now move to four crucial interpretations found in Deland S. Anderson, Slavoj Žižek, Stephen Houlgate, and Robert R. Williams, who all come close enough to my concerns to warrant extended dialogue. I shall also briefly discuss some representatives of the Left Hegelian tradition in recent times, who represent a common but dismissive contemporary attitude to Hegel's philosophy of religion and any notion of the death of God in Hegel that goes beyond a *metaphor* for something non-theological or a *projection* of humanity.

While many Hegel commentators have picked up on the main passages and the theme of the death of God, Anderson has written the only book in English devoted wholly to the death of God in Hegel.²³ Anderson notes the most simple motivation for writing about this theme in Hegel, namely how common it appears in his writings: "In the end he would return to the death of God in every major work he wrote, save the capacious *Logic*."²⁴ Such a consistent reoccurrence is strong evidence that the death of God is a crucial theme for Hegel. Given how common this theme appears in Hegel's work, we ought to ask: just *how* important is the death of God for Hegel's thought? Is it one reoccurring theme among others or in some sense central to Hegel's thought? In Anderson's words, "This prompts the following question: Does the death of God as presented in Hegel's works provide a point of departure for understanding what is referred to as his "System"?"²⁵ This is a question that I will take up indirectly from Anderson. More specifically, I aim to provide an affirmative answer by focusing on the centrality of the related ideas of love, unification, and negation which are central to both the death of God in Hegel's works and Hegel's philosophical "system" more broadly.²⁶

Despite Anderson's claim about the centrality of the death of God for Hegel's entire system, Anderson focuses the majority of his energy on Hegel's early contributions to the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, especially the 1802 work *Faith and Knowledge*. The second major goal of this thesis is to take up this neglected question hinted at by Anderson of *how* the death of God may be central to Hegel's thought in and beyond *Faith and Knowledge*, by assessing reoccurring themes of negation and unification in the other key texts mentioned above.

²³ Deland S. Anderson, *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday: The Death of God in Philosophical Perspective* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

²⁴ Anderson, *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday*, xi.

²⁵ Anderson, *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday*, xi.

²⁶ The extent to which Hegel's philosophy should be called a "system" is an issue of contention for his interpreters. From now on, after acknowledging the complexity, since Hegel does indeed use the term, I shall drop the scare quotes.

Anderson takes the death of God as the hermeneutical key and guide to Hegel's speculative philosophy, which I shall follow, albeit in a different way than Anderson, namely, by focusing on the relation of Hegel's continued emphasis on the unification of opposites as key to Hegel's thought on the death of God, and thus as a window into the core of his philosophy.

Not all commentators acknowledge that Hegel connects the death of God in his early works with his positive statements on a specific way of interpreting the Christian theology of the cross found in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Commenting on the statements at the end of *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Walter Kaufmann writes the following: "To put it into our own words: there is no supreme being beyond; the spirit is not to be found in another world; the infinite spirit has to be found in the comprehension of this world, in the study of the spirits summed up in the *Phenomenology*. "History comprehended" must replace theology."²⁷ While it is true that Hegel does not want to locate "the spirit" in another world, Hegel does *not* aim to *replace* theology with philosophy, but emphasizes they both have the same object, comprehended in different ways. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* must be taken into serious consideration, even when they blur strict lines between philosophy and theology, as his central claim about the identical content of the two disciplines implies.

Robert C. Solomon goes even further than Kaufmann: "And readers of the *Phenomenology* have long been puzzled by its closing imagery, "The Calvary of absolute Spirit ..." What is Calvary other than the death of God? But where the New Testament Calvary murders a man, returning him to God, Hegel's Calvary murders God and returns him to man ... A bizarre image, if the *Phenomenology* were in fact a religious treatise, but a fitting image for an elaborate and elusive definition defense of humanism. With a touch of perversity, Hegel uses the language and imagery of Christianity to establish the blasphemous position for which Spinoza was condemned and Fichte fired."²⁸ As an interpretation of the relation between "religion" and "humanism" in the *Phenomenology* alone, this is controversial at best, and when brought into relation to his other works on religion, highly implausible.²⁹

A contemporary example of the Left Hegelian approach to Hegel's philosophy of religion can be found in Martin Hägglund's recent work critiquing the type of religious faith that

²⁷ Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 148. Italics mine.

²⁸ Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 584.

²⁹ As should become evident by the end of this thesis.

advocates eternity and an afterlife and recommending a secular faith that celebrates finitude and freedom instead. As far as this rejection of otherworldliness and advocating of freedom, it is consistent with what we find in Hegel, but what Hägglund says about Hegel on the reality of God is a dismissal of Hegel's positive appropriation of God: "Hegel agrees with the general Enlightenment critique of religious faith, which maintains that there is no God—or any other form of infinite agent—in the universe."³⁰ It is one thing to advocate for a Left Hegelian reading of Hegel which makes no claim to represent what Hegel actually thought and wrote—it is another to claim what Hegel believed or agreed with, which is what we are presently interested in. As we shall see, Hegel disagreed strongly with the general Enlightenment critique of religious faith.

Žižek represents a more interesting position on Hegel's God while still remaining within the Left Hegelian camp. His thought on Hegel's God is important for us not just because he comes close at times to the Middle Hegelian position than others on the Left that we have just seen, but that he devotes significant space to Hegel's thought on the death of God—more than any other figure who can be classified as a contemporary representative of the Left Hegelian reading of God's death in Hegel. Further, he recognizes the central role that love plays for Hegel in general and in relation to the death of God. I shall outline some of his basic positions on Hegel and the death of God before moving onto the contemporary representative of the middle position on Hegel and the death of God found in Williams.

Žižek advocates a materialist reading of Hegel's approach to Christianity that draws significantly on the Marxist tradition, Jacques Lacan, and Alain Badiou, among others.³¹ What is of interest for us is not the details of Žižek's own idiosyncratic approach to Christianity, but specifically three different moves he makes in his interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of religion: (1) he provides an interpretation of the death of God which takes the death of God seriously as *inherent* to God and not just human subjects; (2) he links Hegel as the philosopher of Christianity to Hegel as a philosopher of love and both to the death of God and provides an interpretation of Hegel on the unification of opposites in relation to Hegel's thought on the

³⁰ Martin Hägglund, *This Life: Why Mortality Makes us Free* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2019), 354-355.

³¹ See Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012).

death of God; and (3) he understands the Holy Spirit as the activity of God in the community *after* the death of God.

Regarding (1): while adamant that his position is an atheist one, Žižek does agree that “the properly Christian-Hegelian notion of the Holy Spirit is misunderstood when reduced to the humanist claim that “God” is nothing but our (human) awareness of God, so that the Holy Spirit is simply the spiritual substance of humanity.”³² Žižek objects to Solomon’s reading cited above of Hegel’s God as a straightforward defence of humanism and objects to the idea that God as Spirit is *nothing but* us: “of course there is no Spirit as a substantial entity above and beyond individuals, but this does not make Hegel a nominalist—there is “something more” than the reality of individuals, and this “more” is the virtual Real which always supplements reality, “more than nothing, but less than something.”³³ Soon after this, Žižek makes clear how he sees Hegel’s understanding of the Incarnation as a necessity (“universal/eternal Truth”) based on a contingency which contradicts humanism’s emphasis on *all* individuals embodying the universal rather than a concrete individual.³⁴ These moves appear to place Žižek somewhere close to the Middle Hegelian position, where God is seen as a reality irreducible to humanity and the Incarnation as something more than a normal individual, but also distinct from the traditional notion of a transcendent God existing *beyond* the world.

Regarding (2): Žižek explicitly identifies Hegel’s philosophy as relating to love: “his underlying problem is, from the very beginning of his thought, that of love.”³⁵ Crucial to our focus is that Žižek brings forth an interpretation of Hegel’s ideas on love and unification of opposites: “What makes him [Hegel] a Christian philosopher and a philosopher of love is the fact that, contrary to the common misunderstanding, in the arena of dialectical struggle there is no Third which unites and reconciles the two struggling opposites.”³⁶ Žižek claims this lack of a Third in love “as another way of proclaiming the death of God: there is no big Other which guarantees our fate; all we have is the self-grounding abyss of our love.”³⁷ Žižek understands love in relation to tragedy, holding that it is a monstrosity rather than a sublime tragedy—a *Sygne* rather than an *Antigone*.³⁸ As we shall see, Williams also relates Hegel’s thought to tragedy, a topic to which we shall return in the final chapter.

³² Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 96.

³³ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 97.

³⁴ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 98.

³⁵ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 9.

³⁶ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 112.

³⁷ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 112.

³⁸ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 80-85.

Point (3) is perhaps the key to understanding Žižek's view insofar as the Holy Spirit is the spirit of an emancipatory community, that the Christian Church is actually best fulfilled in atheistic socialist and psychoanalytic societies and communities, for example, rather than in actual Christian communities, reflecting the atheistic core of Christianity.³⁹

As interesting and provocative an interpretation as Žižek's views are, there is lack of connection with Hegel's discussions of the death of God in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which is both Hegel's most mature and lengthy material on his views regarding God (if considered alongside his *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*⁴⁰), where he arguably presents the most clear material that supports the Middle Hegelian view of a non-traditional but *positive* understanding of God that escapes the limits of both traditional theism and atheism. Thus, while not the primary aim of this thesis, I aim to demonstrate how Hegel resists both the purely humanistic interpretation and an orthodox theological interpretation of the death of God, but holds a view which is the unity of the opposites of God and death, that negation exists as a moment (but not the final word à la Žižek) in God, and that this radically changes the concept of God as traditionally conceived and challenges any one-sided interpretation of the death of God. Further, this interpretation of the concept of God holds the "speculative intuition" of the unity of love and death as key. It is *this* God who is unified with death, rather than a concept of God for whose unity with death is necessarily impossible. It is a concept that is only found fully expressed in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, first appearing in Hegel's 1821 lecture manuscript. Hegel speaks there of the death of God as a "fearful picture" that is simultaneously the "the highest love" since love is about relinquishing oneself in another, even in this case of the relinquishing of the divine idea in death and thus unifying these "absolute extremes" of God and death—what Hegel calls love itself, and the "speculative intuition."⁴¹

³⁹ "The solution [to the gap between "true" Christianity and actually existing Christianity with its flaws] here is the properly Hegelian one: the true Idea of the Christian collective *was* realized, but outside of the Church as an institution—which, however, does not mean that it survived in intimate, authentic religious experiences which had no need for the institutional frame; rather, it survived in *other* institutions, from revolutionary political parties to psychoanalytic societies ... It is thus only in post-religious "atheist" radical-emancipatory collectives that we find the proper actualization of the Idea of the Christian collective—the necessary consequence of the "atheistic" nature of Christianity itself." Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 115.

⁴⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, ed. and trans. by Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III: The Consummate Religion*, 125.

This line of thought in Hegel has recently been developed by Williams, whose work I shall pay sustained attention to as a more faithful (though perhaps less flamboyant) interpreter of Hegel's thought concerning the death of God and the roles of love and unification than Žižek.⁴² In contrast to Kaufman, Williams argues that Hegel's "intent is not to reject theology but rather to reconstruct it by acknowledging the tragic and reformulating theological doctrines with what he regards as more appropriate conception of evil, an essential and robust concept of the other, and a social-intersubjective concept of divine spirit in its community."⁴³ I have already introduced the idea that Hegel's position is best characterised by the Middle Hegelian position which is somewhere between orthodox theism and atheism. Williams is the most relevant contemporary scholar to explicitly emphasise such an interpretation: "The death of God that Hegel endorses is the "between" between atheism and theism."⁴⁴ This reconciliation of atheism and theism has to do with the death of God being a moment within God which is "not final, but rather a *transition*, to wit, from substance to subject" and ultimately that contra the traditional understanding of an impassible God, "God suffers, but endures the suffering, and is resurrected as the spirit that discovers itself in absolute laceration."⁴⁵ We shall focus on this transition from substance to subject and resurrected spirit in chapters three and four on *PS* and *LPR*, and William's view on God's suffering in the final concluding chapter.

Williams' way of connecting the death of God in the early work with the themes in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is to articulate Hegel's reference of the infinite grief of the finite as a moment in *Faith and Knowledge* to the death of God and atheism as a moment in the divine life. Elsewhere in his work, Williams picks up on Hegel's account of this constituting love as the "speculative intuition," indeed, "The union in love of God and death constitutes the basic speculative intuition of Hegel's thought."⁴⁶ I aim to connect this explicitly with a theme which has been developed by Houlgate. According to Houlgate, "The heart of the Christian understanding of God, for Hegel, is thus that God is known to be present in the world as love and ultimately as spirit, and in this central doctrine Christian faith – albeit implicitly

⁴² Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel & Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴³ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 294.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 300.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 300.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 23.

and in a pictorial, representational form – comprehends the immanent character of absolute, dialectical reason.”⁴⁷

While Anderson focuses exclusively on the death of God in *Faith and Knowledge*, and Žižek focuses mostly on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Williams focuses almost exclusively on theological aspects of the death of God in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (and the *Lectures on the Proofs for the Existence of God* in his most recent work).⁴⁸ The aim of this thesis is to take up the difficult task of bringing together the early philosophical and cultural aspects of the death of God from his early theological writings to his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the theological aspects of the death of God in his later lectures. Given the importance of love to the death of God in the *LPR*, I shall begin with an examination of *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, and related fragments, in which love dominated as the central theme. A.R. Bjerke has noted, “scholars who are interested in the historical development of Hegel’s thought tend to locate love within Hegel’s earliest texts, interpreting it as a primitive form of Spirit that he abandons for the Concept in his later work.”⁴⁹ I aim to follow this conception throughout his later works, initially through *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and then through the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Only then, I argue, can we fully appreciate the total vision of Hegel’s thought on the death of God and how central it is to his philosophy as a whole.

⁴⁷ Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 249.

⁴⁸ This later work, which is less relevant to this thesis, but nonetheless important in defending the Middle Hegelian position is Robert R. Williams, *Hegel on the Proofs and the Personhood of God: Studies in Hegel’s Logic and Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴⁹ A. R. Bjerke, “Hegel and the Love of the Concept,” *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 1 (2011) 76-89; 76.

Chapter 1

The Role of Love in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* (and the “Love” Fragment)

The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate (hereafter *SCF*) is part of Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings* (hereafter *ETW*) and is the most relevant essay for Hegel’s early thinking on love as unification and as well as being the most extended focus on love in all of Hegel’s works. The *death* of God is only discussed in *ETW* somewhat implicitly, in the context of what the early Christian community did and thought when Jesus (as the embodiment of God) died. Rather than trying to find the death of God explicitly in this text, the aim of this chapter is to examine two themes in this text that are related to Hegel’s later thought on the death of God. The first and more important theme for this thesis is the unifying role of love at work in Hegel’s *SCF* and the related fragment “Love” in the *ETW*, which I argue provides the foundation in order to understand Hegel’s later thought on the relation between love and the death of God on the one hand, and the unifying role of dialectics and speculative philosophy on the other. This is important because I wish to argue that Hegel’s thought on the death of God is one in which love and philosophical unification *both* play a role and are theoretically connected. The second theme is the need for Jesus as the embodiment of God to die in order to allow the members of the community to find the spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, everywhere, rather than simply embodied in a single historical figure. This is a major theme in Hegel’s understanding of the consequence of the death of God that needs to be introduced here and treated again in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Walter Kaufmann provocatively argued that the naming of these early works of Hegel—which were never intended for publication, and only named in 1906 by Dilthey’s student Hermann Nohl as *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, translated by T. M. Knox as *Early Theological Writings*—was an unfortunate mistake, and that they should have been named “The antitheological essays.”⁵⁰ According to Kaufmann, these early works are *distinguished* from Hegel’s later works by being antitheological.⁵¹ That is, these works are not antireligious,⁵² but

⁵⁰ Walter Kaufmann, “The Young Hegel and Religion” in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 61-101; 62-63.

