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TRANSCENDING SUBJECTS: HEGEL AFTER AUGUSTINE,
AN ESSAY ON POLITICAL THEOLOGY

by

Geoffrey J. D. Holsclaw, B.A., M.Div.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in
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ABSTRACT
TRANSCENDING SUBJECTS: HEGEL AFTER AUGUSTINE,
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Geoffrey J. D. Holsclaw, B.A., M.Div.

Marquette University, 2013

From where do political reformers and radicals come who are willing and prepared to challenge the status quo? Where are people formed who are capable of initiating change within a political system? Some worry belief in transcendence closes off authentic political engagement and processes of transformation. Others think that a transcendent orientation is the only means to protect and promote a more free and just society. Some see a positive commitment to transcendence as inimical to democratic practices, while others see such a commitment as indispensable for such a project. These general issues concern transcendence, immanence, and subjectivity as they bear on the question of political transformation.

Explaining the differences between these fundamental orientations prompts an investigation of the philosophical and theological systems of Hegel and Augustine. Examining Hegel and Augustine around the issues of transcendence and freedom offers a way to understand these more localized disagreements between political philosophers and theologians, and even between theologians.

This dissertation examines Hegel, because after the recent demise of Kantian liberalism in the forms of Rawls and Habermas, many are returning to Hegel as the original critic of Kantian philosophy specifically, and of Enlightenment secularism generally. This return to Hegel has produced a larger amount of research that dislodges the easily caricatured Hegel of dialectical monism and political conservatism, creating the possibility of a more positive deployment of Hegel within philosophy and politics. Concerning Augustine, in one sense his theology is perennial for theology, whether accepted or rejected. But in addition to this, just as with Hegel many are beginning to question the received Augustine, mining his texts within his own cultural and theological milieu rather than merely as the beginning of supposedly unfavorable theological developments. The time is ripe for an engagement between these two stalwarts of theology and philosophy in order to illuminate the similarities and differences and make clear their contemporary relevancy.

This dissertation will argue that Hegel best represents a philosophy of 'self-transcending immanence' that promotes freedom by standing in opposition to transcendence, and that Augustine best represents a theology of 'self-immanent transcendence' as the only possible hope for the true freedom.

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Geoffrey J. D. Holsclaw, B.A., M.Div.

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HEGEL

- DS/Diff *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*. Translated by H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf. Albany: SUNY Press, 1977. *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*. In *Werke* 2:9-138.
- E *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*. Translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*. In *Werke* 8-10.
- FK/GW *Faith and Knowledge*. Translated by Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris. Albany: SUNY, 1977. *Glauben und Wissen oder Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie*. In *Werke* 2:287-433.
- LPR/VPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Translated by R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson. 3 vols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984-1987. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. Edited by Walter Jaeschke. *Vorlesungen*, vols. 3-5. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983-1985.
- PR *Hegel’s The Philosophy of Right*. Translated by Alan White. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002. Cited by Hegel’s paragraph (§) numbers. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. In *Werke* 7.

PS/PG *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
Phänomenologie des Geistes. In *Werke* 3.

SL/WL *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1969.
Wissenschaft der Logik. In *Werke* 5-6.

Werke *Werk in zwanzig Bänden: Theorie Wekausgabe*. Edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969-1971.

AUGUSTINE

ciu. *De ciuitate Dei*. CCSL 47-48.
The City of God against the Pagans. Translated and edited by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

conf. *Confessions*. CCSL 27.
The Confessions of St. Augustine. Translated by John K. Ryan. New York: Image Press, 1960. Also when noted, *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

duab. an. *De duabus animabus*. CSEL 25/1.
Concerning Two Souls, Against the Manicheans. Translated by Albert H. Newman in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Father*, vol. 4. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994.

lib. arb. *De libero arbitrio*. CCSL 29.
On Free Choice of the Will. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.

Simpl. *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*. CCSL 44.
To Simplician—on Various Questions. In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, translated and edited by J. H. S. Burleigh, 376-406. Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1953.

trin. *De trinitate*. CCSL50/50A.
The Trinity. Translated by Edmond Hill (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century) Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991.

CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1959-

CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1866-

INTRODUCTION

There is another world and it is this world.
- Franz Wright

Theology seems to have lost its place, unsure to which world it belongs. Does theology, God, or the gods live within *this* world or do they journey toward *another*? And if to *another* world, what is its nature and its relation to *this* world? One could posit *another* world superimposed upon *this* one, interacting unperceivably, relating irreducibly. But a second could posit *another* world as merely a reflection, reification, or projection of *this* world. This other world is a false, but perhaps necessarily, production propelled up from below. The first truly affirms *another* world; the second critically accepts it. For those truly affirming *another* world, it is *this* world that is thereby changed, cognitively if not materially, in reference to the other. For those critically affirming *another* world, it is the other world that is changed, either into a persistent illusion or an illusive projection. And between these two orientations is a world of difference, philosophically and theologically.

Transcendence, Immanence, Subjectivity, Freedom

Speaking of *this* world and another world, a world *beyond*, speaks of transcendence and immanence. *What* is transcendent to *what*? From what perspective is *something* immanent to *something else*? Transcendence is always transcendence *of* a world. But which world, and whose? In the classical perspective transcendence refers to something like a transcendent world above (invisible, immutable, eternal) making intelligible the immanent world below (visible, changeable, temporal) of which we are a

part, subjects caught within and between these two worlds (spirited bodies or embodied spirits). Transcendence “is that which is beyond the visible and temporal world of humans, but as such, it is reached by humans in the movement beyond themselves.”¹ The transcendence *of* the immanent world is a movement *beyond*, a movement that subjects in some way accomplish. This transcendence, therefore, is doubled: first as that which *is* beyond the world, and second, as the *act* by which subjects reach this transcendence as a form of self-transcendence.

In the modern turn toward the subject, however, the doubling of transcendence (transcendence of the world and transcendence of subjectivity) turns to a doubling of immanence. After the turn toward the subject, begun by Descartes and completed in Kant, this world below is not grounded in a transcendent world above, but is grounded in the subject itself. With Descartes the metaphysics of transcendence is replaced with the metaphysics of subjectivity such that the world beyond the subject is the non-subjective world of immanent objects. This rebounds into the shrinking of immanence from encompassing the entire world of material objects to encompassing the world of thought representing these objects to a subject. In modernity, “immanence is no longer the world within our reach...but is our own subjectivity” representing the world of objects.² This creates a doubling of immanence: first as the world in opposition to otherworldly transcendence, and second as the immanence of thought to the subject. In this regard, modern subjectivity frames the problem of transcendence *as* the world of immanent

¹ Arne Grøn, “Subjectivity and Transcendence: Problems and Perspectives,” in *Subjectivity and Transcendence*, ed. by Arne Grøn, Iben Damgaard and Soren Overgaard (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. K), 11.

² Grøn, “Subjectivity and Transcendence,” 12.

objects the subject is seeking to grasp, rather than as a transcendence *beyond* the world of such objects.