⁵¹ Kaufmann, “The Young Hegel and Religion,” 62.

⁵² Kaufmann, “The Young Hegel and Religion,” 63.

are against a certain perceived deadening effect of theology on the religious life of people. While there is certainly a strong element of critique towards the dominant theological positions of Hegel's day (not least his own theology teachers), I hold that it is a mistake to categorize these works as antitheological, for while Hegel in these writings was hostile to the dominant theologies of his day, these writings fit with Hegel's later emphasis for seriously and critically thinking through religious claims in ways which have both negative and positive assessments of them, thus treating theology more seriously, as a philosopher, than the theologians themselves do, who had retreated from the big theological claims towards feelings and the human side of the religious experience.⁵³

Hegel's earliest theological writings, most importantly "The Positivity of the Christian Religion,"⁵⁴ are in the vein of Kant's moral philosophy.⁵⁵ For instance, one of the earliest texts that Hegel penned in this period is a life of Jesus from a Kantian perspective, named *The Life of Jesus*.⁵⁶ However, Hegel was to break with this practical Kantianism and develop a more unique position centred on an understanding of love as playing a unifying role for a *folk or popular religion (Volksreligion)*. According to Richard Kroner, "Hegel's first original philosophy might be called a "Pantheism of Love," arrived at through his opposition to Kant's strict contradistinction between duty and inclination, moral law and natural impulse, reason and passion."⁵⁷ Kroner gives voice to a fundamental link between this early focus on love and his later work:

Hegel's Pantheism of Love has all the characteristics of his future metaphysic. It aims at a reconciliation of opposites, tries to overcome one-sided rationalism, one-sided emotionalism, or one-sided empiricism. It is dialectical in its structure, although its method is not yet dialectical in the strict sense of the word. [...] It is not difficult to see the link between this early theological speculation and Hegel's mature philosophy. What Hegel rejected in framing the Pantheism of Love, he never reaffirmed later on. He found a new logic, a new rationalism to solve the problem

⁵³ This will become apparent in Chapters 3 and 5, where Hegel attacks the philosophical and theological thought of his day for its overly subjective attitude towards religion.

⁵⁴ See G. W. F. Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" in *Early Theological Writings*, 67-181.

⁵⁵ See Stephen Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel in the Development of Hegel's Thinking* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 85-112; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60-68.

⁵⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, "The Life of Jesus" in *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, ed. and trans. with introduction and notes by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 104-165.

⁵⁷ Richard Kroner, "Introduction: Hegel's Philosophical Development" in *Early Theological Writings*, 1-67; 11.

insoluble by the rationalism he had overcome in his earlier years. He found a method to perform by logic what, in the first period, seemed performable by the living spirit alone.⁵⁸

Kroner's summary neatly identifies the fundamental role of love in this period of Hegel's thought as a reconciling of opposites and correction of one-sided ways of thinking and living in the world. Not only does love play a unifying role, it is dialectical in its structure, and what the "pantheism of love" rejects is consistently rejected throughout the later developments of Hegel's philosophy. The dialectical structure of love continues in Hegel's later work and will become apparent as we examine the dialectical movements in *PS* regarding forgiveness that mirror much of the movements of love in *ETW*. The rejection of "positive" forms of religion which focus on miracles and a singular human being on the one hand, and forms of Kantian morality that posit a contradiction between inclination and duty on the other, will also continue in the later works of Hegel that I shall examine. This link that Kroner identifies with Hegel's mature philosophy is the major factor that I aim to focus on, so I now turn to the ways that these themes are originally set out in *ETW*.

Love and Life vs. Concepts, Law, and Morality

As already mentioned, the most important work in which Hegel's early focus on the unifying role of love appears is *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*.⁵⁹ Hegel begins *SCF* with a polemical assessment of the spirit of Judaism. While most modern scholars would consider this at the very least an uncharitable assessment of Judaism,⁶⁰ and deeply problematic at worst, it is only important for the purpose of this thesis to note how this serves as a background to examine Christianity and its focus on love (the presence of love in the Hebrew Scriptures is given no serious attention by Hegel in this work).⁶¹ According to Hegel, Judaism suffers from a kind of slavishness and servility to a wholly other God who is a Master to whom the Jewish people are slaves. Importantly, this led to a stringent dualism, a stark opposition between God and the world and thus God's people and the world: "The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite; if he did not take it to be a nullity, he looked on it as sustained by the God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was simply under God's mastery."⁶² This dualism between God and world, mastery and servitude,

⁵⁸ Richard Kroner, "Introduction: Hegel's Philosophical Development," 12.

⁵⁹ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" in *Early Theological Writings*, 182-301.

⁶⁰ Crites calls it a "savage interpretation of Judaism" in *Dialectic and Gospel*, 115.

⁶¹ Which is arguably a major oversight, on which see Simon May's chapter "The foundation of Western love: Hebrew Scripture" in Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 14-38.

⁶² Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 187.

that Hegel reads out of the Hebrew Bible and extra-biblical ancient Jewish literature such as Josephus,⁶³ is the target of Hegel's criticism and what Hegel sees Jesus as living and teaching against.

It is against this background in which Jesus was born, which Hegel calls the Jewish fate, that Jesus is understood by Hegel to be rebelling against with a new focus on love.⁶⁴ Right from the beginning of Hegel's discussion of Jesus's new focus on love, there is announced the doomed fate of this task, and thus the ambivalent nature of the specifically Christian attempt at unification through love: "enmities like those he sought to transcend can be overcome only by valor; they cannot be reconciled by love. Even *his* sublime effort to overcome the whole of the Jewish fate must therefore have failed with his people, and he was bound to become its victim himself."⁶⁵ Despite this inherent problem in the task, Hegel does see this new unification of discords in love as an attempt to bring the ideal into existence, and sees this as a beautiful human *need* which contrasts to a problematic obedience to commands:

Over against commands which require a bare service of the Lord, a direct slavery, an obedience without joy, without pleasure or love, i.e., commands in connection with the service of God, Jesus set their precise opposite, a human urge and so a human need. Religious practice is the most holy, the most beautiful, of all things; it is our endeavour to unify the discords necessitated by our development and our attempt to exhibit the unification in the *ideal* as fully *existent*, as no longer opposed to reality, and thus to express and confirm it in a deed.⁶⁶

Terry Pinkard explains the background to this conception of love as against obedience to *commands* with reference to the way in which Hegel drew from his close friend Friedrich Hölderlin and moves in a direction away from Kantian ethics which had dominated his *earlier* theological writings. What Hegel took from Hölderlin was a conception of freedom that denies that duty comes from a self-imposed law, but rather a "loving relationship with some deeper ground than his own finite subjectivity."⁶⁷ This deeper ground is one that both includes the individual finite subjectivity but also exceeds it and is thus named the "infinite" by Hegel. Crucially, it is *self-bounding* rather than *self-legislating*, and thus duty is free and not bound by some purely external force.⁶⁸ Therefore this conception of love that incorporates the vision of freedom just mentioned overcomes the troublesome opposition between inclination and duty,

⁶³ See Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 184.

⁶⁴ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 205.

⁶⁵ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 205-6.

⁶⁶ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 206.

⁶⁷ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 141.

⁶⁸ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 141.

where one wants to do one thing but ought to do something else. Rather than following duties or commands against one's will, love makes the lover inclined to act for the sake of the loved other while also judging this to be the right thing to do, and is thus the basis of ethics, as opposed to Hegel's understanding of Kantian autonomy which has a coercive aspect insofar as it conflicts with inclination.⁶⁹ In Hegel's words, "The opposition of duty to inclination has found its unification in the modifications of love, i.e., in the virtues."⁷⁰

Not only duty fails to reconcile the divisions that abstract from life, but law in the form of legal or moral concepts also fail. Hegel does discuss the unifying power of law in the form of moral or civic commands, which he argues are "unifications of opposites in a *concept*," but that this "leaves them as opposites while it exists itself in opposition to *reality*," and that therefore "it follows that the concept expresses an *ought*."⁷¹ What Jesus did, against these "purely objective commands" was "set something totally foreign to them, namely, the subjective in general."⁷² Thus, this spirit of Jesus is one that is "raised above morality" and "visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form."⁷³ Thus, when Jesus issues commands to his hearers such as "love God and your neighbor," Hegel claims that "this turn of phrase is a command in a sense quite different from that of the "shalt" of a moral imperative."⁷⁴ Crucially, Hegel in this early stage of his thought—a period dominated by a reaction against his formally beloved Kantian ethics—sees the attempt to grasp life via concepts as a disaster:

It is only the sequel to the fact that, when life is conceived in thought or given expression, it acquires a *form* alien to it, a conceptual form, while, on the other hand, the moral imperative is, as a universal, in *essence* a concept. And if in this way life appears in the form of something due to reflection, something said to men, then this type of expression (a type inappropriate to life): "Love God above everything and thy neighbor as thyself" was quite wrongly regarded by Kant as a "command requiring respect for a law which commands love."⁷⁵

Thus, this fundamental opposition between concept and reality, and the subsequent opposition between duty and inclination (what we *like* to do) is one that makes Kantian morality guilty of

⁶⁹ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 141.

⁷⁰ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 225.

⁷¹ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 209.

⁷² Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 209.

⁷³ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 212.

⁷⁴ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 213.

⁷⁵ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 213.

an alien abstraction that goes *against* life and even reduces love to a duty which is inappropriate to life. Hegel summarizes the core of the inadequacy of law and its reliance on concepts: “I mean that, since laws are purely conceptual unifications of opposites, these concepts are far from exhausting the many-sidedness of life.”⁷⁶ As we shall see, life functions for Hegel in this period as the other key concept (alongside and related to love), which is behind the resistance to an abstract command or law ruling over life, especially in the form of Kantian morality. Duties are irreducibly in opposition to life and human inclination. Love—which unifies inclination and virtue—cannot be reduced to the level of duty or subservient to an attitude towards duty, which is something external, abstract, and divided from life. Rather, love alone overcomes these divisions.

The overcoming by love of these divisions created by the law can be seen in what Jesus does to nullify the law in Sermon on the Mount, with his response (or non-response) to the command not to kill: “Against such command Jesus sets the higher genius of reconcilability (a modification of love) which not only does not act counter to this law but makes it wholly superfluous; it has in itself so much richer, more living, fulness that so poor a thing as law is nothing for it at all.”⁷⁷ Hegel elaborates the key point that “In reconcilability the law loses its form, *the concept is displaced by life*; but what reconcilability thereby loses in respect of the universality which grips all particulars together in the concept is only a seeming loss and a genuine infinite gain on account of the wealth of living relations with the individuals (perhaps few) with whom it comes into connection.”⁷⁸ This advantage of love over law is one that Hegel stresses while simultaneously admitting a certain weakness, namely the limited power of this kind of love to spread outside of a small community and become truly universal.

For Hegel, Jesus teaches a model of love that reconciles social divisions and inequalities. An example of the unifying feature of love that Hegel finds in Jesus can be seen in his interpretation of Matthew 5:23-24, where Jesus says, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”⁷⁹ Hegel interprets this verse in contrast to the dangers of alienation in calling another a fool (even if that person has something against oneself) and breaking equality, an act which: “annuls not only all relation with the speaker but also all equality, all community of

⁷⁶ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 233.

⁷⁷ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 215.

⁷⁸ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 215. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁹ All of my own New Testament references are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

essence.”⁸⁰ Against such inequalities which lead to a breakdown of community and relationship, Hegel sets love: “Love, on the other hand ... comes before the alter conscious of a separation, ... but leaves its gift there, is reconciled with its brother ... It does not leave the judge to apportion its rights; it reconciles itself to its enemy with no regard to right whatsoever.”⁸¹ Hegel’s main point is that love has this reconciling nature of unifying a form of social separation and preventing inequality, even of enemies (the most divided people). This type of love does not take its own rights into consideration insofar as it prioritizes reconciliation. What is interesting is that Hegel does not focus on forgiveness, but on love, which, as we shall see, is the opposite of Hegel’s main focus in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Another aspect of love for Hegel is it leading to freedom in recognition in contrast to the bondage of law. Hegel writes: “In contrast with the Jewish reversion to obedience, recognition in love is a liberation; in contrast with the re-recognition of lordship, it is the cancelation of lordship in the restoration of the living bond, of that spirit of love and mutual faith which, considered in relation to lordship, is the highest freedom.”⁸² Notably, Hegel here connects love to recognition, a concept that becomes central for his later work⁸³ and to which we shall return to in our chapter on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Love also plays the role of unifying the virtues, reconciling the virtues in ways that mere concepts cannot. Hegel states that, “if love were not the sole principle of virtue, then every virtue would be at the same time a vice. ... virtues as modifications of love. ... If there is no such unification in one spirit, every virtue has something defective about it, since each is by its very name a single and so a restricted virtue.”⁸⁴ So central is love to this period of Hegel’s thought that it is the unification of all the virtues. Most importantly, and as already noted, love brings about a “living bond of the virtues, a living unity” which achieves unification in a way that a concept cannot.⁸⁵ Indeed, a concept cannot capture the reality of love, “it is no universal opposed to the particular, no unity of the concept, but a unity of spirit, divinity.”⁸⁶

In this period of his thought, Hegel does equate God, or the function of God in human life with feeling and ultimately with life: “To love God is to feel one’s self in the ‘all’ of life, with

⁸⁰ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 216.

⁸¹ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 216.

⁸² Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 241.

⁸³ See Robert R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁸⁴ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 244.

⁸⁵ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 246.

⁸⁶ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 247.

no restrictions, in the infinite.”⁸⁷ This becomes clear when Hegel speaks of God as “pure life,”: “anything and everything said of it must be free from any [implication of] opposition. And all reflection’s expressions about the relations of the objective being or about that being’s activity in ... objective action must be avoided, since the activity of the divine is only a unification of spirits.”⁸⁸ Hence, “The union of the human and the divine is life itself.”⁸⁹ Anticipating Hegel’s later thought about the limits of less than speculative ways of thinking in his critique of reflective philosophy, Hegel remarks that “Reflective thinking, which partitions life, can distinguish it into infinite and finite, which affords the concept of man as opposed to the divine. But outside reflective thinking, and in truth, there is no such restriction.”⁹⁰ Those who seek to use reflective thinking to attempt to understand the unity of the human and the divine destroy the understanding by trying to “grasp absolutely different substances which at the same time are an absolute unity.”⁹¹ In doing so, they must uphold the differences with the understanding, which in turn is a destruction of life.⁹² This sheds significant light on those statements concerning concepts splitting up life, in contrast to the unifying effect of love. In this stage of Hegel’s thought, concepts are united with reflective thinking, which is a position we shall see Hegel reversing in the coming chapters.

The Developed Picture of Love

So far, we have seen that Hegel draws key distinctions between his concept of love that he reads in Jesus and the early Christians, and Judaism on the one hand, which was its background and immediate context, and Kant’s thought on the other, which set up an opposition between inclination and duty. We further saw that for Hegel, love is not a concept, but a living union of life that goes beyond and fulfils law and morality, while avoiding the contradictions of inclination and duty. This is Hegel’s interpretation of the Kingdom of God, which is a realm in which “what is common to all is life in God” but not in terms of commonality that a mere concept expresses, but rather “is love, a living bond which unites the believers; it is this feeling of unity of life, a feeling in which all opposites, as pure enmities, and also rights, as unifications of still subsisting oppositions, are annulled.”⁹³ Jesus came teaching about this Kingdom of God, which centred on the living bond of love, as

⁸⁷ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 247.

⁸⁸ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 255.

⁸⁹ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 262.

⁹⁰ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 262.

⁹¹ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 264.

⁹² Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 264.

⁹³ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 278.

opposed to the alienating force of the law of an absolutely Other God in his Jewish context and any precursor to the alienating force of Kantian ethics with its separation between inclination and duty. With this background in place, I now aim to draw out a fuller picture of this concept of love operating in *SCF* and related fragments.