Obviously, the issues of transcendence, immanence, and subjectivity are always intimately woven together and concern a fundamental “matter of orientation in philosophy.”³ Oriented around the subject, to speak of the transcendence *of* the world is to ask if and how there is a world other than subjectivity and how subjectivity must deal with or takes account of this worldly transcendence. This could be called the question of epistemological transcendence. But oriented around the world itself, to speak of the transcendence *of* the world is to ask about the being of the world and its beyond, if there is a beyond. This could be called the question of ontological transcendence.⁴ Each orientation entails shifting the primary definition of immanence and includes an account of the self-transcendence of the subject. Epistemological transcendence construes immanence as that which is thinkable for subjectivity. Ontological transcendence construes immanence as the totality of beings, or being itself, which may or may not be thinkable for consciousness. Of course neither orientation cancels out the other, and the question of subjectivity is integral to both. In either case, transcendence implies some sort of human self-transcendence as the movement beyond the immanence of thought.⁵

The complex weaving together of these elements reveal the basis for the title of this work: *transcending subjects*. On the one hand, ‘transcending’ can be an adjective describing “subjects”. This places the emphasis on the subject and its act of transcending,

³ Grøn, “Subjectivity and Transcendence,” 12.

⁴ The distinction between ‘ontological transcendence’ and ‘epistemology transcendence’ comes from Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). Westphal also adds ‘ethical transcendence’.

⁵ Grøn, “Subjectivity and Transcendence,” 30.

referring specifically to the self-transcending process by which subjectivity moves beyond its own immanent world of thought.⁶ On the other hand, ‘transcending’ could also be a present participle acting upon ‘subjects’ as its object. This would place the emphasis not on the subject that transcends, but on the active transcending of subjectivity, i.e. the subject is being transcended by and to something else. These two ways of reading the title, that subjects actively transcend and that subjects are transcended, is the central problem of this study.

An introduction such as this cannot endlessly qualify transcendence, subjectivity, and immanence in advance of the planned discussion of Hegel and Augustine. Therefore we will modify William Desmond’s classification regarding transcendence as a baseline for our investigation.⁷ What Desmond calls first transcendence (T1) regards the transcendence of external objects in the world, related but not reducible to conscious thought. Second transcendence (T2) is the self-transcendence of subjectivity as it relates to, yet exceeds and is not reducible to, first transcendence. This is the self-transcending power of thought about external objects and its freedom within this world of objects. Third transcendence (T3) refers to a beyond in relation to both nature/being (T1) and subjectivity (T2). This third type of transcendence is typical of religious or metaphysical thought and recently has received an endless onto-theological critique. Because this investigation is not concerned directly with a philosophy or theology of nature, we will combine the first two into a single category in what will be called ‘self-transcending

⁶ Of course, posing the problem this way seems to make an absolute distinction between thought and reality, something problematized by Hegel. In due course we will see how Hegel formulates his own understanding of subjectivity’s own self-transcendence.

⁷ William Desmond, *Hegel’s God: Counterfeit Double?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 2-7.

immanence'. Self-transcending immanence affirms the non-reducible interrelation between the transcendence of objects and the self-transcendence of subjects. The second category affirms an actual transcendence in the ontological sense, and I will just use the word 'transcendence' to signify this ontological meaning.

Hegel will guide our understanding of this self-transcending immanence and his critical affirmation of another world. As we will see, Hegel critically affirms transcendence as the necessary passage of thought's self-determining freedom within this world. For Hegel, to truly affirm another world is to hinder freedom in this world. In this sense, actual transcendence competes with the freedom of self-transcendence. On the other hand, Augustine's orientation towards transcendence offers an alternative vision and practice of freedom. Augustine sees God's transcendence not merely as an opposed 'other' (whether epistemic or ontological), but gives an account of God's 'self-immanentizing transcendence' in which God comes into this world in order to re-establish freedom.⁸ This study will read "Hegel *after* Augustine," as the subtitle suggests, arguing that Augustine offers a fundamental orientation regarding transcendence, immanence, and subjectivity.

A Radical Political Subjectivity?

This study, however, will farther restrict itself by not merely focusing on these philosophical and theological problems, but will ask about political possibilities. Within their broader orientations between transcendence and immanence, Hegel and Augustine

⁸ Of course, the cogency and plausibility of these distinctions between Hegel's 'self-transcending immanence' and Augustine's 'self-immanentizing transcendence' can only be seen at the end of our investigation. As of yet they only have heuristic value in positing different fundamental orientations in philosophy and theology.

represent two forms of understanding freedom and social change. The general questions of transcendence, immanence, and subjectivity will therefore run through the specific questions of radical political subjectivity and its capacity for both engaging in social criticism and offering substantial change. It is for this reason the second subtitle claims this to be “an essay on political theology.”

To understand the issues surrounding the possibility of a radical political subjectivity within Hegel and Augustine let us first observe a recent interaction between Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas. Coles seeks to express the possibilities of a radical democracy understood as a receptive generosity. Hauerwas points to a radical ecclesiology expressing itself as repentant orthodoxy. Their dialogue, captured in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*, will serve to clarify the terms of this inquiry regarding a political subjectivity capable of social criticism and change.⁹

Romand Coles: Radical Democracy as Receptive Generosity

Away from the corporate mega-state, which contains a rhetoric of democracy even while eroding its possibility, Romand Coles seeks a radical democracy, a democracy never fully in possession of itself, a democracy that is fugitive in nature.¹⁰ Unlike the attempts to gain a share of State power, radical democracy attempts to share power

⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007).

¹⁰ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 307. Coles is drawing from Sheldon Wolin’s *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), ch. 17 where Wolin sets forth this idea.

through a persistent tending to others as a process of mutual benefit.¹¹ The characteristics of such a radical democracy consist in tension-dwelling practices between 1) the past and future, 2) receptive listening and prophetic voicing, 3) immediate goals and deep transformation, and 4) cultivating local habits and the habit of de-habituating.¹² Radical democracy is enabled by a receptive generosity and reciprocal mutuality where each person is open to the other, never fully in possession of oneself. This generosity and mutuality is cultivated by liturgies—body practices—that form in participants the capacities of patience, care, dialogue, courage, and fortitude.¹³ Radical democracy, therefore, is not a system of governance guided by a constitution, but a continual process guided by the individuals constituting it.

In his desire for radical democracy, Coles admits to being haunted by John Howard Yoder, whose ecclesial politics, or radical ecclesiology, embodies many traits of radical democracy (tension dwelling, generous receptivity, reciprocal mutuality, body practices, and non-coercive relations).¹⁴ But even in this haunting, Coles has two crucial concerns in regard to Hauerwas' appropriation and extension of Yoder. First (in the form of a question), could not the centrality of Christ for Yoder (and Hauerwas) lead unexpectedly to anti-democratic practices of exclusion? In other words, does not the emphasis Hauerwas places on orthodoxy lead to the inability of practicing generous receptivity? And second, concerning the 'liturgical turn' in theology and Christian

¹¹ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 141.

¹² Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 278.

¹³ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 323.

¹⁴ Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics, Ordinary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 137-138.

ethics,¹⁵ might an understanding of Christian ethics as Christian practice embodied and performed in the liturgy lead to an ethical and political orientation of gathering as a closed community rather than cultivating a community openly scattered throughout the world?¹⁶ Yet even in the midst of these worrisome questions, Coles, ever true to practicing generous receptivity, acknowledges that these “undemocratic institutions linked to orthodoxy” might actually constitute the very conditions of a radical democracy.¹⁷ Or said differently, Coles worries that radical democracy might indeed require a transcendent orientation for its very possibility of being, even while worrying that this transcendence also precipitates the forms of exclusion that radical democracy seeks to avoid.