Hegel has so far established that love unifies a community in a way that law and morality in the form of concepts cannot, but he has not made clear the divisions that already exist in life outside of law, morality, and their transgressions (such as calling a brother a “fool”). Absolutely essential for our focus on the *death* of God and the negative in Hegel’s speculation and dialectic is the following in *SCF*: “In love man has found himself again in another. Since love is a unification of life, it presupposes division, a development of life, a developed many-sidedness of life. The more variegated the manifold in which life is alive, the more places in which it can be reunified; the more places in which it can sense itself, the deeper does love become.”⁹⁴ There is in this remarkable passage two crucial concepts for Hegel’s later thought (to which we shall repeatedly return). First, there is the concept of a person finding themselves *in* another. Second, a concept of life that is dialectical in structure, that is, it envisions life as inherently divided in its development and many-sidedness, which the unification of love *presupposes*. Indeed, the *greater* the division or many-sidedness of life, the *greater* the unification and love. This can be compared with the following from the fragment called “Love” from the same period of Hegel’s thought, which introduces a new idea alongside the one just covered and sheds significant light on it:

The lover who takes is not thereby made richer than the other; he is enriched indeed, but only so much as the other is. So too the giver does not make himself poorer; by giving to the other he has at the same time and to the same extent enhanced his own treasure (compare Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* [ii. 1. 175-77: “My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep;] the more I give to thee, The more I have”). This wealth of life love acquires in the exchange of every thought, every variety of inner experience, for it seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life.⁹⁵

Here we explicitly find a concept of love whereby *loss* is actually gain, i.e., in the model of the giver giving something away to the lover (and thereby losing it themselves) and *gaining* treasure, or “the wealth of life” as a result. The structure mirrors what we saw above of life as

⁹⁴ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 278-9.

⁹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, “Love” in *Early Theological Writings*, 302-308; 307.

a movement that gains unification through love from what was once division, which is omnipresent since life is inherently a variegated manifold of such differences. Love is an active force which proactively searches for differences in order to unify them, and in doing so, adds to the wealth of life. Such “unifications ad infinitum” that love searches out from the divisions of life—and the greater the division the greater the unification and wealth gained in love—expresses a concept that is crucial for Hegel’s latter philosophy in general, and on the death of God in particular, namely, that the greatest division is taken up into the greatest unification, and, crucially, even the most extreme opposites of God and death are unified in love.

The Fate of Love and the Spirit after the Death of Jesus

While we have examined the main features of love from this period which I wish to keep in mind as we move onto Hegel’s later writings, I shall finish this chapter with a reflection on Hegel’s thoughts on the limits of this type of love and the limits of holding onto a singular leader and embodiment of God in Jesus.

Key to Hegel’s understanding of knowledge of God, and ultimately God’s self-knowledge through human knowledge of God throughout his work is that both God and humans are spirit and only spirit recognizes spirit.⁹⁶ This is explained in the following analogy: “The hill and the eye which sees it are object and subject, but between man and God, between spirit and spirit, there is no such cleft of objectivity and subjectivity; one is to the other an other only in that one recognizes the other; both are one.”⁹⁷ There is no dualism between God and humans, since both are spirit, indeed both share a divine element: “How could anything but a spirit know a spirit? The relation of spirit to spirit is a feeling of harmony, is their unification; how could heterogeneity be unified? Faith in the divine is only possible if in the believer himself there is a divine element which rediscovers itself, its own nature, in that on which it believes, even if it be unconscious that what it has found *is* its own nature.”⁹⁸ This leads Hegel towards an interpretation of Christianity that prioritizes concrete spirit and removes the need for supernatural or otherworldly elements traditionally found in orthodox Christianity

⁹⁶ “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 265.

⁹⁷ “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 265.

⁹⁸ Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” 266.

such as miracles, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, or a future eschatological Kingdom of God to be brought to fruition by divine action alone.

Indeed, after the death of Jesus, Hegel argues that any interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event occurring to the body of the historical Jesus is a mistake, and only adds to an objectification of faith that is against the spirit of love that was the best part of the early Christian movement.⁹⁹ Anticipating a theme that continues throughout Hegel's work, and making much of the discourses of Jesus in John 16 speaking about having to leave to bring the "Comforter" or the "spirit of truth" he writes, "Jesus was conscious that it was necessary for his individual self to perish, and he tried to convince his disciples also of this necessity."¹⁰⁰ Only then can the spirit be universalised fully in the community without clinging to a singular objective individual. This, however, failed: "But they could not separate his essence from his person; they were still only believers."¹⁰¹ Once again, like the concepts that divide in the realm of law and morality, *belief* in a singular figure along with doctrines that necessarily developed around that figure end up dividing through a focus on the sensuous presence and concepts. What was promised but ultimately failed to take full hold after the death of Jesus was love universalized in *life* and thus the true notion of the Holy Spirit which is this love actualized in the community.

Indeed, Hegel argues that it was the *fate* of the early Christian movement to become unduly objectified on the one hand, and isolated and local in its love on the other. The localised nature of love combats the objectification:

The community has the need of a God who is the God of the community, in whom there is manifested just that exclusive love which is the community's character and the tie between one member and another; and this must be manifested in God not as a symbol or an allegory, not as a personification of a subjective entity (for in such a personification the worshiper would become conscious of the cleavage between the subjective entity and its objective manifestation), but as something which is at one and the same time feeling, i.e., in the heart, and object; feeling here means a spirit which pervades everything and remains a single essence even if every individual is conscious of his feeling as his own individual feeling.¹⁰²

As the God of the community, God must in some sense *be* the *feeling* of the *community*, holding it together, rather than something which has room for a dualism between the subject

⁹⁹ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 292.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 272.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 272.

¹⁰² Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 290.

and object, i.e., the traditional way that Christians view Jesus as both a universal God and a particular individual human, or a religious symbol or allegory for some mysterious idea that leaves the believer at a distance from the desired unification. Earlier we quoted Hegel's definition of love as "this feeling of unity of life, a feeling in which all opposites [...] are annulled."¹⁰³ This God, who in some sense *is* the love of the community, holds it together despite being made up of individual humans who have feelings of their own. The primary limit to all of this is how particularized such a community becomes rather than becoming truly universal:

The need to unite subject and object, to unite feeling, and feeling's demand for objects, with the understanding, to unite them in something beautiful, in a god, by means of fancy, is the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge to religion. This urge of the Christian community its belief in God could not satisfy because in their God there could have been no more than their common feeling. In the God of the world, *all* beings are united; in him there are no members, as members, of a community. The harmony of such members is not the harmony of the whole; otherwise they would not form a particular community, would not be linked together by love. The Godhead of the *world* is not the manifestation of *their* love, of *their* divinity.¹⁰⁴

This is thus the fate of Christianity, with its spirit of love, which could not become sufficiently universal since it was a localized love of *the community's* feelings; for God to be truly universal, the unification must not be restricted to a specific community centred around a specific individual, nor to a specific love of a specific community, but must be truly universal and transcend such local manifestations. Hegel views the fate of Christianity as having the unfortunate nature of failing by virtue of its locality and specific restricted character, despite having a universal type of love that urges towards the unification of life in all its manifestations. Nonetheless, Hegel identifies a key role for love to play for the task of unification in this period of his thought. While he will replace this focus on love with more conceptual methods of unification in his future works, I shall argue that both the dialectical structure of this love is mirrored in later concepts that Hegel employs, and that love explicitly resurfaces in his most extreme example of unification: the death of God.

¹⁰³ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 278.

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," 289-90. I have altered this translation to use "understanding" instead of "intellect," both of which are used to translate *Verstand*. See Michael Inwood, "Reason and Understanding" in Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 242-244; 242.

Chapter 2: Speculation and the Death of God and philosophy in *Faith and Knowledge*

The Background

The aim of this chapter is to uncover the meaning of Hegel's "Speculative Good Friday" within the context of its appearance in his work *Faith and Knowledge* (hereafter *FK*). Before beginning, it is worth briefly noting some of the main strands of thought that come between *ETW* and *FK*. The major work between *ETW* and *FK* is *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (hereafter *DFS*), which is Hegel's first philosophical publication and introduces several themes that are taken up in *FK*. In this work we see Hegel shift away from his focus on love as the unification of opposites towards "speculation" or "speculative philosophy." In the Preface, Hegel explicitly states that "The principle of speculation is the identity of subject and object,"¹⁰⁵ which is a principle associated with Schelling's philosophy.¹⁰⁶ The main object of this work, as the title indicates, is to differentiate between the philosophical systems of Fichte and Schelling, especially arguing that Schelling's philosophy of nature is an improvement over Fichte's speculative philosophy insofar as it "sets the objective Subject-Object beside the subjective Subject-Object and presents both as united in something higher than the subject."¹⁰⁷ In other words, Schelling's philosophy of nature reconciles subject and object in a more objective way than Fichte's speculative philosophy—a way that avoids a reduction of this unification of subject and object to the subject—instead grounding the unification of subject and object in the Absolute.

For the purposes of this thesis, two aspects of *DFS* are important, namely the explicit claim that the need for philosophy comes from dichotomy and the language of death and resurrection applied to philosophy. Regarding the need for philosophy, Hegel claims that "Dichotomy is the source of *the need of philosophy*."¹⁰⁸ What dichotomy does Hegel have in mind? The answer is the stark dualisms and antitheses that permeate the thought of his day "such as spirit and matter, soul and body, faith and understanding, freedom and necessity, etc."¹⁰⁹ These are

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ On this early relationship to Schelling, see Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 152.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, 90. Here and onwards I have altered this translation to use "understanding" instead of "intellect" for *Verstand*, like I did in one instance for the *ETW* translation used last chapter.

set up by the understanding: “The understanding, as the capacity to set limits, erects a building and places it between man and the Absolute, linking everything that man thinks unworthy and holy to this building, fortifying it through all the powers of nature and talent and expanding it *ad infinitum*.”¹¹⁰ For Hegel (and for Schelling),¹¹¹ the understanding (*Verstand*) is an inflexible way of thinking that achieves a certain kind of clarity at the expense of depth, that is, it fixes ideas and sets them up against one another in an exclusionary way.¹¹² This is the dominant force behind what he calls “reflective philosophy” (*Reflexionsphilosophie*).¹¹³ Against this, Hegel sets up Reason (*Vernunft*) as the principle of speculative philosophy, which, rather than viewing ideas as sharply separated from and opposed to one another, tries to unify these ideas by appeal to the Absolute, and, in Walter Cerf’s words, “give the true conceptual vision of the whole.”¹¹⁴

Regarding the death and resurrection of philosophy, Hegel already here provides a stunning image of his big picture, and what I wish to argue is the heart of the death of God in his philosophy: “Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy [...] is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission.”¹¹⁵ Here again we see a theme—namely of oppositions as an inherent part of life—that emerged as the *presupposition* of the unification that love brings in *SCF* and the related fragment “Love.” Their union, or “re-establishment” is *only* possible out of the “*deepest* fission,” which continues Hegel’s insistence on the greatest unification (“totality and the highest pitch of living energy”) arising from the greatest division. This crucial statement in the first section of his essay is followed up by his philosophical solution—a speculative Easter—on the final page: “That which has died the death of dichotomy philosophy raises to life again through the absolute identity.”¹¹⁶ Here Hegel sees the resurrection out of the death of dichotomy to be found in a new conception of philosophy, namely speculative philosophy, which employs a concept of Reason that posits the identity of fundamental oppositions. Hegel finishes the essay as follows: “And through Reason, which devours both [finite and infinite] and maternally posits them both equally, philosophy strives towards the consciousness of this

¹¹⁰ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, 89.

¹¹¹ At least for this period of their thought, when their thought was closest together.

¹¹² See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, 242-243.

¹¹³ See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, 249.

¹¹⁴ Walter Cerf, “Speculative Philosophy and Intellectual Intuition: An Introduction to Hegel’s *Essays*” in Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), xi-xxvii; xvii.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, 91.

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, 195.

identity of the finite and the infinite, or in other words, it strives towards knowledge and truth.”¹¹⁷ Thus, with this stress on unification of opposites through Reason, Hegel has shifted his focus from seeing love as the primary unifying force in life, a feeling that unites life and those in it, albeit failing by being restricted to a small community, towards a notion of Reason that overcomes dichotomy and fission in life and philosophy. As in *SCF*, an understanding of reflective thinking that divides life is at the center of the critique, but to overcome it we are now urged to employ philosophy and concepts, rather than feelings and a modification of life (in a lived sense).

Faith and Knowledge

We now turn to *FK* where the death of God is invoked as a result of the dichotomies brought about by reflective philosophy and calls for a resurrection through speculative philosophy. The death of God is only explicitly brought into focus at the end of his conclusion, which reads as follows:

But the 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. Formally, 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 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.¹¹⁸

This “abyss of nothingness” that constitutes the death of God is a reference to the “infinite” that Hegel sees Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi positing in their philosophies as being accessible only by a philosophical faith, since for them, the finite and infinite are irreconcilable opposites. As we shall see below, this separation of the finite from the infinite leads to the death of philosophy *and* religion. The next thing to note is that Hegel is quite explicit about this “infinite grief”—which once was found in feeling of religion and its notion of a historic Good Friday—must now constitute a *moment* of the “supreme Idea,” in speculative philosophy and its “speculative Good Friday.” Indeed, Hegel follows this by ending the book with more language suggesting

¹¹⁷ Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, 195.

¹¹⁸ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191.

a philosophical resurrection after the philosophical death of God: “the highest totality can and must achieve its resurrection solely from this harsh consciousness of loss, encompassing everything, and ascending in all its earnestness and out of its deepest ground to the most serene freedom of its shape.”¹¹⁹ Hegel is making the claim that speculative philosophy is a resurrection of philosophy from the ruins of a reflective philosophy, thereby achieving a totality that is not full of harmful dichotomies such as the finite and the infinite, subject and object, faith and reason, which when viewed in a binary way have disastrous results for philosophy and other aspects of life, such as religion.

His target of criticism is reflective philosophy as found in Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte. The book contains an introduction, a chapter each on Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte, and a three-page conclusion that ends with the passages quoted above. To illuminate the concluding words on the death of God, the “speculative Good Friday” and the resurrection of the “highest totality” from these ruins, we shall turn to the introduction and examine the motivating ideas and goals behind this conclusion.

The introduction begins with the claim that “Civilization has raised the latest era so far above the ancient antithesis of Reason and faith, of philosophy and positive religion that this opposition of faith and knowledge has acquired quite a different sense and has now been transferred into the field of philosophy itself.”¹²⁰ What Hegel means by this becomes clear when he notes the fact that philosophy has gained autonomy from theology and that it is no longer a handmaiden to faith.¹²¹ That is, when it comes to the topic of faith and reason, it is no longer a relation of philosophy to faith or theology that is at stake, but rather an issue *immanent* to philosophy itself, to a type of reason at work in philosophy and its relation to a type of faith at work in philosophy. On the other hand, within religion, reason no longer fights against the “positive” aspects of faith, i.e., “miracles and suchlike” but no longer bothers, having already won and finding the task not worth the bother.¹²² On Hegel’s view, “Enlightened Reason” in targeting those aspects, targeted a “limited conception of religion,”—religion seen from the perspective of the understanding—as “faith as opposed to Reason,” envisaging “religion merely as something positive and not idealistically.”¹²³ Here Hegel continues his critique of “positive” religion (the focus on miracles and suchlike) as an alienating form of religion, a

¹¹⁹ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 191.

¹²⁰ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 55.

¹²¹ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 55.

¹²² Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 55.

¹²³ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 55.

fossilized form that misses the deeper meaning of religion, which he began in *ETW* and we discussed in the previous chapter. The result of this battle that “Enlightenment Reason” fought with religion is a disaster—indeed a kind of *death*—for both reason and religion: “The new born peace that hovers triumphantly over the *corpse* of Reason and faith, uniting them as the child of both, has as little of Reason in it as it has of authentic faith.”¹²⁴ Thus, there is a false peace that hovers over the Enlightenment conception of reason and faith, which does justice to neither religion nor philosophy, and indeed leads to the death of both. After “reason” won this spurious battle with faith in terms of positive religion, it has moved the relation of faith and reason into philosophy itself. This is how the problem is dramatically introduced on the first page.

The philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte are then introduced as the questionable way that philosophy has “made itself the handmaid of faith once more.”¹²⁵ What Hegel means by this is that “Reason, having [...] become mere understanding, acknowledges its own nothingness by placing that which is better than it in a *faith outside and above* itself, as a *beyond* [to be believed in].”¹²⁶ The first example that Hegel invokes is Kant’s treatment of the ontological argument as an empty trick and the repositioning of God now posited as a beyond to be approached only by a practical faith which is posited to support morality.¹²⁷ This critique extends to Kant’s fundamental restriction of reason to the finite. Despite its idealism in acknowledging that intuition and concept cannot be separated it nonetheless turns back to absolute subjectivity.¹²⁸ In Jacobi, Hegel saw a similarity to Kant in restricting knowledge to finitude and empirical life while also positing “an absolute Beyond” to be believed in by faith¹²⁹ and an exaltation of the individual and subjectivity above the concept.¹³⁰ In Fichte’s system of philosophy Hegel saw a sorry culmination where there is no reconciliation between subject and object, the subjective and the objective, or in Fichte’s language, the Ego and non-Ego: “the Ego *ought* to be equal to the non-Ego. But no point of indifference can be recognized in it.”¹³¹ This sets up the fundamental problem of the entire work: the understanding is trapped in finitude and cannot know the infinite, the subject is separated from the object and trapped in subjectivity, yet this finite subjectivity longs for the infinite and the object, and thus must make

¹²⁴ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 55. Italics my own.

¹²⁵ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 56.

¹²⁶ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 56.

¹²⁷ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 67.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 68.

¹²⁹ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 97.

¹³⁰ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 148.

¹³¹ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 153.

recourse to a faith—rather than knowledge—in an unknown beyond which is opposed to it. All of this for Hegel is disastrous for *both* philosophy and religion and thus constitutes the death of God. As we saw from the conclusion, however, Hegel’s *speculative* Good Friday leads to a rising from this unhappy situation to a *unification* of these opposites.

While Hegel does make his project apparent at the start of the introduction and the end of the conclusion, it only becomes fully clear through an examination of what his other claims in the introduction are and exactly what he accuses Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte of doing in their philosophy to warrant the accusation of reflective philosophy which has forsaken reason and limited itself to the understanding. Indeed, in the conclusion Hegel goes as far as to claim that these three philosophies have “recast the dogmatism of being into the dogmatism of thinking, the metaphysic of objectivity into the metaphysic of subjectivity” which is a reference to Kant’s philosophical revolution of overturning pre-critical or “dogmatic” metaphysics: “through this whole philosophical revolution the old dogmatism and the metaphysic of reflection have at first glance merely taken on the hue of inwardness, of the latest cultural fashion.”¹³² This is a reversal from a one-sided focus on objectivity to a one-sided focus on subjectivity, rather than their true reconciliation.

Yet this cultural “fashion,” of subjectivity which rightly stresses freedom and is seen politically in the French Revolution,¹³³ was part of a historical process that has now led to speculative philosophy. A philosophical solution is what is needed, indeed a “systematic philosophy” which invokes the “absolute.”¹³⁴ This focus on subjectivity leads to the dualisms of old taking on a new form, as is well explained by Stephen Crites:

Dualism is in fact what Hegel finds to be the great perennial problem of philosophy. The traditional dualisms of “spirit and matter, soul and body, faith and understanding, freedom and necessity” have now, however, been taken up into the Kantian and post-Kantian dualisms of “reason and sensuousness, intelligence and nature” and more generally into that “of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity.” Hegel’s critical writings therefore carry on an unremitting attack against these modern forms of dualism.¹³⁵

As we saw in *ETW*, the various dualisms present in Judaism and Christianity worried Hegel greatly in his search for a reconciliation of cultural dichotomies in a popular religion (*Volksreligion*), and this same worry about dualism continues in *FK*, but it is has now

¹³² Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 189.

¹³³ See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 169.

¹³⁴ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, 169.

¹³⁵ Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 160-161.

transitioned largely into the realm of philosophy. Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte all represent a turn towards the subjective while still positing an objective beyond—an infinite—that cannot be reached by reason but can only be believed in by faith. It is Hegel’s project of speculative philosophy that he has taken from Schelling which now answers the call for the unification of opposites and dichotomies that love once answered, and while this unification fulfills many of the same functions that love did for Hegel in *ETW*, it has moved more explicitly into the realm of philosophical ideas and their specific impact on thought and culture. The death of God in this period of Hegel’s thought was concerned with dichotomies caused by the *death of philosophy* and its need for resurrection in speculative philosophy. As we shall see in the next chapter, Hegel moves beyond Schelling’s identity philosophy towards a more explicitly dialectical philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in his quest for a picture of such a philosophy that can reconcile subject and object, finite and infinite, and faith and knowledge.

Chapter 3: Forgiveness, Dialectic, and the Death of God in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

So far, we have seen how love operates for Hegel in *ETW* and speculative philosophy in *FK* as employed for the purpose of *unifying* dichotomies in life and thought. In both of these works, God's death was in some way related to these concepts that Hegel employed—implicitly in the case of Jesus as the embodiment of God needing to die to bring about a more free love in the community, not tied to a singular individual, or explicitly as speculative philosophy rising from the death of God brought about by Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi—in such a task of unifying dichotomies left in post-Kantian philosophy and culture. The major task now is to see how dialectical thought, in the mode of Hegel's phenomenological philosophical history of human "spirit" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter *PS*) achieves a similar goal of unification, and how this relates to the famous ending, among other references to God's death in this text. Hegel's *PS* contains a *significant* amount of material explicitly and implicitly related to the death of God. According to H. S. Harris, "By calling his book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel made it into an epic story about God."¹³⁶ And famously, the epic ends with a cryptic passage invoking the death of God in the form of the "Golgotha of absolute spirit."

I shall begin rather late in the text, with the section on the hard-hearted Judge. It is here that Hegel shows significant continuity in thought with his account of reconciliation and love in *SCF* that we examined in our first chapter. Next, I shall analyze the death of God passages and those relating to the Spirit in the religious community after the death of Christ in the "Religion" section. Then, I shall cover the transition from religion to philosophy in the "Absolute Knowing" chapter, focusing especially on the famous "Golgotha of absolute spirit" ending. Finally, I shall return to the famous Preface, as this was written last and contains some of the clearest expressions on the overall aim and themes of the work, especially on the role of negation and the negative, given their importance for Hegel's understanding of death.

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Recognition

In the section titled "Conscience; the Beautiful Soul, Evil, and its Forgiveness,"¹³⁷ Hegel covers a wide range of territory concerning moral relations in modern romanticism, including the role

¹³⁶ H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder: I: The Pilgrimage of Reason* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1997), 31.

¹³⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 632; 365. Here and elsewhere I refer to the paragraph number followed by the page number.

of conscience, ironic consciousness, the “beautiful soul,” and more. He ends with a section on evil and forgiveness seen through the prism of one confessing evil and a hard-hearted Judge who initially declines forgiveness and thus mutual recognition. What is interesting for our purposes is the way that Hegel describes this forgiveness and reconciliation, given the proximity of these concepts to Hegel’s thought on love, the death of God, and overcoming dichotomy more generally. There is a significant amount of continuity in Hegel’s thinking in this section with what we saw in *ETW*. Just prior to this section, Hegel had critiqued “the moral worldview,” which shared many similarities to his critique of Kantian ethics in *SCF*, especially concerning the opposition between duty and inclination. More importantly, earlier in our chapter on *ETW*, we saw that the young Hegel introduced both recognition and reconciliation as connected to love. We also saw that Hegel brings up Jesus’ teaching about reconciliation to one’s brother who has something against you—an act of forgiveness—as a contrast to the response of calling that brother a fool, which Hegel argues brings about inequality and thus a breakdown of community and relationship. As we shall see, Hegel maintains this structure that we saw in love in *ETW*, but his new focus is on forgiveness rather than love.

To contextualize this section on forgiveness within my overarching concern with the death of God, I want to argue that this section of *PS* is a fine example of how Hegel’s philosophy constantly raises ideas at the core of his thought on the death of God without mentioning any explicit reference to the death of God. We see this when Hegel states that “Absolute spirit comes into existence only at the point where its pure knowing of itself is the opposition and flux of itself with itself.”¹³⁸ In context, this is about the contrast between a “*singular individuality* existing absolutely inwardly” which is the “evil” person seeking forgiveness once they recognize their error before the universal, and “the pure knowing of itself as the universal essence” which is the hard-hearted Judge. Their reconciliation is in “*existing spirit*”¹³⁹ via forgiveness and mutual recognition, which brings about reconciliation. Here absolute spirit is constituted by knowledge of oneself in one’s own opposition with oneself *in another*, where both parties recognize they are equal spirits, *after* overcoming the inequality where the hard-hearted Judge judges himself above the one judged as being evil. The hard-hearted Judge does this via an act of renouncing “the divisive thought and the rigidity of its being-for-itself holding fast to itself for the reason that it in fact intuits itself in the first agent.”¹⁴⁰ Like the much

¹³⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 671; 388.

¹³⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 670; 388.

¹⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 670; 387.

discussed master-slave section,¹⁴¹ it is recognition which destroys the inequality and brings about a form of reconciliation which not only benefits each party involved in terms of their personal identity, but is essential for absolute spirit as opposition and flux that exists within itself and is reconciled within itself.

This movement of flux and opposition within itself that is reconciled is the same movement that Hegel brings up in relation to the death of God. In *FK* the idea that the death of God in the wake of Kant and the Enlightenment was a *moment* in the “supreme Idea,” and that speculative philosophy shall transform this death via a philosophical resurrection which unifies the oppositions. Thus, the death of God was fundamentally about dichotomy and the unification of opposites in a speculative resurrection, and we shall see that this is also central to Hegel’s concept of spirit and thus God in *PS* and *LPR*. We shall see this in the role that death plays as a moment of opposition within God in the philosophical examination of Christian representations such as the self-distinguishing of God in the Son, the suffering and death of God involved in such distinguishing, and the reconciliation in the Holy Spirit as God existing within the community.

The ending to this section and the entire chapter on “Spirit” sums up this reconciliation in a way that is not unlike Hegel’s definition of love in *ETW* insofar as love involves finding oneself in another. Furthermore, Hegel ends by invoking God, transitioning into the “Religion” chapter by invoking a theme already implicitly seen in *ETW* and that is central to the *effect* of the death of God in Hegel’s thought, namely, God existing in the community:

The reconciling *yes*, in which both I’s let go of their opposed *existence*, is the existence of the *I* extended into two-ness, which therein remains the same as itself and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-relinquishing and in its opposite. – It is the God that appears in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowing.¹⁴²

Here, like in the concept of love in *SCF* and the “Love” fragment, we have a conception of multiplicity in harmony where the individuals remain individuals while also only existing and finding (the certainty of) themselves in and through the union with the other. This reconciling

¹⁴¹ It is worth noting that this section on forgiveness is a higher phenomenological stage than the master-slave section, precisely *because* it introduces forgiveness in recognition which the master-slave section lacks. This is important because the master-slave dialectic is often seen as absolutely central to *PS*, but if the forgiveness section is higher *and* is related to Hegel’s thought on the death of God, then that lends support to the claim that the death of God is at the center of Hegel’s philosophy. I want to thank Diego Bubbio for drawing my attention to this point.

¹⁴² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 671; 389.

forgiveness leads to the recognition of God in the community rather than anything merely inward. As H.S. Harris reads the transition from the Hard-Hearted Judge to religion:

What happens when the Hard Heart breaks, and we make the transition to Religion proper is that the God within is projected outwards. God becomes recognizable as the spirit of the actual community in which we live and move. ... The soul that flies from the word to the God within, is guilty for that flight, and doubly guilty when it pretends to condemn the world in the name of the God within. This inner God must appear; he must become “manifest.” ... But God can only be manifest as the spirit of universal forgiveness, the spirit that transcends the whole moral standpoint.¹⁴³

Hegel’s focus on forgiveness here mirrors his early focus on love in *SCF* insofar as it both transcends the moral standpoint of Kant and the hard-hearted Judge and reconciles spirit via a finding of oneself in another while *remaining* oneself. As is to be expected if Hegel’s philosophy shares its content with religion, there is a religious and a philosophical side to this forgiveness: reconciliation of spirit is also the manifestation of God. As Harris puts it, using William James as an example (after Harris had noted James’ critique of Hegel’s ethical position): “the last law of Conscience, the one through which all consciences are reconciled is: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”” William James can with good right be committed to making the world better; and he can properly condemn those who are not (in his eyes) committed to that. But *as a philosopher* he must not presume to condemn anyone; for when he does that he falls short of his scientific goal, which is to comprehend them.”¹⁴⁴ Thus Hegel’s own philosophical project in *PS* of showing how consciousness arrives at philosophical science mirrors his ethical-religious argument about forgiveness due to the *situatedness* and *finitude* of all perspectives—even the hard-hearted Judge who knows himself as the universal essence, as well as the philosopher who strives to make judgements. Again, as Harris interprets Hegel: “It is only when we abandon the stance of moral judgement, only when we do not seek to be moral valets, that we can be scientific observers at all.”¹⁴⁵ This is arguably one of the more unexpected ways that Hegel’s philosophical thought mirrors his religious thought—after all they share the same content in Hegel’s view—namely that giving up one’s universal position to recognize the situated and concrete finite character of spirit is a movement essential to spirit

¹⁴³ H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1997), 521.

¹⁴⁴ Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder II*, 522.

¹⁴⁵ Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder II*, 522.

itself, and thus philosophy and religion as shapes of spirit, and ultimately, as we shall further see, is key to the death of God, since God *is* spirit.

The Death of God in Religion and the Nature of Spirit

The transition to the *Religion* chapter is the biggest change of gear in *PS*.¹⁴⁶ Out of all the shapes of consciousness examined up until this chapter in *PS* there have been defective forms of religion such as the unhappy consciousness and the religion of the Enlightenment, but now we begin to see religion as a form of *spirit knowing itself as spirit* that fulfills for Hegel an absolutely central role in his philosophy. Perhaps the most striking feature is the weighty burden that Hegel puts on Christianity as bringing to the world in representational form the truth that speculative philosophy will deliver via the concept. This is seen in Christianity through the death of Christ as the death of God. It is essential that it is the death of God—not just the death of Jesus of Nazareth, or Christ—that is at the center of Christianity in Hegel’s view, and thus indirectly central for his philosophy.

Hegel first introduces the death of God explicitly in *PS* by writing that the “tragic fate” of the “unhappy consciousness,” and its “*certainty of itself* that is supposed to be in and for itself,” breaks down and “expresses itself in the harsh phrase *that God is dead*.”¹⁴⁷ The unhappy consciousness could not gain the eternal essence that it desired. The unchangeable, (such as God or the gods) were too far away to provide the certainty that they were called upon to bring about, and finding oneself in that which is remote and alien from oneself ended up backfiring.¹⁴⁸ Hegel continues: “It is the consciousness of the loss of all *essentiality* in *this certainty* of itself and of the loss even of this knowing of itself – it is the loss of substance as well as of the self.”¹⁴⁹ In contrast to the unification through forgiveness and reconciliation (the reconciling *yes*) that brings about certainty of oneself with which Hegel ended the

¹⁴⁶ Harris calls it “the most radical of all the transformations that occur in the *Phenomenology*.” Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder II*, 521.

¹⁴⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 752; 431.

¹⁴⁸ Christianity or Neoplatonism is a common interpretation of what’s behind Hegel’s “unhappy consciousness,” e.g., Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 72. Stephen Crites rightly points out that Hegel’s treatment is not reducible to religious unhappy consciousness, but is a concept with an extremely broad range and scope: unhappy consciousness is a presupposition and necessary stage on the way to spirit that occurs whenever consciousness looks to some essence outside of itself for happiness. Stephen Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 291-296. According to Robert R. Williams, the death of God in relation to the unhappy consciousness in *PS* is about “the loss of everything substantial” in the period of the Roman Empire, which was “the era of universal subjugation.” Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 292.

¹⁴⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 752; 431.

previous section of *PS*, Hegel pits the unhappy consciousness as a shape of consciousness that loses all *certainty* of itself since it does not find true recognition of itself in the alien essence. Throughout *PS*, and here in particular, it becomes clear how connected self-certainty and self-knowledge are for Hegel and are achieved throughout the text by recognition, which brings about equality through forgiveness and reconciliation, in a way that mirrors the role of love in *ETW*. In *FK*, we saw that when consciousness is full of unreconciled dichotomies, e.g., the separation of subject and object, finite and infinite, and faith and reason found in various ways in Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte, there is the moment of the feeling of God's death, which, according to Hegel, must be speculatively reconstituted as a *moment* awaiting a speculative resurrection and unification. The same fundamental movement is found in the "Religion" chapter of *PS*, where Hegel argues that the shapes of consciousness where this feeling that God is dead are stages of consciousness that await a greater reconciliation where such dichotomies are overcome. This is first seen in the movement from unhappy consciousness to universal forgiveness and reconciliation and thus God becoming spirit in the community. And secondly as we shall see in the next section, the movement of the "Absolute Knowing" final chapter, where philosophy fulfills in a scientific way for spirit the role that Christianity played for spirit in an earlier representational way. First, however, we turn to the role that Christianity plays in revealing what spirit is.

According to Hegel, it was conceived by Christians thinking representationally that the kenotic Incarnation of God in Christ was an act of free will; however, Hegel asserts that the necessity for its self-relinquishing lies in the concept, namely, that what exists-in-itself, which has that determination only in opposition, has for that very reason no truly stable existence. [...] this is the one that relinquishes itself of itself, goes to its death, and as a result reconciles the absolute essence with itself, for in this movement it exhibits itself as *spirit*. The abstract essence is self-alienated, it has natural existence and self-like actuality. This, its otherness, or its sensuous presence, is taken back again by the second-coming-to-be-other, and is posited as sublated, as *universal*. As a result, the essence has in that sensuous presence come to be itself. The immediate existence of actuality has thus ceased to be alien, or external, to that essence, as it is what is sublated, or what is universal. Thus, this death is its resurrection as spirit.¹⁵⁰

Earlier we saw Hegel speak of the need for "opposition and flux of itself with itself" for absolute spirit to attain self-knowledge and thus to come into existence. Here we see

¹⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 779; 446.

explicitly how this works in relation to Hegel's understanding of the *concept* that is found in the Christian ideas of Trinity and Incarnation. The self-relinquishing of God happens because God is not a stable, static entity (God as merely Father in eternity), but a dynamic movement of determination in opposition (the Son entering finitude), and the sublation of this opposition (the Holy Spirit in the reconciled community). It is because *only in opposition* and in taking on otherness and sublating that otherness—i.e., the same movement of losing oneself in the other while at the same time sublating this state of otherness and remaining oneself in the unification of love and forgiveness that we saw earlier—does anything ultimately exist as spirit.

Hegel explains the *result* of this movement of God's kenosis and incarnation to death and then resurrection as spirit in the community as "the constitution of a religious community, which previously lingered in representational thinking, but which now returns to itself as a return into the self; and thus spirit makes the transition from the second element of its determination, or from representational thinking, into the *third*, into self-consciousness as such."¹⁵¹ This is perhaps the most important passage in *PS* detailing Hegel's general sketch of how the most crucial movement within Christianity relates to the rest of his philosophy. Here the second movement is found in the Christian understanding of the Son in Jesus Christ as a person available for representational thinking (*Vorstellung*). Representational thinking is a kind of *picture-thinking* which shares some similarities with the understanding, insofar as it does not penetrate to the speculative understanding of unified concepts but lingers with a limited understanding that involves the types of oppositions that we have seen Hegel combatting with speculative philosophy and the concept (*Begriff*). This second stage then gives way to the third stage, that of the Holy Spirit in the community, or "self-consciousness as such." The Holy Spirit is the result and implication of the reconciling of God with God from the second stage of God's death and the uniting of the finite and infinite and is God's resurrection from that unifying death as spirit, and crucially, since divine and human spirit are reconciled, God's self-consciousness is identical to human self-consciousness: both are united with themselves after a self-distinguishing and return, and both know themselves as spirit.

What is therefore so important for Hegel is that Christianity contains concepts that are revealing for the task of understanding spirit—especially as spirit knowing itself as spirit,

¹⁵¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 780; 446.

since it knows divinity as spirit and itself as humanity reconciled with divinity, and thus spirit with spirit—and that these concepts are only fully unlocked when one moves from viewing Christianity in a representational fashion to viewing it via the concept. Vitality for our topic, it is when one grasps that God’s death in Christianity leads to spirit, and that this is a concept which unveils the true nature of what spirit—both human and divine—is. Hegel repeats this important point in several ways, emphasizing different aspects, especially that what is found in representational thought in the community and its effects on the community is best understood as coming from the concept, or God *in itself*: “The movement of this religious community, as self-consciousness which has differentiated itself from its representational thought, is that of *bringing out* which has come to be *in itself*. The dead divine man, or the human God, is *in itself* universal self-consciousness; He has to become this *for this latter self-consciousness*.”¹⁵² There is here a recognition by Hegel of the Christian community overcoming its own representational thinking when it truly has the Spirit in the community, due to following the *dead* “divine man,” the “human God” which is *in itself* self-consciousness, thus enabling the self-consciousness of the community.

Hegel is particularly careful to stress the unique role that death plays in giving rise to spirit embodied in the community: “Death is transfigured from what it immediately means, i.e., from the *non-being*, of *this singular individual*, into the *universality* of spirit which lives in its own religious community, dies there daily, and is daily there resurrected.”¹⁵³ As we see again here as in *ETW*, resurrection for Hegel goes beyond any representational meaning of a miraculous historical event towards an embodiment of spirit within the community, where the universal truth of spirit is able to live in time, rather than in an abstract beyond or tied to a singular individual.

Hegel returns to the unhappy consciousness in a section dealing with the death of Christ (the mediator) and stresses how this death overcomes the “one-sidedness” of God previously conceived as abstracted from the world. This death therefore does away with any retreat into finding one’s essence in an unchangeable substance and opens a way towards knowing substance as subject, as universal self-consciousness.

The death is the agonized feeling of the unhappy consciousness that *God himself is dead*. This harsh expression is the expression of the inmost simple-knowing-of-oneself, the return of consciousness into the depth of the night of the I=I which no longer differentiates and knows

¹⁵² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 781; 448.

¹⁵³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 784; 450.

nothing external to it. This feeling thus is in fact the loss of *substance* and of the substance taking a stance against consciousness. However, at the same time it is the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of its own self which it lacked as object, as immediacy, or as pure essence. This knowing is therefore *spirit-giving*, as a result of which substance becomes subject, its abstraction and lifelessness have died, and it has become *actual*, simple, and universal self-consciousness.¹⁵⁴

Hegel thus invokes the death of God as overcoming the problem of the unhappy consciousness and bringing about the type of self-consciousness that he will bring into focus in his next section on *absolute knowledge*. When God dies, one can no longer project one's essence onto an essence totally outside of oneself. That substance, the abstract essence, or God simply as Father in eternity, is lost. With the loss of that substance, consciousness has to move to subjectivity and to a certainty of oneself, which is essential for self-consciousness. The crucial move is thus made from *substance* to *subject*, where God as substance is now understood as subject and ultimately the Holy Spirit within the community, as a universal form of self-consciousness. Here Hegel sees this understanding of God's death as having decisive impact for human self-consciousness, insofar as spirit is a movement away from abstraction and the unhappy consciousness towards universal self-consciousness.

The Death of God and Absolute Knowing

The final chapter of *PS* contains the clearest example of Hegel's thought on the relation between religion and philosophy from this period. What becomes especially clear is the superior nature of philosophy in dealing with the shared content of religion and philosophy, when it comes to *self-knowledge*: "as long as spirit has not *in itself* brought itself to completion as the world-spirit, it cannot attain its completion as *self-conscious* spirit. For that reason, the content of religion expresses what *spirit* is earlier in time than science does, but it is science alone which is spirit's true knowing of itself."¹⁵⁵ Thus, while religion first discovers what spirit is—namely self-knowledge through opposition and sublation of those oppositions, and thus spirit knowing itself as spirit—philosophy is the fulfillment in terms of bringing out *explicitly in a scientific way* what spirit is to consciousness, since it uses dialectical reason and the concept rather than representational thinking (what Hegel here calls "coarse consciousness"¹⁵⁶).

¹⁵⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 785; 451.

¹⁵⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 802; 462.

¹⁵⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 803; 463.

We see this when we move to the most well-known instance of the death of God being invoked within *PS*, namely the “Golgotha of absolute spirit” which appears in the final paragraph of the book:

The aim, absolute knowing, or spirit knowing itself as spirit, has its path in the recollection of spirits as they are in themselves and are as they achieve the organization of their realm. Their preservation according to their free-standing existence appearing in the form of contingency is the science of phenomenal knowing. Both together are conceptually grasped history; they form the recollection and the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone; only –

Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits
Foams forth to him his infinity.¹⁵⁷

Absolute knowing is achieved by a knowing of the shapes of spirit throughout history. This is a philosophical knowing, even if the Christian consciousness of God’s death and appearance as spirit in the community in one of those shapes helped bring about a non-scientifically grasped understanding of spirit. Nonetheless, here we see the entire shape of the history of spirit mirroring and invoking the representational imagery of God’s death. Golgotha means “the place of the skull” and is found in the New Testament gospels as the place where Jesus was crucified. Stephen Crites asks the obvious question: “What can it mean that absolute spirit, too, has its Golgotha?”¹⁵⁸ Crites reflects on the relation here between the Christian gospel, the negative, and the dialectical:

Perhaps the image [of the place of the skull] is employed as a metaphor for historical negativity, that each incarnation of spirit in history is annihilated in its turn, only to be “preserved” in its transfiguration into recollective knowledge. Hegel had concluded *Faith and Knowledge* with such an evocation of a speculative Good Friday and Easter. But here the word does not support that pattern. “Golgotha and recollection” might have implied something of the sort, but the reverse order suggests no transfiguration of the first into the second, but quite a different relation: perhaps simply two forms of negativity, the dialectical and the historical. In the Preface, written a short time later, Hegel emphasizes in the strongest terms that “the tremendous power of the negative” is never surpassed in the life of the spirit.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 808; 467.

¹⁵⁸ Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 540.

¹⁵⁹ Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 547.

This interpretation is one that raises the crucial connection between Hegel's thought on the death of God with his thought on negativity. It does so by highlighting a central feature of Hegel's project in *PS*, namely the sublation of various shapes of spirit throughout history which are not simply to be transformed into recollective knowledge. Rather, the negation and power of the negative is "never surpassed in the life of spirit" and thus remain essential moments of spirit knowing itself as spirit. This is crucial for this thesis, as the death of God is fundamentally about negation constituting a moment in God, even while simultaneously remaining a reconciling of opposites. We shall now turn to the preface, to examine how negativity operates there, ending with the important passage Crites has just referred to.

The Death of God and the Preface

Before we move to the passage Crites has referred us to, I want to point out an earlier statement in the Preface that stresses in the strongest terms the necessity for God and the negative to remain united, thus adding support to Crites's interpretation discussed above: "The life of God and divine cognition might thus be expressed as a game love plays with itself. If this Idea [*Idee*] lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative, then it lowers itself into edification, even into triteness."¹⁶⁰ Not only does Hegel stress the necessity of the negative to the concept of God and cognition of God; he crucially links this to *suffering* and *love*. The life of God understood as a game that love plays with itself, necessarily involves suffering and the negative (as well as seriousness and patience). If we keep this in mind while turning our attention to what we covered in the section on forgiveness, and Hegel's earlier writing on love, we see that negation is always there for Hegel, and that negation and reconciling forces like love and forgiveness go together, since love and forgiveness presuppose the many-sidedness of life and all the divisions that includes. This anticipates the "speculative intuition" that the most extreme opposites of God and death are united in infinite love, to be addressed in the next chapter.

The important passage that Crites has already alluded to from the Preface reads as follows:

[T]he life of spirit is not a life that is fearing death and austere saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet in its absolute disruption. Spirit is not this power which, as the positive, avoids looking at the negative, as is the case when we say of something that it is nothing, or that it is false, and

¹⁶⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19; 13.

then, being done with it, go off on our own way on to something else. No, spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and lingering with it. This lingering is the magical power that converts it into being.¹⁶¹

Thus, the life of spirit—whether for God or for humans (for both are spirit)—is intimately connected with death and finds itself in death and the negative. Death and the negative are no mere negligible contingencies for Hegel but are essential for the life of spirit. It is worth noting that in context this passage is concerned with the scientific task of absolute knowing, or the science of phenomenological knowing, but since Hegel’s thought on spirit has the dual nature of applying to God and humans, since both are spirit, this is just as true for God as it is for humans. Thus, negation is inherent both to God and to human spirit, and this negation manifests in the task of philosophy via the key role that negation has in dialectical reason, as negating and sublating shapes of consciousness and raising those shapes to the absolute knowing of philosophy which explicates how spirit is fully self-conscious and knows itself as spirit. The death of God is thus in this sense the key to understanding Hegel’s concept of *both* God and philosophy insofar as it places the movement of negation (God’s death, and the negation and sublation of shapes of consciousness throughout history) and reconciliation (forgiveness, and the movement from abstract divinity to God as spirit in the community) at the center of his thought.

¹⁶¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 32; 21.

Chapter 4: Bringing Love and Speculation Together: The Death of God in the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (hereafter *LPR*, which for our purposes refers to volume III) are the mature expression of his thought on religion, worked on up until 1831, the year of his death. They are thus the final and arguably most important collection of writings to consult for Hegel's thought on the death of God. What makes them so crucial is that Hegel ties together so many themes he has developed over his philosophical career and integrates them in a philosophical discussion of religion, which is the second highest moment of spirit next to philosophy. Indeed, it has even been (boldly) argued by Hodgson that insofar as the absolute idea (or God) is the foundation and telos of nature and finite spirit, Hegel's philosophy of religion can be seen as the final culminating moment of the encyclopaedia of philosophy.¹⁶² Regardless of what one makes of such a claim, these lectures represent the culmination of a core aspect of Hegel's thought that occupied his mind and writings from his earliest student days up until his death.

Hegel's philosophy of religion is split up into three main sections: (1) The Concept of Religion, (2) Determinate Religion, and (3) The Consummate Religion. Hegel lectured on philosophy of religion in this way in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831. My focus shall be on (3) The Consummate Religion and Hegel's comments related to the death of God, which vary to some extent in every year that he lectured on philosophy of religion.¹⁶³

The Death of God in 1821

We have access to the 1821 lectures in the form of Hegel's manuscript. Many of Hegel's most crucial ideas are already developed in this beginning to his series of lectures on the philosophy of religion—especially those ideas related to the death of God. Setting the background to his remarks on the death of God, Hegel introduces some of his key ideas on why the Christian idea of Incarnation in Christ is so important for his thought, specifically in the section “Appearance of the Idea in a Single Individual.”¹⁶⁴ Crucial for Hegel's philosophy of religion is the way that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ is the appearance of God or the *Idea* in a single human being, and that this only needs to happen

¹⁶² See Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83.

¹⁶³ See Hodgson, “Editorial Introduction” in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume III*, 1-54; 1.