Stanley Hauerwas: Radical Ecclesiology as Repentant Orthodoxy

In relation to Coles’ concern about the ‘liturgical turn’, Hauerwas wonders how and where people are formed who are concerned with radical democracy. Certainly they do not simply drop from the sky. Hauerwas notes that Coles’ account of radical democracy is significantly developed in conversation with Ella Baker and Cornel West, both of whom were liturgically formed in an ecclesial tradition to be persons capable of generous receptivity and prophetic voicing. Without these strong religious traditions, Hauerwas wonders if these types of people are even conceivable?¹⁸

¹⁵ See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds. *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

¹⁶ *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical*, p. 211.

¹⁷ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 323.

¹⁸ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 111.

Second, in relation to Coles' haunting by John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas suggests that Yoder would like Coles to be haunted by Jesus instead. In fact, Hauerwas confesses that he also is haunted by Jesus. In addition to this, Hauerwas intentionally places his body in positions to be haunted by Jesus. "That I go to church," says Hauerwas, "does not mean I think that Jesus is only to be found there. It just means that he has promised to show up there in a manner that can help us discern how he shows up in other places."¹⁹ Hauerwas emphasizes the 'liturgical turn' not to form a closed community, bordered off and secured from others, but as the principle means by which the otherness of Jesus can haunt the ecclesial community gathered in his name. The ecclesial community does this so that it might be scattered in the world to live as Jesus lived. It is not a question of church against the world, but an emphasis on the church for the world.

Lastly, Hauerwas claims that a commitment to orthodoxy protects the radical democratic ideal practiced by (or for Hauerwas, inspired by) Jesus. Orthodoxy "names the developments across time that the Church has found necessary for keeping the story of Jesus straight" such that "rather than being the denial of radical democracy, orthodoxy is the exemplification of the training necessary for the formation of a people who are not only capable of working for justice, but who are themselves just."²⁰ This relation of orthodoxy and the liturgical training of a people highlight Hauerwas' understanding that only in these practices can radical ecclesial and radical democratic processes flourish. Or rather, only within these practices can a radical subjectivity flourish, and without them it will stagnate.

¹⁹ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 105.

²⁰ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 30.

Indeed, in the midst of claims that Hauerwas' ecclesial focus fosters an exclusivism based in an imaginary center (be it orthodoxy, liturgy, or Jesus), Hauerwas seeks to turn this criticism around. He asks, and is never answered by Coles, "what do radical democrats do if they do not confess sin?"²¹ For in the practice of confessing and repenting of sin, the church takes into account its own failure to be what it ought to be. It does this not as an excuse for evil nor as an eternal postponement of holiness. Rather the Church knows from the beginning that it is not in possession of itself, that it has not been sufficiently haunted by Jesus, by the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Ghost. The confession of sin affirms the necessity of a critical distance (from society at large and even from oneself) and this confession is itself a practice of constructive change in turning from evil to good.

But if radical democrats do not confess sin, how can they ensure that their practices of democracy do not become self-possessing? And how do they know there is movement toward what is good? Does radical democracy even have a category such as sin through which it can make sense of the need for and failures of a generous receptivity? Or in the terms Coles uses, if radical democracy requires cultivating the radical habit of de-habitation (i.e. breaking with the oppressive habits of the status quo), this practice of de-habitation must assume both the reality of and access to a horizon transcending such oppressive habits. For Hauerwas, this transcendence is protected rather than prohibited by orthodoxy, and accessed through confession of sin.

In this brief summary we see both Coles and Hauerwas emphasizing the need for establishing a critical distance from the status quo in order to initiate constructive change.

²¹ Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 326.

And both agree that some formative subjectivity is required for such critique and change. However, they disagree about how best to accomplish these goals. But instead of diving into their respective works and filling out how they have engaged these issues, we will seek to investigate the deep division between the two, the division separating much contemporary political theory, be it theological or not. Between Coles and Hauerwas is a basic difference in orientation regarding transcendence. While both are devoted to the establishment of justice and freedom, Coles sees a positive commitment to transcendence as inimical to a radical democratic practice, and Hauerwas sees such a commitment as indispensable for such a project. Explaining the differences between these fundamental orientations leads us to the philosophical and theological systems of Hegel and Augustine. Examining Hegel and Augustine around the issues of transcendence and freedom offers a way to understand these more localized disagreements between political philosophers and theologians, and even between theologians.

Why Hegel and Augustine? An Apologetic Purpose

Why, it might be asked, should we turn to Hegel and Augustine? What possible recourse can be found from these two for a radical political subjectivity? While each seemingly begins with an odyssey of the subject, do not both end as fascist curmudgeons? It should be noted, however, that concerning Hegel, after the recent demise of Kantian liberalism in the forms of Rawls and Habermas, many are returning to Hegel as the original critic of Kantian philosophy specifically and of Enlightenment secularism generally. This return to Hegel has produced a larger amount of research that dislodges the easily caricatured Hegel of dialectical monism and political

conservatism, creating the possibility of a more positive deployment of Hegel within philosophy and politics. Concerning Augustine, in one sense his theology is perennial for theology, whether accepted or rejected. But in addition to this, just as with Hegel many are beginning to question the received Augustine, mining his text within his own cultural and theological milieu rather than merely as the beginning of supposedly unfavorable theological developments. The time is ripe for an engagement between these two stalwarts of theology and philosophy in order to illuminate the similarities and differences and make clear their contemporary relevancy.

While descriptive commentary is useful, this is not the sole purpose in engaging Hegel and Augustine. Indeed, Hegel is deployed here as one of, if not the most, sophisticated attempts at articulating ‘self-transcending immanence’ as a philosophical system in opposition to transcendence. He does this for the purpose of securing a positive account of freedom (subjective and social) beyond the negative accounts offered by Hobbes and his followers. Because of this, Hegel makes the ideal test case for examining those promoting freedom through a philosophy of ‘self-transcending immanence’ intended to exclude transcendence. On the other hand, Augustine offers a theological orientation that emphasizes God’s ‘self-immanenting transcendence’ as the only possible hope for true freedom. In essence, Hegel claims that transcendence destroys freedom and Augustine claims that transcendence is the only means to freedom. At its core, this study seeks to show that Augustine gives a better explanation of and therefore funds a better practice for freedom. And by practice of freedom I mean the ability to criticize and constructively change the dominant social system in which a subject finds itself. Through Augustine, then, it will be argued that *the possibility of*

social criticism and substantive change better reside in God's self-immanent transcending immanence than in our own self-transcending immanence.

I do not want to give the impression, however, that I simply reject everything in Hegel and accept all of Augustine. In general I can affirm aspects of Hegel's social and political philosophy, but not his fundamental orientation regarding a self-transcending immanence. Because of this I can accept aspects of his understanding of the process of subjective recognition as social intersubjectivity and the self-transcending of consciousness. Conversely, I generally affirm Augustine's fundamental orientation regarding God's self-immanent transcending immanence, but not necessarily all aspects of his theology. Examples would be aspects of the Donatist controversy and parts of his views on reprobation.

Also, it is not the case that philosophy and theology are being pitted against each other. It is not the case that Hegel is rejected because he is a philosopher and Augustine accepted because he is a theologian. Indeed, Hegel is very interested in theological issues and Augustine in philosophical matters. Both Hegel and Augustine relate philosophy and theology in such ways as to have made themselves prominent figures in both theology and philosophy. The issues between them are not theology and philosophy, but rather the fundamental orientation between transcending immanence and immanence, here focused on subjectivity and the possibilities of political criticism and change.

Objections

But there is a problem. Actually two. First, by comparing Hegel as a philosopher of immanence to Augustine as a theologian of transcending immanence it seems that I am violating

the very center of Hegelian thought, that there really is no opposition between transcendence and immanence, the infinite and the finite. To position Hegel as a philosopher of immanence may seem to swim against the current of his own thought, placing Hegel within a binary opposition he would deny. The second objection concerns the positive comparison between Hegelian and Augustinian subjectivity.

Concerning the first objection, one of the essential purposes of Part One will be to show that Hegel does not accomplish his goal of uniting the infinite and the finite as a process of accounting for all 'otherness'. It will be argued that rather than proving his point by strict scientific deduction, he instead assumes his conclusions. Hegel gives a plausible philosophical system of immanence, but one which is ultimately chosen rather than proven. Of course Augustine does not escape this fate either. But for Augustine, it is not the case that we choose the system but that the system (God) converts us. That neither Hegel nor Augustine ultimately prove their case makes this study more of an aesthetic apologetic based in the plausibility and suitability of Augustine's position over Hegel's.

But it must also be said, in regard to this first objection, that Hegel himself is given to polemic and binary thought. He definitely thinks that Kant, and all other appeals to transcendence are wrong. Hegel believes that reflective philosophies of Kantian origin are inferior to and opposed to his own speculative philosophy. And he definitely thought that reference to an actual transcendence was positively inimical to the self-determining freedom of modern thought. And in none of these binary oppositions does he think he is violating his own philosophy. Too often, an over-hasty denial of binary oppositions is a refusal to examine the deep presuppositions and orientations within philosophical and

theological systems. This denial either leads to gross misunderstanding or superficial agreement among and within philosophy and theology. This investigation in no way desires to minimize the complexity and subtlety of these issues and therefore will proceed through detailed inquiries into both Hegel and Augustine. But it will nonetheless persistently return to the question of these fundamental orientations between transcendence and immanence, focused through the possibility of each to produce and sustain a radical political subjectivity capable of criticism and change.

The second objection will be discussed in full at the beginning of chapter 5, but needs to be mentioned here. These fundamental orientations between Hegel and Augustine will be tested through their respective accounts of subjectivity and politics. Initially this seems to be the most natural place from which to carry out such a comparison between Hegel and Augustine given the perceived influence Augustine exerts on western philosophy and theology and subjective turn. But some have begun to question the all too easy assimilation of Augustine's understanding of the subject to modern, especially Cartesian, accounts of subjectivity.²² It is enough here to note that I am in complete sympathy with the criticisms concerning the relative equivalence of Augustinian and modern subjectivity, and that it is exactly this lack of congruence that gives Augustine the resources by which a radical political subjectivity is produced.

²² The received view is expounded by those like Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Representative of those questioning this view are Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); John C. Cavidini, "The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine's Thought." *Augustinian Studies* 38/1 (2007), 119-132; Thomas Harmon's "Reconsidering Charles Taylor's Augustine" in *Pro Ecclesia* 20/2 (2011): 185-209.

Outline

This study proceeds in two parts, the first concerning Hegel and the second on Augustine. Each part contains three chapters. Chapter one looks at recent interpretations of Hegel's political philosophy given by Robert Pippin and Slavoj Žižek. This will offer entrance into the field of Hegelian studies and its recent post-Kantian emphasis on self-determining freedom. It will be shown that these two contemporary interpretations end in drastically different positions, with Pippin focused on evolutionary social practices and Žižek on revolutionary subjective acts. The question arising from this chapter concerns whether such a dichotomy necessarily follows from Hegel or only from his interpreters. To answer this question one must be thoroughly acquainted with Hegel's philosophical project. Chapter two, therefore, introduces Hegel's philosophical and social project of "*being at home with oneself in one's other*" (E §24 A2) in two steps. First, his *Logic* is examined as the linchpin of Hegel's philosophy. Entrance will be made by looking at Hegel's derivation of the concept of the true infinite from the concept of being. This derivation of the true infinite (which unites the finite and infinite) is utilized by Hegel to ward off the need to reference an unthinkable transcendence (an 'other') beyond consciousness. In the second portion of this chapter we will turn to his *Phenomenology* and examine both the course and development of consciousness into self-consciousness and how Hegel utilizes his conception of the true infinite within this development. This chapter is essential for (1) properly understanding Hegel's philosophy, for (2) understanding the claim that his philosophy is committed to self-transcending immanence, and for (3) its argument that Hegel ultimately fails in providing a

presuppositionless beginning for his philosophy. Chapter three, concluding part one, will examine the political consequences of Hegel's philosophy of freedom. This chapter will determine that the dichotomy between Pippin and Žižek reproduces an inherent instability within Hegel's system leading toward his failure in securing a radical political subjectivity capable of both social criticism and substantive change.

Part two will move from Hegel's attempt at "*being at home with oneself in one's other*" to Augustine's pilgrimage of the soul in its return to the God who is both absolutely other and intimately the same as humanity. Similar to chapter one, chapter four will examine contemporary interpretations of Augustine's political theology, represented by John Milbank and Eric Gregory, each positioning Augustine's ontological commitments alongside the concerns of modern liberalism. While not denying these ontological commitments, but centering on the process of subjective formation, chapter five examines Augustine's *Confessions* and its depiction of the bondage and conversion of the will. This chapter will begin to outline how Augustine integrates the subjective and social aspects of the conversion of the will. This chapter will show how this integration is only possible because of the self-immanent transcending of God in the Incarnation. Chapter six turns from the prodigal rebellion of the will to the pilgrim journey of the city of God. It looks at how God's self-immanent transcending founds and establishes a truly just society, changing from a city dominated by the desire for domination to a city opening in love toward God and neighbor. The conclusion will gather together the threads of these various arguments to show that concern for a radical political subject, capable not only of offering criticism but also engaging in change, must

abandon all Hegelian forms of self-transcending immanence in favor of a more Augustinian self-immanenting transcendence.

Subjectivity, Matter, and Time

One last issue must be raised so that it can be placed to the side until the conclusion. This investigation centers on the issues of a radical political subjectivity. As we will see in chapter two, because Hegel is so focused on question of thought (via a social self-consciousness) the issue of time and matter are effectively bracketed out of our exposition. This is not the case for Augustine as he links questions of subjectivity (and its conversion) to ontological issues that questions of matter are much more difficult to avoid. Likewise, because Augustine is more concerned with the transformation of subjectivity, and society, this entails raising issues of temporality (which Augustine is keenly aware of in the tenth book of the *Confessions*). But in order to keep this project to a manageable size, these issues (of matter and time) are for the most part left unexplored until the conclusion.