¹⁶⁴ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 110, 110-122.

once, in a way which attains “the consummation of spirit.”¹⁶⁵ The consummation of spirit is God or the *idea (Idee) appearing* as a specific subjectivity—an infinite subjectivity—within the finite world and *for* consciousness.¹⁶⁶ Since this divinity is exclusively in *one* human, it is unique, and importantly, *not abstract*, as Hegel argues would be the case if it was spread out among several individuals.¹⁶⁷ This allows *the* reconciliation between the finite and the infinite to become explicit, in that this individual is the infinite concrete unity of the divine and the human. While concrete, this is still an *implicit* unity of the divine and human, since it is an *eternal truth* that need only be expressed once.¹⁶⁸ As Hegel emphatically states regarding the Incarnation: “*Once is always.*”¹⁶⁹ Hegel connects these reflections explicitly with Christian doctrine: “In the eternal idea [there is] only one Son, one only exclusive of other finite beings—not in and for himself but eternal love.”¹⁷⁰ This is an example of Hegel’s creative use of Trinitarian theology, where the Son is unique in the eternal idea (God) because the Son is that movement and moment of differentiation that love (and thus eternal love) requires.

In contrast to Hegel’s earlier discussion of Christianity in “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” there is here a positive appropriation of the uniqueness of God’s presence in a *singular* human being, and its necessity for universal reconciliation, which Hegel previously criticized for its conflict with universality and thus its leading towards positivity. He does, however, later temper such a strong focus on singular individuality with the primary role given to the Holy Spirit in effecting God’s reality in the world and bringing about the final reconciliation of the traditionally opposed opposites of divinity and humanity, the infinite and finite.

Hegel further explains his thinking on the singularity of God in Christ as follows:

Singularity exclusively is *for others*; [it is] immediacy and is the return from the other into itself. The singularity of the divine idea, the divine idea as *one* human being, is first brought to completion in actuality to the extent that initially it has *many* single individuals confronting it, whom it brings back into the unity of the Spirit, into the *community*, and therein it is [present] as actual, universal self-consciousness.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 113.

¹⁶⁷ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 114.

¹⁶⁸ See Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 336.

¹⁶⁹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 115.

¹⁷⁰ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 115.

¹⁷¹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 133.

The appearance of the divine idea in one human being is thus *for* spirit, as far as it is primarily *for* the consciousness of the community. For Hegel, the Son did not have to become incarnate in order to die to provide atonement for sin but reveals the eternal nature of God as differentiated and reconciled spirit. This provides an important background to Hegel's understanding of Christ as the appearance of the idea in a singular human and its universal significance for reconciling humanity and divinity—which to the understanding are opposite extremes, as the finite exclusive of the infinite and vice versa. Why this is so important for us is that, as we shall see, the death of Christ as the death of God is in this context the reconciling of these extreme opposites of finitude and infinitude—the human and the divine.

Before moving on to that death, it is worth noting those comments of Hegel on Christ's teaching that relate to the theme of love in order to continue our investigation into the role of love in unification in Hegel's thought. Hegel claims that love is the major teaching of Christ: "The most outstanding and at the same time comprehensive teaching of Christ is, as is well known, *love*, and indeed: "Love your neighbor" [Matt. 22:36-40]."¹⁷² He specifies that this love is *not* an empty universal love which "indulges in a vain attempt to spread out its love until it becomes a mere pretense [*Vorstellung*], the very opposite of what love is."¹⁷³ Rather, it is a specific love—a love of "a few particular individuals."¹⁷⁴ This focus on love furthers Hegel's emphasis on the primacy of love for understanding Christianity but takes on a more concrete form than Hegel's reflections in *SCF*, where the universality of love was stressed over love of specific individuals (e.g., those in small early Christian communities). However, even in these lectures, love is not limited to the teaching of the individual Christ, because Hegel connects love to its ground in "the calling [*Bestimmung*] of the Holy Spirit"¹⁷⁵ to which we shall return when we examine Hegel's reflections on what comes *after* the death of Christ as the death of God.

Turning now to the most salient points Hegel makes in the 1821 manuscript about the death of Christ, the first thing to note is that Hegel emphasises the humanity of Christ (and thus God), and how the crucial thing is that God, in order to be truly united with finitude, must experience "the pinnacle of finitude," which is death.¹⁷⁶ More precisely, it is "the anguish of death" where "death is the pinnacle of negation, the most abstract and indeed

¹⁷² Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 118.

¹⁷³ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 118.

¹⁷⁴ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 118.

¹⁷⁵ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 119.

¹⁷⁶ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 124.

natural negation, the limit, finitude in its highest extreme.”¹⁷⁷ For God to be united with humanity, God must be united with finitude, even the highest extreme or pinnacle of finitude, which is anguished death. It is not enough for God to remain in the abstract, nor for God to appear as a purely divine figure among mortals, immune from finitude. Hence, “The temporal and complete existence of the divine idea in the present is envisaged only in [Christ’s] death.”¹⁷⁸ Hegel then makes several important claims regarding the nature of this death. First, it is the “highest divestment of the divine idea” which “is expressed as follows: ‘God has died, God himself is dead.’ [This] is a monstrous, fearful picture [*Vorstellung*], which brings before the imagination the deepest abyss of cleavage.”¹⁷⁹ As a representation, this is not yet a clear explanation of what the concept or “speculative intuition” behind such a representation is, but it is enough to bring before the imagination the deepest conception of division *within* God.

Most important for our argument is what Hegel does next in connecting this death to love as unification:

But at the same time this death is to this extent the highest love. [It is] precisely love [that is] the consciousness [of] the identity of the divine and the human, and this finitization is carried to its extreme, to death. Thus here [we find] an envisagement of the unity [of the divine and the human] at its absolute peak, the highest intuition of love. For love [consists] in giving up one’s personality, all that is one’s own, etc. [It is] a self-conscious activity, the supreme surrender [of oneself] in the other, even in this most extrinsic other-being of death, the death of the absolute representative of the limits of life. The death of Christ [is] the vision of this love itself—not [love merely] for or on behalf of others, but precisely *divinity* in this universal identity with other-being, death. The monstrous unification of these absolute extremes is love itself—[this is] the speculative intuition.¹⁸⁰

Rather than lingering on absolute division, Hegel invokes the same structure that we first saw in *ETW* with love and continued seeing in *FK* and *PS* with regard to unification, but is once again here explicitly related to love—namely a movement out of oneself into another, without ceasing to be oneself—sublating any one-sided otherness and thus bringing about unification. Here it is not two individuals becoming unified through love, but “*divinity* in this universal identity with other-being, death,” which is love itself. This movement, this nature of

¹⁷⁷ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 125.

¹⁷⁸ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 125.

¹⁸⁰ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 125.

unification of the most extreme oppositions of God and death, is what Hegel here calls the speculative intuition, which is the truth behind the representational understanding of God's death in Christianity.

The next thing to note is that Hegel focuses on the reversal from greatest loss to greatest gain, which we saw in the *ETW* was part of the movement of love: "In addition to the fact that it is a natural death, it is the death of a criminal, the most degrading death on the *cross*."¹⁸¹ This degrading death of a criminal—that which is lowest—is transformed into what is highest: "In a natural death finitude as a natural condition [is] at the same time transfigured [by civil honour]; but here civil dishonor, [death on] the cross, [is] transfigured. That which is represented as the lowest and which the state uses as an instrument of dishonor is here converted into what is highest."¹⁸² Thus, the negative here, that of a dishonorable death, has the marks of spirit that we saw in the preface to *PS*, where "Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet in its absolute disruption" and "spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and lingering with it."¹⁸³ For the early Christians, this death had the power of reconciliation, rather than shame and defeat, which Hegel will say more of in the 1824 Lectures when he speaks of what comes *after* the death of God, namely God existing as spirit in the community.

The Death of God in 1824

The Lectures of 1824 diverge from the 1821 lectures in placing less emphasis on the death of Christ and more on the transition to spiritual presence after Christ dies.¹⁸⁴ For this reason, now is an appropriate time to address this theme as it is developed in the lectures, in relation to what we have seen in the previous chapters regarding the spiritual presence of God in God's community after the death of Christ. First though, in Hegel's treatment on the death of Christ in these lectures the issue of God's death as necessary for God as spirit does come more sharply into focus:

For it is *this* suffering and death, this sacrificial death of the individual for all, that is the nature of God, the divine history, the being that is utterly universal and affirmative. This is, however, at the same time to posit God's negation; in death the moment of negation is

¹⁸¹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 129.

¹⁸² Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 129.

¹⁸³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 32; 21.

¹⁸⁴ As noted by Hodgson in his "Editorial Introduction," Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 1-54; 32.

envisaged. This is an essential moment in the nature of spirit, and it is this death itself that must come into view in this individual. It must not then be represented merely as the death of *this individual*, the death of this empirically existing individual. Heretics have interpreted it like that, but what it means is rather that *God* has died, that *God himself is dead*. God has died: this is negation, which is accordingly a moment of the divine nature, of God himself.¹⁸⁵

Hegel emphasizes that Christ's death is not simply the death of a specific individual but is the *death of God*, part of the divine history and thus God's negation, and thus an essential moment in the nature of spirit. The implications of this for our argument are clear: The death of God is inherent to Hegel's conception of God, and since God is spirit and the divine history has its own negation, this is true of the nature of spirit more generally. This makes sense if one keeps in mind that for Hegel, as we saw in *SCF*, what humans and God have in common is spirit—both are spirit. The *way* that God is spirit necessarily involves death: “Death is love itself; in it absolute love is envisaged. ... Through death God has reconciled the world and reconciles himself eternally with himself. This coming back again in his return to himself, and through it he is *spirit*.”¹⁸⁶ It is in the negation of otherness, or “other-being” and return, in God's case through the other-being of finitude and death, and the reconciling of the extreme opposites of God and death, leading to life as Spirit in the community that God *is* spirit. To this movement of spirit after God's death we now turn.

Hegel introduces the theme of what comes *after* the death of God in Christianity as “the transition from externality, from appearance, to inwardness.”¹⁸⁷ This transition from externality and appearance is *achieved* by God's death, where there is no longer the ability to cling to a single individual, but the necessity of finding God as spirit within a community, which we saw has been an emphasis of Hegel's from as far back as *ETW*. Furthermore, this move to spirit achieves what the unhappy consciousness wanted but could not have: “the certainty felt by the subject of its own infinite, nonsensible essentiality, the certainty with which it knows itself to be infinite, to be eternal, immortal.”¹⁸⁸ That is the first aspect. The second aspect is that “the subject's being filled with the truth, and the fact that this truth is in self-consciousness *as* self-consciousness, that it is not external but is there as the inward truth of thought.”¹⁸⁹ Self-consciousness *as* self-consciousness is spirit knowing itself as spirit, the

¹⁸⁵ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 219.

¹⁸⁶ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 220.

¹⁸⁷ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 223.

¹⁸⁸ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 223.

¹⁸⁹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 223.

essence of which lies in the inwardness of thought, in the concept. This is a theme we saw in *PS*, where religion enables the initial move for spirit knowing itself as spirit (where God's death plays a central role) and opens up philosophy as making this knowledge fully self-conscious.

Hegel then explicitly moves onto addressing the "issuing forth of the Spirit in the community."¹⁹⁰ He asks two questions: namely, "What does spirit know," and "what then is its content, what is its teaching?"¹⁹¹ Regarding the first, Hegel asserts that spirit knows itself, that it is its own subject "because it is spirit."¹⁹² This, as we just saw, relates to the self-knowing of spirit that we saw in *PS*. Regarding the second question, Hegel says "this objective spirit, while standing over against the community, also posits itself, realizes itself therein; even as it was first posited objectively, it now posits itself, is posited, subjectively."¹⁹³ Spirit knows itself as spirit (it sees God and humanity, the finite and the infinite, united as spirit) and its teaching is that God posits Godself subjectively, that is, moves from an objective spirit to a spirit in the community, subjectively appropriated. Hegel makes it explicit that this spirit is God, "a living, active God, the God who possesses activity, who produces himself; he himself *is* his activity..."¹⁹⁴ Moreover this active God plays out historically in three (Trinitarian) moments, the first being God as abstract essence (the Father), which is sublated in love in the second moment (the Son) and ultimately love is what is objective in the third moment (the Holy Spirit):

This third [moment] consists in what was already there in the Son—namely, that spirit is objective for itself, that it objectifies itself as the unity of the first and the second [moments], so that the second [moment], otherness, is sublated in eternal love. But this love expresses initially [i.e., in God made flesh] a relationship, a knowing, a seeing of the one in the other, such that the two extremes remain independent; it expresses an identity in which the two extremes are not absorbed. Now, on the contrary, it is love [itself] that is defined as what is objective; this is the Spirit.¹⁹⁵

The Holy Spirit here has the same character that the Son has, namely the reconciliation of the divine (abstract essence) and the human (God incarnate) in eternal love. Initially, this appears as the Son walking among humanity, where the abstract essence and this human appear as

¹⁹⁰ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230.

¹⁹¹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230.

¹⁹² Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230.

¹⁹³ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230.

¹⁹⁴ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230.

¹⁹⁵ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 230-231.

independent of each other. However, when the Holy Spirit is introduced, it is seen that love is the essence of God in which the first two “moments,” of the Father and Son are actually united (in death), and this love is objective as Spirit in the community. This is key to Hegel’s take on the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, but what is important for our purposes is that God is for Hegel love and spirit, and that death is a key moment within this conception of God that enables the reconciliation between the opposite extremes (as they appear to the understanding and representational thinking) of the infinite and the finite.

Finally, one sees the same movement that one saw in the death of God in *FK*, where reflective thinking leads to the death of God, and speculative thinking or “the concept” is the solution and thus the philosophical resurrection:

Once reflection has invaded the sphere of religion, thinking or reflection assumes a hostile attitude toward the representational form in religion and toward the concrete content. And once thinking has begun in this way, it does not stop; it carries through, it empties heart and heaven; cognitive spirit and the religious content then take refuge in the concept. Here they must find their justification; thinking must grasp itself as concept and free, not maintaining the distinctions as merely posited, but letting them go free and in that way recognizing the content as objective.¹⁹⁶

The problem for Hegel is that both philosophy and religion were still dominated by reflective thinking in 1824 as they were in 1802 when he wrote *FK*, and the relationship between philosophy and religion was thus still not grasped properly. The distinctions found in religious representations that lead to oppositions—finite and infinite, divine and human—do not represent irreconcilable dichotomies for Hegel, because viewed via the concept they contain an objective content that accords with speculative philosophy, especially, as we have seen, its concept of spirit. Hegel emphasises that philosophy *seems* to be opposed to the Christian religion but is only really opposed to staying bound to representational forms of religious truth, rather than moving to the concept of those religious truths. On the other hand, philosophy is opposed to those aspects of the Enlightenment that are indifferent about or opposed to the truth in religious content. Harking back to *FK* but this time more explicitly treating religion, Hegel states:

The Enlightenment—that vanity of understanding—is the most vehement opponent of philosophy. It takes it very ill when philosophy demonstrates the rational content in the Christian religion, when it shows that the witness of the Spirit, the truth in the most all-

¹⁹⁶ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 245.

embracing sense of the term, is deposited in religion. Thus the task of philosophy [here] is to show forth the rational content of religion.¹⁹⁷

Hegel is here echoing themes that we saw in *FK*, where the death of God is caused by the Enlightenment, Kantian, and post-Kantian reflective philosophy. He is also emphasising the theme developed in *PS* that the nature of spirit is revealed in religion before it is discovered and fully explicated by philosophy. Thus, the sense of the death of God in *FK*, brought about by certain types of Enlightenment thinking, is for Hegel *countered* by the sense of the death of God in Christianity, which for Hegel is the center of its content, enabling its understanding of God as spirit and thus of the nature of spirit, albeit when viewed speculatively through philosophy and thus via the concept.