CHAPTER 1: HEGEL IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

*Thinking immediately involves freedom.*¹

Introduction

As noted in the introduction, after the demise of a Kantian/Rawlsian political philosophy of secular rights and duties, many are returning to Hegel as offering a model of post-secular political philosophy able to both include substantive social practices and even robust religious life.² This contemporary return to Hegel exhibits two seemingly opposed expressions: one in the form of social self-legislating historical practices resulting in inter-subjective recognition; the other in the form of radical subjectivity persisting within the dialectic failure of the social reconciliation. The former focuses on the evolution of social normativity while the latter on the revolution of radical subjectivity. After the overcoming of metaphysics (post-Heideggerian for contemporary interpreters, post-Kantian for German Idealists like Hegel), readings of Hegel fall within these two broad frameworks. The ‘normative Hegel’ is expressed through the work of Robert Pippin. And the ‘radical Hegel’ offered by Slavoj Žižek. Interpreting the work of these two will take up the bulk of this chapter as a way of orienting ourselves within the landscape of contemporary Hegelian studies. In addition to this we will begin to see the problems within Hegel’s system of ‘self-transcending immanence’.

¹ E §23 R.

² Beyond Robert Pippin and Slavoj Žižek mentioned below, see *Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism: Studies in Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Robert B. Williams (Albany: SUNY, 2001); Thomas A. Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel: Reconsidering Anthropology, Ethics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) and *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

This return to Hegel, however, can only be properly understood as an overturning of the metaphysical interpretation of Hegel. For many, Charles Taylor's *Hegel* effectively reintroduced Hegel to American philosophy in 1975, and did so by reading Hegel metaphysically. Taylor sees Hegel responding to and uniting the two diverse Enlightenment strands of radical moral autonomy and Romantic expressive unity.³ To do this Hegel must overcome the oppositions between the "knowing subject and his world, between nature and freedom, between individual and society, and between finite and infinite spirit."⁴ Hegel did not want to refer to some general pantheism that places humanity as an insignificant part within the cosmic substance. Instead, Hegel modified Spinoza and Schelling, so that human subjectivity would not be lost in the cosmic substance.

But overcoming these opposition requires more than the unity of substance and subject, and therefore Hegel turns to *Geist*. Taylor explicates *Geist* through Hegel's account of the human subject.⁵ In Taylor's account, the human subject for Hegel is both a living being (animal) and a thinking/expressive being (rational), and as such is necessarily embodied in a double sense. As an animal, the human body has a form of life and therefore also a natural limit. But as a thinking and expressive being, humanity always creates tangible modes of expressing its thoughts, constituting the second form of embodiment. But following Kant, consciousness is always both continuous and discontinuous with this embodied way of life, separating thought from desire, reason from nature, intention from inclination. This consciousness divides humanity from itself

³ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 3-50.

⁴ Taylor, *Hegel*, 79.

⁵ Taylor, *Hegel*, 82-86.

resulting in the unfortunate, even if expected, articulation in Cartesian dualism. Within this embodied alienation “man is thus inescapably at odds with himself.”⁶ Or in a more Hegelian idiom, “the subject is both identical with and opposed to his embodiment” because thinking cannot exist without embodiment even while it struggles against this embodiment.⁷

But rather than the non-coincidence of life and expression for the human subject, cosmic *Geist* unites the embodiment of life and expression because the universe is already the embodiment of *Geist*. For *Geist* to fully express itself in the universe as free and rational a consciousness must exist in the universe as an external embodiment (or expression) of self-determining rational freedom of *Geist*. This embodied expression of *Geist* is finite spirit, or human subjectivity. Human individuals are not merely fragments of the universe, parts of the cosmic whole, but are “vehicles of cosmic spirit.”⁸ While everything in the universe is an expression of *Geist* expressing itself, humanity is the culminating vehicle of this expression, especially when humanity comes to know itself as rationally free.

For Hegel, on Taylor’s reading, the differences between nature and freedom, individual and society, finite and infinite each express moments of the original unity of *Geist* now externally embodied, but returning toward unity as self-conscious freedom. This is the basis for Hegel’s claim to being an idealist, that the “Idea becomes its other, and then returns into self-consciousness in *Geist*.”⁹ As *Geist* passes through its other, which is embodied existence as the universe, we see that “absolute idealism means that

⁶ Taylor, *Hegel*, 84.

⁷ Taylor, *Hegel*, 85.

⁸ Taylor, *Hegel*, 44, also 90-92.

⁹ Taylor, *Hegel*, 109.

nothing exists which is not a manifestation of the Idea, that is, of rational necessity,” and that “absolute idealism is related to the Platonic notion of the ontological priority of rational order, which underlies external existence, and which external existence strives to realize,” foremost of which is human subjectivity as self-legislating freedom.¹⁰ Taylor’s interpretation of cosmic *Geist* working through human self-consciousness as the expression of *Geist*’s own essence constitutes the metaphysical reading of Hegel. And that those like Pippin and Žižek seek to overturn this interpretation in their return to Hegel.

In the first section of this chapter we will examine how Robert Pippin understands Hegel. The second section will examine the work of Slavoj Žižek and his drastically different rendering of Hegel. In their reaction against the metaphysical reading of Hegel proposed by Taylor and others, Pippin and Žižek exemplify two currents in political appropriation of Hegel. The former is concerned with autonomy established through social practices, and the latter thinks of autonomy as established against social practices. These opposed interpretation will serve to introduce Hegel’s main concerns while also beginning to show the inherent instability caused by the Hegelian system of self-transcending immanence. This instability will cause us to drive into Hegel system in the next chapter.

1. Evolutionary Social Practices: Autonomy through sociality

Against a metaphysically monist, or idealistically spiritualist reading of Hegel, and the materialist reduction into a historical method, Klaus Hartmann began articulating

¹⁰ Taylor, *Hegel*, 110.

a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel as one working out the categorial structure of thought or reason.¹¹ This began preparing the way for interpreters like Robert Pippin. For Hartmann, Hegel's *Logic* is reconstructive of human thought. Unlike Taylor for whom human subjectivity is the vehicle for *Geist*, for Hartmann "the vehicle of reconstruction will be concepts or categories" and the procedure of this reconstruction is dialectical.¹² Hegel's philosophy only attempts an integrative, systematic reconstruction of thought without presupposition. Within Hegel's framework, thought encounters its other in the world or as being. As this other enters into thought and makes a difference to thought in the mode of negation. The otherness of being is established in thought as 'being thought' and therefore as the negation of being itself. The thought of something 'being though' is its 'determinate negation'. This conflict of being and negation, which brings being into thought, is the dialectic procedure by which content is placed within the immanence of thought. Because of this process "Hegel's philosophy appears to us as categorial theory, i.e. as non-metaphysical philosophy, or as a philosophy devoid of existence claims and innocent of a reductionism opting for certain existences to the detriment of others."¹³

The perspective of Hegel as providing a pure category theory, claims Hartmann, strips the needs for picturing, or representing (*Vorstellung*) how knowledge of things comes about, i.e. bridging the subject-object divide. The cost of breaking down this bridge is the price of circularity: reason can only be satisfied when "it can accept things

¹¹ Klaus Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, ed. Robert Stern (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 224.

¹² Taylor, *Hegel*, 244.

¹³ Taylor, *Hegel*, 248.

on its own terms, within the immanence of thought.”¹⁴ Because of this circularity one cannot ask the question of the cause of the universe because such a question is a category mistake for Hegel. Likewise, the questions of *realphilosophie* overstep the bound of the Hegel’s *Logic*, mistaking itself as a normative rather than reconstructive system. Hartmann is against a ‘maximal’ reading of Hegel which extends the dialectic of categories to actual existence and the processes of contingency. This is the metaphysical reading that Hartmann sees as indefensible philosophically (even though he concedes it is an exegetically defensible reading of Hegel). Hartmann instead opts for a ‘minimal’, or non-metaphysical, interpretation that sees Hegel’s achievement as mapping the interior categories of thought.¹⁵

This problem with Hartmann’s interpretation is that order to save Hegel from a seemingly pre-critical metaphysics of cosmic *Geist* Hegel is reduced to a Kantian variant. Hartman separates thought from being and makes being only internal, or immanent, to thought. This move fails to avoid Kant’s ontological skepticism, a problem motivating Hegel’s entire system (i.e. Hegel desired to abolish the *noumenal/phenomenal* divide). Hartmann’s Hegel argues for the necessity of the categories, but not why we should both understand the world in those categories and how we have come to this understanding as both normative for *and* yet true of the world. And most importantly, the separation of the *Logic* from the *realphilosophie* reintroduces Kantian ethical formalism, a situation Hegel

¹⁴ Taylor, *Hegel*, 253.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Hegel*, 256-7.

also sought to avoid (i.e. Hegel desired to abolish the opposition between nature and freedom).¹⁶

Robert Pippin has taken up the challenge of offering a more consistent reading of Hegel as a non-metaphysical thinker. Making a strong argument for understanding Hegel as a post-Kantian philosopher, Pippin seeks a third way between the right Hegelians who postulate a “philosophically problematic theological metaphysics” and the left Hegelian who run to the margins of Hegel’s texts looking for useful conclusions and formulations amid a thoroughly historical methodology (but Pippin admits he is also offering a left Hegelian interpretation of agency as socio-historical achievement).¹⁷ Pippin presents Hegel as a non-metaphysical thinker, yet still speculative in his idealism, extending Kant’s critical epistemology. This ‘absolute idealism’ does not revert back to a precritical cosmic mind, i.e. the human subjectivity writ large for Taylor, but rather is Hegel’s solution to the perceived failure of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction, or said differently, Hegel’s *Begriff* is merely a variation on Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception.”¹⁸ With a rejection of Kant’s strict divide between concept and intuition, opting for their perpetual interweaving, Pippin argues for a Hegel who is always in need of a *Phenomenology* as the historically formed content which is schematized in his *Logic*.

The focus below will be on Pippin’s reading of Hegel’s practical philosophy as an extension of Kant’s critical project. For Pippin, Hegel reinterprets Kantian freedom as

¹⁶ Simon Lumsden, “The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel,” *Philosophical Compass* 3/1 (2008): p. 55.

¹⁷ Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5. Regarding his comment on Left Hegelianism, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.

¹⁸ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 6-10.

social self-legislation, historically achieved through practices and institutions, resulting in mutual recognition as inter-subjective institutional relatedness. Each of these movements articulates Pippin's version of the self-transcending immanence of Hegelian philosophy. Pippin's goal is to show that Hegel can be interpreted non-metaphysically without merely reducing him to Kant. Instead, within a post-Kantian trajectory, Hegel offers new answers to these Kantian problems. Kant's problems and Hegel's answers will be explored around Pippin own themes of freedom as 'self-legislation'.

Kantian Self-Legislation

The problem of freedom within modernity often comes down to attempts to reconcile the individual and society. To understand Hegel's contribution to this problem we must first understand how Kant adopts the problem of self-legislation from Rousseau. Rousseau sought to reconcile the original independence of natural humanity with the dependence of humanity in society, or more colorfully, to reconcile the fact that "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."¹⁹ The natural savage, who at one time lived *within* himself, now lives *outside* himself, in society, mistaking this exteriority for freedom.²⁰ But Rousseau does not opt for a mere return to a natural setting, but poses the problem of how to achieve independence through societal dependence. This is not the search for a relatively unconstrained freedom of non-interference as we seek to secure

¹⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", in *Social Contract and other later political writing*, ed. and trans. by Victor Gourevitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.1.1. Pippin summarizes this inheritance from Rousseau to Kant to Hegel in "Hegel, Ethical Reasons, Kantian Rejoinders," *Philosophical Topics*, 19:2 (1991): 99-103.

²⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. and trans. by Victor Gourevitch, (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 199.

our needs or desires (from Hobbes to Nozick). Rather, it is a reconciliation of our particular wills and the general good of society, expressed as the general will. Only in this ‘general will’ can one achieve freedom as independence without denying the fact of social dependency. Indeed, the ideal society would be structured to mediate economic and psychological dependence in order to flourish personal independence. Only in this society would it make sense that one could be “forced to be freed.”²¹

Kant take from Rousseau the desire for freedom as more than non-interference, but rather than basing it on a vague conception of the “general will,” Kant produces an argument from reason expressed as the categorical imperative. The basis of moral action is to “act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.”²² This universal law, or norm as Pippin prefers, is not imposed externally, but rather is self-legislated by reason. Respecting others as an end, rather than a means, is to posit humanity itself as an ultimate value or norm to be followed. This norm is not something other than the capacity to set and evaluate norms according to reason, such that the categorical imperative is a self-legislated law, not externally imposed by nature or force, but internally posited by reason.²³ This positing by reason, for Kant, is a process of individual reflective endorsement where each applies the standards of reason to one’s own actions. For Kant, this reflective endorsement is meant to solve Rousseau’s problem of the general will because self-legislating reason is

²¹ Rousseau, “Of the Social Contract”, 1.7.8. Regarding this account of Rousseau and his influence on Hegel, also see Frederick Neuhouser’s *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55-81.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 3rd ed*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 30.

²³ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 75 and 87. See also Paul Franco’s *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11-20.

not something more than individual reason as will. The cost, however, of Kantian self-legislation as individual reason's own reflective endorsement is that morality is separated from politics causing a separation between individual and society. It is here, with the success of Kantian self-legislation but the failure of social reconciliation, that Pippin sees Hegel moves the argument forward.

Spirit as Socio-Historical Achievement

Remembering that the “Kantian notion of self-legislation is the center of everything” for Hegel,²⁴ we can now examine Pippin's understanding of Hegel's neo-Kantian political theory, beginning with his understanding of *Geist*. Often rendered by the “almost meaningless and now standard translation” of ‘spirit,’ regularly misunderstood as a cosmic mind or soul, Pippin understands *Geist* as the “state of norm-governed individual and collective mindedness...and institutionally embodied recognitive relations.”²⁵ Pippin's understanding of *Geist* draws from a “distinct and controversial interpretation” of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* and its linking of nature and *Geist* as anti-dualistic, as self-relating, and as the achievement of freedom.²⁶

For Pippin, *Geist* is neither material nor immaterial because it is not a thing at all. Rather *Geist* is Hegel's way of expressing a non-dualistic relation between nature and mind. *Geist* is not divine mind manifesting itself in nature, but rather the truth of nature in which nature vanishes [*verschwunden*] (PSS 1:24-25), yet not other than nature.²⁷ The truth and vanishing of nature in *Geist* indicates the inappropriateness of purely natural

²⁴ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 111.

²⁵ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 39.

²⁶ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 48.

²⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 45-46.

causality as an explanation for the complexity of certain natural organisms who “come to be occupied with themselves and eventually to understand themselves no longer appropriately explicable within the boundaries of nature.”²⁸ The divide between nature and *Geist* is therefore not an ontological one, but an explanatory or a normative one, such that humanity has established for itself that while being part of nature it is inappropriate to reduce human achievements and aspirations to merely natural phenomena.²⁹

Because of its non-reducible to nature, *Geist* must be understood as self-relating. For Hegel, sentient creatures do not merely embody their natures, but employ a mediated and self-directed stance toward their natures. The reflected, self-conscious stance of humanity is really the source of the nature-*Geist* distinction as humanity seeks to render intelligible its natural embodiment and its reflective achievements.³⁰ *Geist* is self-relating because it knows itself as *Geist* in its distinction from, and yet dependence on, nature. In this way *Geist* comes to know itself when it makes the normative distinction between itself and nature, becoming self-relational in the process. But it must be remembered that this overcoming or vanishing of nature, is not based in an alternative ontological entity acting upon nature. Rather, while not reducible to nature, the achieved distinction of self-relating *Geist* best considered as “not non-natural.”³¹

All of this is a way of saying *Geist* is best understood as an achieved freedom from, but in, nature. This independence from nature is a capacity historically achieved,

²⁸ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 46.

²⁹ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 61.

³⁰ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 51. In this Pippin agrees with Taylor's interpretation of human nature for Hegel, but not Taylor's application of this to *Geist*.

³¹ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 52.

not naturally given or cosmically received. According to Pippin, Hegel sees the human mindedness of *Geist* as

something like achievements, modes of self- and other-relation and so ways of making sense of, taking a stance with regard to, nature and one's own nature that can be reached, or not, and these are of course achievements actually reached by nothing other than creatures otherwise describable as bits of matter in space and time.³²

Geist, therefore, is freedom from nature, while remaining within it, such that self-actualization is not some cosmic mind or *Geist* expressing itself through nature and history. *Geist* is rather "a kind of socio-historical achievement (the achievement of certain practices and institutions) which some natural beings are capable of" such that there is a "continuity between natural and spiritual dimensions."³³ *Geist* is the capacity for freedom of thought and action that is a practical and historical achievement, an achievement not requiring an ontological distinction between nature and spirit.³⁴ As Pippin says,

Spirit, understood this way (that is, by taking full account of the anti-dualism claim and the insistence that development is a self-determining development) is thus not the emergence of a non-natural substance, but reflects only the growing capacity of still naturally situated beings in achieving more and more successfully a form of normative and genuinely autonomous like-mindedness.³⁵

This achievement as self-relating freedom connects to the Kantian concerns of self-legislation, but now socially constituted as a historically achieved norm, rather than an individually, reflectively endorsed norm. That *Geist* is a product of itself, relating to itself, mirrors Kant's concern that one gives oneself one's own law.

³² Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 54.

³³ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 42.

³⁴ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 61.

³⁵ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 112.

Geist, as the socially normative sphere of “not non-natural” human existence represents Pippin’s articulation of self-transcending immanence. *Geist* is immanent to natural processes but self-transcends them through its own normative self-relation. Human sociality as historical achievement is exactly the form of Hegelian self-transcending immanence for Pippin. But as we will see, Hegel’s concept of *Geist* is meant to extend beyond merely a socio-historical achievement into an account of mutual recognition ending in autonomy as social self-legislation.

Mutual Recognition as Condition for Freedom

The last major step in Pippin’s interpretation of Hegel’s practical philosophy centers on an understanding of mutual recognition, the fact of which establishes and ensures actual freedom. The language of achievement used by Pippin throughout marks Hegel’s account of human nature as neither essentialist nor teleological. Because of this individuals are neither liberal autonomous agents nor communitarian instances of society, however those are to be construed, because this would be to lapse into essentialist or teleological renderings of humanity. Neither the individual nor society can become the sole basis for deducing the other, but rather the individual and society are both considered as rational achievements. Pippin claims that positing such a gradualist account of achieved social norms must eventually be able to account for its own understanding of itself.³⁶ How is this accomplished?

Hegel’s account of the struggle for recognition attempts to fill this process of achieved social norms. Against the widely accepted Marxist interpretation that chapter

³⁶ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 195.

four of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers a struggle for recognition as the formation of subjectivity, Pippin argues this section, and the entire work, offers an account of the conditions of freedom. For Pippin, the question of freedom, not the question of subjectivity, guides Hegel's discussion such that the struggle is not an individual, psychological struggle for recognition, but rather a struggle for the adequate conditions for asserting and realizing freedom. When the positions of Lord and Bondsman emerge after a struggle to the death, the Lord, who would forsake life to assert freedom, and the Bondsman not willing to forsake life, the problem that emerges for Hegel is not the psychological dispositions or motivations of each. Rather the problem is the objective failure of each to have achieved the goal of freedom because the Lord is now seeking recognition from one who is unworthy to grant it, and the Bondsman recognizes the Lord but is not recognized in return. In Pippin's paraphrase of the situation,

The dilemma is that the objective social situation is such that neither can find any way of dealing with each other in normative terms; no exchange of justificatory reasons is possible in such a context, and so the very determination of what was done remains provisional and indeterminate...[because] each is striving to be free under conditions that will not allow the realization of freedom.³⁷

Hegel traces this breakdown of mutual recognition through the social organization of labor, and then through general figures of consciousness attempting to justify or legitimate this inequality: the figures of Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness. These failed attempts at securing freedom reveal the need not only for a socio-pragmatic and historical account of freedom, but also an institutional account of mutual recognition. Pippin outlines this institutional account consisting of (1) a free

³⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 202.

subject being recognized as such by (2) another such subject in (3) a concrete practice of mutual recognition (4) achieved as successful norms of mutual justification.³⁸ This mutual recognition as participating in mutual justification means to treat others *and* oneself as reason-givers and reason-responders within a normative social framework.³⁹

Pippin notes that for Hegel this recognition is always institutional, but not institutional in the strict sense in which Hegel delineates as within the family, civil society, and the state. For Pippin, in an admittedly deflationary move,⁴⁰ institutional recognition is the claim that we are always already giving and receiving practical reasons within a context, from a social-institutional position, where the rules governing social interaction are already established. But this is not a positivistic claim about institutional structures. Rather this is a claim for the discursive nature of giving and receiving reasons for one's actions: i.e., one always argues from the position of being a parent in regard to children, a property owner in regard to one's possessions, as a business person in regard to fulfilling a contract, and as a citizen in regard to taxation. Hegel's point is that these are already viable institutional positions from which one gives and receives reasons, not requiring a higher discourse for justification.

Because all institutions are revisable, breaking down and changing, Pippin claims that Hegel should not be read as a cultural positivist.⁴¹ These fundamental changes occur in institutions not because an agent has *done* something different, but rather because what can be *justified* as reasonable by that agent becomes different. For Pippin, "requesting, providing, accepting, or rejecting practical reasons...are all better viewed as elements in a

³⁸ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 209.

³⁹ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 191.

⁴⁰ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 272.