The Death of God in 1827

The 1827 lectures do not introduce much new material relevant to our topic, but they do clarify two issues at the center of my argument, namely God as love and the negative as a necessary moment in God. The first relevant part of the 1827 lectures that I wish to highlight is Hegel's meditation on what it means to say "God is love":

When we say, "God is love," we are saying something very great and true. But it would be senseless to grasp this saying in a simple-minded way as a simple definition, without analysing what love is. For love is a distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two—to be outside of myself and in the other—this is love. I have my self-consciousness not in myself but in the other. I am satisfied and have peace with myself only in this other—and I *am* only because I have peace with myself; if I did not have it, then I would be a contradiction that falls to pieces. This other, because it likewise exists outside itself, has its self-consciousness only in me, and both the other and I are only this consciousness of being-outside-ourselves and of our identity; we are only this intuition, feeling, and knowledge of our unity. This is love, and without knowing that love is both a distinguishing and the sublation of the distinction, one speaks emptily of it. This is the simple, eternal idea.¹⁹⁸

Hegel here connects his concept of love explicitly to the Christian idea that God *is* love, invoking all the distinctive features of love that we have already seen. Not only this, but he invokes that which—unlike the unhappy consciousness which is a contradiction that falls to

¹⁹⁷ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 247. Comment in brackets my own.

¹⁹⁸ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 276.

pieces—finds peace with itself *in* the other, by sublating the distinction between the two while remaining oneself. Worth noting is that Hegel invokes the intuition and feeling of unity alongside knowledge, thus in some ways returning to his early emphasis on the feeling and intuition of love in *ETW* before he took his speculative turn. Most relevant, however, is how this relates to our focus on the death of God as a moment of love, since Hegel interprets the death of God as a moment in the movement that God is, and interprets it as infinite love, the speculative intuition here seen as matching the eternal idea. The “speculative intuition” at the heart of Hegel’s thought on the death of God—that God and death are united in love—is here seen as in harmony with “the simple, eternal idea” that God is love, and consistent with Hegel’s emphasis that the highest moment of this love is death, since in death divinity and finitude are united.

The direct comments on the death of God in this lecture series follow closely the 1821 manuscript. Once again, Hegel emphasises that negation is found in God, but here he makes very clear just *how* central this is to his thinking: “Otherness, the negative, is known to be a moment of the divine nature itself. This involves the highest idea of spirit.”¹⁹⁹ What I want to emphasise is Hegel’s explicit placing of the negative, and thus death, as a moment of the divine nature itself, involving the *highest* idea of spirit, lends further support to the claim that the death of God can be read as a key to understanding Hegel’s system as a whole.

The death of God in 1831

These lectures contain a significant number of new themes and finalising points. There are also some old themes already seen in the previous lectures that are now newly developed or developed to their fullest extent. The first theme I want to touch upon is the natural way of understanding the death of Christ as a *result* of his teaching in contrast with the understanding of the death of Christ through faith and via the Holy Spirit. Hegel notes that Christ’s teaching was revolutionary, leading to his persecution and the sealing of his teaching via his death. In this he was like Socrates, and “Unbelief can go this far.”²⁰⁰ That is, viewed from a purely historical or literary point of view, Christ is a man who seals his revolutionary teaching by his death. However, Christ’s death is understood by faith “of the Holy Spirit” which generates “the *divine view* [*göttliche Betrachtung*], according to which it is the nature of God that is revealed in Christ.”²⁰¹ Hegel explains here the nature of what this faith is, and

¹⁹⁹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 326.

²⁰⁰ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 368.

²⁰¹ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 368.

what the God revealed is, which has at its core several concepts we have already encountered: “For to be precise, faith is nothing else than the consciousness of the absolute truth, the consciousness of what God is. God is the Trinity, i.e., he is the course of life that consists in being the universal that has being in and for itself, or in differentiating itself and then in setting itself over against itself, yet in doing so, being identical with itself—in a word, it consists in being this syllogism.”²⁰² This “syllogism” has the structure of love and unification that we have covered, and implies God’s death, namely, that negation is in God because differentiation and setting oneself over against oneself is a movement in God that is sublated and the unity of God is maintained. Faith in Christ is the consciousness of this truth about God, and this truth cannot be unlocked by simply viewing Christ as an ordinary historical figure.

Hegel’s explicit treatment of the death of God in 1831 involves several familiar themes but also a new treatment on the resurrection of Christ:

God has died, God is dead—this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that everything eternal and true *is not*, that negation itself is found in God. The deepest anguish, the feeling of complete irretrievability, the annulling of everything that is elevated, are bound up with this thought. However, the process does not come to a halt at this point; rather, a reversal takes place: God, that is to say, maintains himself in this process, and the latter is only the death of death. God raises again to life, and thus things are reversed. The resurrection is something that belongs just as essentially to faith [as the crucifixion]. After his resurrection, Christ appeared only to his friends. This is not an external history for unbelievers; on the contrary, this appearance occurs only for faith.²⁰³

Two things are worth noting here: first, that negation negates itself, and second, that this understanding is what is found in faith by Christ’s friends, rather than an emphasis on representational or sensuous notions of Christ’s bodily resurrection. Regarding the first, this is a key element in Hegel’s thought as a whole, as we saw in *PS*, and is consistent with Hegel’s emphasis in the preface to that work that the negative is, in Crites’s words “never surpassed in the life of spirit.”²⁰⁴ While negation is negated, it is still the negative at work, even if on itself, and only as a sublation that keeps the negative by incorporating it into a more wholistic vision or absolute concept, since *death* is a moment in the movement that God is, and remains so even after it has been negated via the resurrection of God as spirit in the

²⁰² Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 369.

²⁰³ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 323-324, fn. 199.

²⁰⁴ Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 547.

community. Regarding the second, it is Hegel's distinctly "Middle Hegelian" position on God that comes through: resurrection is neither about a supernatural miracle as orthodox Christianity has generally understood Christ rising from the grave leaving behind an empty tomb, but also not about a purely anthropological event of human spirit alone—rather God dies and maintains Godself in the process, being resurrected as Spirit in the community of faith. Indeed, Hegel links the resurrection back to the death of God, stating that "it is God who has put death to death, since he comes out of the state of death."²⁰⁵ The resurrection is an event in the life of God and thus the life of spirit. He immediately reminds us that this death is ultimately about "the monstrous unification of these absolute extremes" which means that "this shameful death is at the same time infinite love."²⁰⁶ These are themes we have already covered; what is new here is that this is the meaning of resurrection and the negation of negation.

I want to end with what I take to be the best summary of Hegel's philosophical understanding of Christianity, found at the end of the 1831 lectures: "This is the absolute truth wholly explicated: *first*, God as the eternal inward life of love; *second*, this absolute truth is portrayed as subject for the representing finite spirit in such a way that the sensible shape of that subject is interpreted through the Spirit. *Third*, there is the explication of this life of love—of the same process which *is* God and which is *represented* in Christ—in the self-consciousness of the community."²⁰⁷ While Hegel does not here mention the death of God, he does define God as "the eternal inward life of love" and that this is found in the sensible shape of Christ which (after his death, as we earlier saw) is interpreted through the Spirit (as the death of God). The death of God seen via the Spirit gives rise to the spirit in self-consciousness of the community, which is God as represented in Christ, that is, a life of love.

²⁰⁵ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 324, fn. 199.

²⁰⁶ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 324, fn. 199.

²⁰⁷ Hegel, *Lectures: Volume III*, 373.

Conclusion: The Death and Resurrection of God and Philosophy: Love, Speculation, and Dialectic

ETW, FK, PS, and LPR in Relation to Three Central Claims

In my introduction, I promised to substantiate three main claims regarding Hegel's thought on the death of God. The first and most important claim was that I would provide a new interpretation of the death of God in Hegel that focuses on the unification of opposites in love, speculation, and dialectics. My second major claim was that the death of God understood in this way is at the center of Hegel's philosophy and thus provides a window into Hegel's philosophy. My third and less central claim was that the death of God was best understood by, and thus supports, a Middle Hegelian interpretation of Hegel's understanding of God. In order to conclude my argument, I shall now tie together some loose ends and summarise how I have supported these claims, before relating them to the thought of Anderson, Houlgate, Žižek, and Williams that I raised in the introduction.

In order to bring together the conclusions from my examination of the death of God in *ETW, FK, PS, and LPR*, I shall briefly summarize the conclusions and focus on how they primarily related to the three main claims that I have set out to demonstrate via my analysis. I shall also aim to show how these three claims relate to each other. The first and biggest claim, namely that the death of God in Hegel is primarily about the unification of opposites in love, speculation, and dialectical philosophy ties into the second claim that the death of God is at the center of Hegel's philosophy. The third and less important claim that the death of God is best understood in a Middle Hegelian way finds its justification at least partially through these original two claims, as well as some direct statements that we have encountered along the way. To get started in unpacking these claims, I now turn to my summary, beginning with *ETW*.

ETW

In *ETW*, specifically in *SCF* and the "Love" fragment, we saw that Hegel viewed love as playing the key unifying role in life. Love brings about a unification of duty and inclination in a way that Judaism and Kantian philosophy could not. This idea of love was a living union of *life* to be implemented in a fractured social situation, rather than an intellectual concept to be deployed primarily within the realm of philosophy. This involved recognition *in* love which led to the highest freedom, namely the spirit of love, and broke down any inequality

where enmity would be held against others due to a conception of rights. Love was seen as the sole principle of virtue and brought the virtues into unity in a way that no concept could.

The most important aspect of *ETW* for our argument, however, were the following three ideas. First, love was seen as a *finding* of oneself in *another* while remaining oneself. This structure of love was found again in *PS* in Hegel's discussion of forgiveness, and again in *LPR* on the death of God as love and the reflections on God *as* love. Second, love required the manifold divisions of life as a prerequisite of unification. Third, the *stronger* these divisions, the stronger the unification and the greater the wealth of life enjoyed by those who gave to the beloved. In this concept the greatest divisions are transformed into the greatest unifications, and the loss of giving something away is transformed into gain for both the giver and the receiver. According to Hegel, Jesus taught this concept of love, but the early Christian community could not stay completely faithful to this type of love because it clung to the localised nature of love thus forsaking the universal call of love.

Regarding my first and most important argument that Hegel's thought on the death of God is primarily concerned with the unification in love, speculation, and dialectic, *ETW* provides the foundation for understanding Hegel's concept of love *and* key elements of his speculative dialectical philosophy that we find in his later works. While he abandons the central role that *love* plays in his later works, I have argued that this structure of love is found repeatedly in *FK*, *PS*, and *LPR*. Indeed, while Hegel abandons the opposition of life to concept that he employed in *SCF*, he did not abandon the primary need for unification, nor the claim that union has division and dichotomy as its presupposition, nor the claim that the greatest unification rises out of these oppositions.

This is related to my second major claim, namely that the death of God as the unification of opposites is central to Hegel's philosophy. *ETW* was not concerned with the death of God explicitly, but it did exhibit the primary structure of a unification of opposites in love, and implicitly about God's presence as the union of spirits in the early Christian community after the death of Jesus. We saw that this focus on unification continues throughout *FK*, *PS*, and is ultimately seen explicitly as love again in *LPR*. Unification of opposites is thus at the heart of Hegel's philosophy, and throughout all these works God's death is related to this unification. Dichotomy is also introduced in *SCF* as the prerequisite of love and unification, and this is followed up in Hegel's *PS* as the power of the negative that is an essential moment of spirit, and thus, as clearly seen in *LPR*, death is the essential moment of negation in the life of God. Finally, regarding the third claim that the Middle Hegelian position best fits this

understanding of God's death, we saw in *SCF* Hegel's claim that God and humans were *both* spirit, and knowing God is spirit knowing spirit. Hegel's understanding of God as spirit, especially God as spirit in death and resurrection in the community is a position that defies the traditional categories of theism and atheism but incorporates elements of both insofar as the negation of God in God's death (the atheistic moment) is found as a movement within God, yet not reducible to a purely anthropological interpretation in the traditional humanistic vein of thought.

FK

In *FK*, we saw Hegel continue the move towards speculative philosophy as providing the unification to dichotomy that was introduced in *DFS*. Hegel had already hinted at his critique of reflective thinking in *SCF*, and in *FK* this becomes his central theme. The reflective philosophy found in the Enlightenment and in Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte comes under critique for upholding dichotomies between subject and object, finite and infinite, and faith and reason. Especially troubling for Hegel is the attack by Enlightenment reason on a defective conception of religion—religion conceived by the understanding as positivistic and full of dichotomies—leading to a false victory over faith that was then transferred into a conflict between faith and reason inherent in philosophy itself. Unlike the old overly objective character of metaphysics that had been banished by Kant, philosophy now took on an overly subjective character.

For our purposes, what is most important is the unique way that *FK* situates the death of God. For Hegel, the turn to subjectivity was the death of philosophy *and* religion and constituted the death of God. Hegel adopted Schelling's speculative philosophy in order to overcome this division between subject and object, finite and infinite, and faith and reason, and thus incorporate and overcome this death as a "speculative Good Friday," transforming philosophy as a result. This concept of the death of God is unique out of the texts we have examined since it is directly about the dichotomies between opposites rather than their unification. However, even here this death is incorporated into speculative philosophy as a "moment," and no more than a "moment," leading to a speculative resurrection of philosophy, as well as religion and God insofar as they can now be viewed speculatively. The relation to my first and second major claims are thus as follows: the death of God is a *moment* in speculative philosophy, just as it will be seen in *PS* and *LPR* as a moment in spirit and ultimately a moment in God. If this is the case, then it follows that the death of God is a key moment in Hegel's speculative philosophy, here seen in *FK* as the moment of dichotomy that

must be unified in speculative philosophy. Regarding the third claim, we see that this speculative resurrection allows a new understanding of religion that avoids the dichotomies of reflective philosophy, which will be seen again in *LPR*.

PS

In *PS*, we saw, the move towards a new dialectical philosophy that traced the movements of shapes of consciousness towards absolute knowledge, i.e., a philosophical science of spirit knowing itself as spirit. Especially important was how forgiveness in recognition functioned in parallel ways to love in *ETW*, maintaining the structure of finding oneself in another, where both I's let go of their opposed existence by finding the certainty of themselves in the other. This attitude of the hard-hearted Judge suspending judgement when recognizing the finitude and perspectival character of even his own perspective translates over into Hegel's own project of philosophical science, where the task is comprehension rather than judgement.

We saw the death of God first invoked in relation to the breakdown of the unhappy consciousness, which cannot find its essence in a beyond outside of itself. This is later combatted by the death of God where there is no longer recourse to an abstract divine essence beyond. God is found in finitude and ultimately as spirit in the community, which reveals the true nature of human spirit. While philosophy does take on a higher shape of consciousness as "Absolute Knowing," it does so because it explicitly comprehends spirit in a fully self-conscious and scientific way which is superior to the representational way favoured by religion. The death of God in this work is seen as a movement inherent to the concept of God, since God is spirit and contains opposition and sublation of this opposition within Godself. The famous "Golgotha of absolute spirit" ending was seen as invoking God's death through its focus on negation, even though Christianity bringing this idea to spirit is surpassed by philosophy. Finally, we saw in the Preface the absolutely essential role of negation in the life of spirit, mirroring the role that opposition, the diversity of life, and dichotomy played in *ETW* and *FK*.

There is more support in *PS* for our second claim that the death of God is key to his philosophy than the other two major claims. We see this primarily in the central role that the Christian understanding of the death of God and transition of God to spirit in the community plays for the understanding of spirit. It does earlier in time, in a representational way, what philosophy will discover later in time in a scientific way, namely that of spirit knowing itself as spirit. Regarding the first claim, we see the focus on unification continued in the section on

forgiveness which shares much the same structure as Hegel's concept of love in *ETW*, which we see also in *LPR* explicitly regarding and supporting our first major claim that God's death for Hegel is unification in love. We also see this first claim supported in the way that the death of God brings about the unification of subject and object in the abstract God dying and thus substance becoming subject and ultimately reconciled in spirit. Finally, the third claim regarding the Middle Hegelian position is supported by Hegel's claim that determination and opposition are inherent to the concept of God since God is spirit, a position that contradicts the emphasis on traditional ways of viewing the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation insofar as they rely on what Hegel would consider representational thinking and are often developed according to the understanding, rather than the speculative concept. It must be noted that the Left Hegelian position appears to gain an equal amount of support by the claim that God is spirit, since it interprets that as God being reducible to human spirit. Hegel's response to this reduction is more clearly seen in *LPR* to which we now turn.

LPR

The *LPR*, as Hegel's most mature statement on his philosophy of religion, ties together several themes that we have encountered. Rather than reiterating the details of each lecture series, I shall summarize them here as a whole. We saw Hegel argue that the incarnation of God in a single person was necessary for others and thus for spirit. Christ's teachings were about love in a concrete sense and ultimately through the Holy Spirit in the community. To become the Holy Spirit in the community, however, it was necessary for God to experience the pinnacle of finitude, namely an anguished death, and thus truly demonstrate to consciousness the unity of the human and the divine. The death of Christ is seen as a vision of love itself *because* it is "the monstrous unification of these absolute extremes" of God and death, which is for Hegel the "speculative intuition." This is the death of God that is revealed in representational form viewed speculatively according to the concept. In this reconciliation between the finite and infinite God is reconciled as spirit, since spirit is a differentiation and reconciliation of such a differentiation.

We see this movement in God by Hegel's own take on the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, where the Son is a differentiation from the Father as fully taking on finitude, but sublated through death in infinite love, which is also the nature of the Spirit in the community as love within the community. This concept of God as love Hegel affirms, and the death of God is an essential moment in the love and spirit that God is, reinforcing the point that the negative is an essential moment of spirit. Furthermore, we saw Hegel explicitly

making the point that otherness and the negative as a moment in the divine nature involves the *highest* idea of spirit. As this is only accessed truly through speculative philosophy that grasps the dialectical nature of spirit, it is superficially opposed to religion insofar as religion has the true content but does not view it speculatively but representationally, and genuinely opposed to the Enlightenment which fails to grasp the speculative content of religion due to the “vanity of understanding” and is thus an enemy of philosophy. The solution to the philosophical death of God found in *FK* is thus a speculative resurrection which has the “speculative intuition” of the death of God, as the unification of opposites in infinite love, at the heart of its understanding of both philosophy and religion.

The first major claim of this thesis is found supported most clearly in *LPR*. It is here that we saw the death of God as the unification of absolute opposites (God and death) in love. Moreover, this unification, the “speculative intuition” which views God’s death speculatively, is an intuition at the core of his philosophy since the concept of otherness and negation in the divine nature involves the very *highest* idea of spirit. That the movement behind the death in God—of differentiation and reunification—matches that of Hegel’s earlier concept of love as unification in *ETW*, speculation as unification in *FK*, and the dialectical movements of spirit in *PS* provides significant support to my argument that the death of God cuts to the core of Hegel’s philosophy and can be seen as a window into his philosophy. Finally, Hegel’s reaction against the Enlightenment dismissal of religion and its failure to grasp religion speculatively, and his insistence on understanding the movement of God dying and *maintaining* Godself in the process, lends support to the Middle Hegelian claim that Hegel takes the reality of God seriously in his own speculative way.

Conclusions in Relation to Anderson, Houlgate, Žižek, and Williams

I shall now return to the ideas of Anderson, Houlgate, Žižek, and Williams that I raised in my introduction. I shall relate the findings of the previous chapters to the guiding insight of Anderson in regard to the centrality of the death of God for Hegel’s philosophy as a whole, and Houlgate’s claim that Hegel’s idea of God as love and spirit provides a representational picture of his dialectical and speculative approach to reason. Both of these issues are related to the second main claim of my thesis, namely that Hegel’s thought on the death of God does penetrate the heart of his philosophy. Žižek and Williams, on the other hand, will be assessed in regard to both the Right-Middle-Left interpretations of Hegel’s philosophy of religion (the third and more periphery claim) and the ways that love, God, and dialectical and speculative thinking interact and are the core of Hegel’s philosophy, which is my first major claim.

Anderson's Claim:

As we noted in the introduction, Anderson observes the frequency of Hegel's reference to the death of God throughout his writings, prompting him to ask if the death of God in Hegel's work provides a "point of departure" for understanding what is known as "Hegel's System."²⁰⁸ Anderson's answer is an affirmative one. He defends the following thesis: "An investigation which asks the question, What is the meaning of the utterance, "God himself is dead?" locates the center and thereby the circumference of the system of Hegel's philosophy."²⁰⁹ I have joined Anderson in the general idea that Hegel's thought on the death of God *does* provide a point of departure and is even at the center of Hegel's philosophy. My own way of following through on this claim does, however, differ significantly from Anderson's. Anderson sums up his answer as follows:

The death of God in Hegel means that death is an absolute necessity, and thus that the Christian notion of a resurrection which somehow undoes death must be let go of when reading Hegel. In death we are one with what we are not, and thus we enjoy the divine reconciliation of self and world in reading Hegel but not a reconciliation of self and God. Yet just because this reconciliation has its origin in the saying, God himself is dead, it does not wipe away the language of God, it sublates it, and compels us to speak in a new way.²¹⁰

As I indicated in the introduction, Anderson focuses the vast majority of his analysis on the death of God in *FK*, without anything but a passing mention of the death of God in Hegel's other works. It should be clear from our analysis of *PS* and especially *LPR* that while death *is* a necessity for Hegel, that does not mean that Hegel lets go of a notion of resurrection, namely that God maintains Godself through death and negation is negated, via God's resurrection as spirit in the community. Negation remains a necessary *moment* in God, and thus the power of the negative is never totally surpassed, but the language of God is only sublated in Hegel insofar as representational thinking about religion is aided by a philosophical understanding of these truths via speculative thinking and the concept. Even more importantly, while Anderson focuses on *FK* and the hermeneutical and linguistic need to use death of God language, I have focused on how the death of God is ultimately about the unification of opposites, implicitly in *ETW*, and more explicitly in *PS* and especially evident in *LPR*. Even in *FK*, which Anderson focuses on, I have argued that God's death is seen as a

²⁰⁸ Anderson, *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday*, xi.

²⁰⁹ Deland Anderson, "The Death of God and Hegel's System of Philosophy" *Sophia* 35, no. 1 (1996), 35-61; 35.

²¹⁰ Anderson, "The Death of God and Hegel's System of Philosophy," 47.

moment in a speculative resurrection. I have thus taken up Anderson's thesis but have attempted to support it in what I take to be a more plausible way that does justice to a wider scope of Hegel's thought concerning the death of God.

Houlgate's Claim:

We saw in the introduction Houlgate's claim that "The heart of the Christian understanding of God, for Hegel, is thus that God is known to be present in the world as love and ultimately as spirit, and in this central doctrine Christian faith – albeit implicitly and in a pictorial, representational form – comprehends the immanent character of absolute, dialectical reason."²¹¹ While this does not mention the death of God, I take this to be a promising line of thought in the attempt to fulfill Anderson's thesis, but it remains to be seen to what extent Houlgate's claim relates to the specific argument I have been developing.

Houlgate elaborates on his own emphasis on how this understanding of God as love relates to dialectical reason:

The willingness to relinquish our autonomy, to sacrifice our right to control our thinking, and to follow wherever the truth leads us, is for Hegel the key to genuinely rational thought, and it is precisely this spirit of willing self-surrender which Christ reveals – in the sphere of concrete experience and practical life – as the way of divine love. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnate God thus reveals the true nature of *reason* by showing that *God* surrenders his transcendence to become human, and lets go of his human form by suffering even to the point of death. The structure of self-conscious dialectical reason *is* the structure of Christian love, therefore, because they both involve the readiness to let go on one's hold on oneself. . .²¹²

This "letting go" and relinquishing of one's own control over things—the letting go of "one's hold on oneself"—is what Houlgate identifies as the common denominator between Hegel's concept of God as love and the "structure of self-conscious dialectical reason." This fits with Houlgate's emphasis on Hegel's method being a presuppositionless one,²¹³ and relates to what we saw in Harris's notion that Hegel's philosophy does not *judge* the shapes of consciousness in *PS* from an already secure position, but follows the inner workings of thought as they manifest historically, in order to comprehend them.

²¹¹ Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 249.

²¹² Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 251.

²¹³ See Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, Chapter 2, 26-46.

I have taken note of these features of Hegel's thought but have argued for a stronger connection between Hegel's understanding of the *death* of God and his speculative and dialectical reason. Indeed, I see the death of God as key to Hegel's concept of God as a whole, and thus essential for any account of Hegel's concept of God revealing in representational form the nature of reason. I have incorporated this notion of self-surrender into my analysis, in *PS* as the structure of forgiveness in giving up one's own universal objective standpoint and recognizing one's own finitude and equality with others. I have also endorsed Harris's and Houlgate's claim that this is taken up by Hegel himself in his own project in *PS*. However, I have argued that the heart of the connection between Hegel's concept of God and his concept of philosophy lies primarily in God's death, viewed speculatively as a unification of the most extreme opposites, thus involving the *highest* idea of spirit.

Zizek's Middle-Left Hegelianism:

Earlier I introduced three points of Žižek's interpretation that related to my thesis. I shall now briefly summarize how my argument relates to each point in light of the findings of the previous four chapters. Since Žižek's own analysis raises the question of the Left and Middle Hegelian interpretations of Hegel's thought on God and the death of God, I shall aim to clarify my own Middle Hegelian position in relation to Žižek's own position which, while remaining a Left Hegelian approach, comes very close at times to a Middle Hegelian position.

(1) We saw in the introduction that Žižek takes the death of God seriously as *about* God and not *simply* about human subjects, which appears to place Žižek close to the Middle Hegelian interpretation of Hegel's thought on God. However, Žižek still considers this position an atheistic one, and this "virtual real" as "less than something" is a weaker notion than what I have emphasised in my analysis. Žižek's thought shows its limitations when one focuses more clearly on the *LPR* and the insistence that death is not the end of God, but that God maintains Godself in the process, as well as his rebuke of the one-sided Enlightenment understanding of God as devoid of truth when viewed via the understanding that thrives on dichotomies such as theism and atheism. For Hegel, the atheistic moment of the Enlightenment is simply a moment, and no more than a moment, within the speculative resurrection announced in *FK* and seen in God's maintaining of Godself in the unification of God and death.

(2) Žižek claims that Hegel is a philosopher of love and a philosopher of Christianity with the death of God as central to his philosophy of Christianity. Moreover, the death of God is directly related to the dialectical struggle between opposites. However, for Žižek, the dialectical struggle of opposites has no reconciliation in a Third, and this is the meaning of the death of God, since there is no “big Other,” but only our “self-grounding abyss of love.” While we have seen that Hegel does not invoke a traditionally transcendent God to reconcile the dialectical struggle of opposites, we have noted that he does constantly aim for the reconciliation of opposites, and that the death of *God* is the highest example of such a reconciliation, as the unity of the most extreme opposites of God and death. The salient point to stress is not that *our* self-abounding abyss of love is all that there is, but rather that for Hegel, love is the shape of reconciliation in spirit, and since God and humans are both spirit, and humanity and divinity are united in God, divine and human love are united and should not be seen as exclusionary of each other, and thus reducible to one side.

(3) Žižek’s focus on God as Holy Spirit in the community after the death of God highlights the important point that the Holy Spirit is not necessarily restricted to the religious community where it first appears. Žižek’s claim that this is best represented in emancipatory atheistic societies is a provocative and interesting claim that is outside the scope of this thesis. What we *have* seen is that Hegel does relate the Holy Spirit in the community to the knowing of spirit as spirit which ultimately finds its fullest explication in philosophy, albeit a philosophy that acknowledges the speculative truth found in the religious representations of God’s death and life in the community as Holy Spirit.

Williams on The Death of God

We shall now move on to Williams’s understanding of the death of God in Hegel, which comes the closest to my own position out of the contemporary literature on the death of God. In the introduction, we saw Williams’ claim that “The union of love of God and death constitutes the basic speculative intuition of Hegel’s thought.”²¹⁴ I have followed this guiding insight of Williams. The union of God and death in love is the most explicit treatment of the death of God found in his most mature writings on the subject, namely the *LPR*. This speculative intuition that focuses on love *involves* union in speculation and dialectics, since this knowledge is only fully unlocked by speculative and dialectical philosophy as developed in *FK* and *PS* and continued in *LPR*. This speculative intuition can thus be seen as the

²¹⁴ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 23.

culminating aspect of the death of God that is at the core of Hegel's thought which takes up the concept of love in *ETW*, unification of opposites in speculation in *FK*, and the dialectical role of negation as key to spirit in *PS*. This guiding insight has been key to my understanding of the three main claims I have affirmed in my understanding of Hegel's thought on the death of God.

Central to Williams's account is the tragic character of Hegel's notion of the death of God. Williams's position contrasts with Žižek's understanding of tragedy in Hegel, who, continuing on his theme of the lack of reconciliation holds that it is a monstrosity rather than a sublime tragedy—a Sygne rather than an Antigone.²¹⁵ On the contrary, Williams argues that Hegel's view of reconciliation *involves* tragedy, more specifically, that reconciliation is qualified by tragedy and tragedy by reconciliation: both tragedy and reconciliation imply that the other is a possibility.²¹⁶ Tragedy involves opposition, conflict, and anguish, and these are the very conditions that make reconciliation possible. Williams argues that for Hegel, the death of God is “the most extreme disruption” which “not only reflects and incorporates the tragic tradition, it is a crucial part of the meaning of reconciliation” since “The reconciliation that comes to humans as a gift of divine love reflects both divine love and divine anguish.”²¹⁷ While I have not explicitly focused on tragedy, my own analysis has revealed this tragic element of Hegel's thought. It has done so in the ideas introduced in *ETW* that unification in love presupposes differentiation and opposition, in *FK* as dichotomy and the death of God constituting a *moment* in a speculative resurrection, in *PS* as the role of *negation* in the dialectical movement of spirit including in God and resulting in God's death, and in *LPR* as the death of God as infinite love that reconciles the most extreme opposites of God and *death*. In this regard, I have affirmed Williams' tragic interpretation, and consider it supportive of the claims that I have made regarding the death of God as unification in infinite love, albeit unification that has the negative as a moment, which is also key to Hegel's speculative and dialectical thinking, thus also addressing my second claim.

Williams argues that this tragic understanding of God is not the traditional orthodox and metaphysical understanding of God found in the dominant strains of western theology and philosophy. That dominant tradition had monarchical, judicial, and moral metaphors for God and led to an asymmetrical understanding of the God-world relation and even of master to

²¹⁵ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 80-85.

²¹⁶ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 291.

²¹⁷ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 291.

servant.²¹⁸ In contrast to this old understanding, Hegel's understanding of the death of God meant that "God for Hegel is not a life-less solitary (*leblose Einsame*), but freely chooses relation and suffers out of love and compassion for the world. Compassion implies that God is related to and influenced by the world. ... [G]enuine relation has to be reciprocal. A one-sided relation is no relation at all."²¹⁹ This is Williams's Middle Hegelian position, since God *relates* to the world in a non-traditional way. Crucially, Williams links this relational compassionate understanding of God as suffering love to the speculative intuition: "Such compassionate self-sacrificing divine love that goes to the point of death for its other constitutes the fundamental speculative intuition of Hegel's thought."²²⁰ This is how Williams's Middle Hegelian position relates to Hegel's speculative intuition at the core of his thought. While I have not emphasised God's suffering out of compassion for the world, I have emphasized the related but arguably more modest claim that for Hegel, God and death are united in love because God, like humans, is spirit, and spirit involves negation, suffering, and *unification*, of which love is the highest form.

²¹⁸ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 293.

²¹⁹ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 292.

²²⁰ Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God*, 293.

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