⁴¹ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 266.

rule-governed social practice” where justifications for actions are offered to others.⁴²

When a crisis arrives within these practices there can be no recourse to a meta-discourse to resolve the issues (i.e. Kant’s categorical imperative) because one can never exit these discursive institutions. In the process of justifying one’s actions one must always accept an opponent’s claim as a move within their own space of reasons, only then countering by offering and attempting to convince them of your alternative understanding of the issues. Pippin points to the development of equal right for women as an instance of this institutional revision and transformation.⁴³ For Pippin, Hegel’s view on practical reason is that

Human subjects are, and are wholly and essentially, always already under way historically and socially, and even in their attempts to reason about what anyone, any time ought to do, they do so from an institutional position.⁴⁴

Or we could say, these institutional positions are the evolving normative frameworks in which *Geist* produces itself, relating to itself as self-legislating freedom. In this interpretation, Hegel is not relying on a monistic substance or cosmic mind to ground institutional necessity, but understands *Geist* as social self-actualization, achieved through shared justificatory practices of giving and receiving reasons for one’s actions, and recognizing oneself in those actions and justifications, as well as through the actions of others.

Evaluation

⁴² Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 270.

⁴³ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 276.

⁴⁴ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 265.

In summary, then, Pippin suggests a Hegel having much in common with strains of American pragmatism and its understanding of social normativity and rationality.⁴⁵ Pippin's Hegel has much to say to the problems of contemporary practical philosophy in regard to how we understand the development of historical and social practices, and how we communally justify our actions to each other, and therefore achieve recognition, without adopting an atomistic individualism.⁴⁶ In these ways Pippin navigates between a Kantian liberal atomism of individuals self-actualization before the moral law and a communitarianism that speaks eloquently of social dependence yet offers no real explanation for how this might function. For Pippin, Hegel is an advocate of evolutionary social practice promoting a rational freedom such that authentic autonomy is achieved through sociality. These evolutionary social practices are the life of *Geist*, the self-transcending achievement beyond, yet within, the immanence of nature.

Pippin's reading of Hegel, however, is self-consciously a reconstruction of the emergence of justificatory social practices of recognition as an achievement. His account never attempts to explain how a present justificatory practice is actually challenged, and most importantly by whom.⁴⁷ But it should be asked, given Pippin's account, where does an Antigone come from who challenges Creon? Where does a Socrates come from who becomes a gadfly within Athens? Where does a Jesus come from who would challenge both the Jewish and Roman practices? Where is this subjectivity constituted, in order to

⁴⁵ Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), also makes a similar claim about the achieved social normativity of giving and receiving reasons, and Robert B. Brandom's *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994), on which Stout substantially relies.

⁴⁶ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 236-7.

⁴⁷ See Pippin's concluding comments that Marx was right about Hegel, that philosophy *only* comprehends the world. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 272.

challenge, the social practices that have evolved in each shape of *Geist*? Pippin's Hegel offers no resources for such a subjectivity because for him the question of 'beyond' is already outside the orbit of Hegel's philosophy. As we will see at the end of chapter three, Pippin, like Hegel, feels no compulsion to offer an account of a radical subjectivity ready and able to break from social norms precisely because there is no need to break from them. There is no need to break from them because, for Pippin and his Hegel, the modern project and its institutions best reflects the normative achievements of humanity.

2. Revolutionary Radical Act: Autonomy Against Sociality.

Slavoj Žižek does not agree with this positive assessment of modern institutions nor this normative account of Hegel. Žižek agrees that Hegel disallows reference to an ontological beyond. But for Žižek this is exactly to mobilize a radical subjectivity beyond social normativity. He accomplishes this by offering a Hegel radically open to the slippages within reality (ontological and social). Žižek's Hegel, driven by a dialectics of failure rather than one of progressive reconciliation, offers a political subjectivity capable of escaping the dominant social order, able to break with the normative status quo. This radical subjectivity engages in revolutionary acts against the normative social order.

Kantian Completion

Žižek constantly seeks to correct the cartoon version of Hegelian dialectics commonly understood as "the self-mediation of the Notion which externalizes itself, posits its content in its independence and actuality, and then internalizes it, [and]

recognizes itself in it.”⁴⁸ In agreement with Pippin, Žižek understands Hegel not as a dialectical panlogician for whom all reality is merely the drama of cosmic mind.

Žižek argues that Hegel does not regress from the Kantian critical insight, falling back into a pre-critical metaphysics, but instead pushes the Kantian critique into the spaces Kant feared to go. Hegel concluded beyond Kant

that every tension between Notion and reality, every relationship of the Notion to what appears as its irreducible Other encountered in the sensible, extra-notional experience, already is an intra-notional tension, i.e., already implies a minimal notional determination of this “otherness.”⁴⁹

What Kant lacks in his critique is the very critique of the *Ding-an-sich*. Kant sees *das Ding* as the limit of phenomena, the thing that transcends notional thought. Žižek claims that Hegel inverts this limitation such that it is not the Kantian Thing in its inaccessible transcendence that *limits* our representational grasp. Rather it is the chaotic movement of the manifold of sensations that must be *limited* in order for phenomena to appear in the first place. This act of limiting creates both the possibility of phenomena and the projection, or illusion, of the *Ding-an-sich* residing behind or beyond phenomenal appearances. It is for this reason that “limitation precedes transcendence,” explaining why ultimately it is *phenomena* that are central to Hegel, not *noumena*.⁵⁰

Rather than Hegel returning to a metaphysics of the Absolute, Žižek sees Hegel as reproaching Kant for keeping one foot within classical metaphysics and its beyond by clinging to *das Ding*, even if devoid of content. Instead of filling in this *noumena* void

⁴⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: on Schelling and Related Matters*, (London; New York: Verso, 1996), 6.

⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 20 (italics in original). Žižek notes Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism* for this insight.

⁵⁰ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 37.

with Absolute Knowledge, as usually claimed, Hegel instead extends Kant's epistemological void into an ontological one.⁵¹ The problem with Kant thinking his *Critique of Pure Reason* "as the critical 'prolegomena' to a future metaphysics" is that Kant does not realize that it "*already is* the only possible metaphysics."⁵² Hegel completes this critical turn not with a return to classical metaphysics, nor merely a notional non-metaphysical logic, but with an additional turn of the critical screw by claiming that the epistemological limitation for us is also the ontological limitation of the world itself. This claim, however, is difficult to grasp for those not initiated in German Idealism.

For Žižek, Hegel completes Kant by supplementing Kant's formulation that the conditions of possibility for our knowledge are the same as the conditions of possibility of the object of our knowledge with its reverse:

the limitations of our knowledge (its failure to grasp the Whole of Being, the way our knowledge gets inexorably entangled in contradictions and inconsistencies) is simultaneously the limitation of the very object of our knowledge, that is, the gaps and voids in our knowledge of reality are simultaneously the gaps and voids in the "real" ontological edifice itself.⁵³

In this way, rather than placing the antinomies of reason within our epistemological finitude, postulating a self-consistent thing-in-itself beyond our grasp, Hegel bites the ontological bullet and posits reality itself as inconsistent. Hegel's achievement then is that

far from regressing from Kant's criticism to pre-critical metaphysics expressing the rational structure of the cosmos, Hegel fully accepts (and draws the consequences from) the result of the Kantian cosmological antinomies—there *is*

⁵¹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 246.

⁵² Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (NY: Verso, 1999), 85 (italics in original).

⁵³ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 55.

no “cosmos,” the very notion of cosmos as the ontologically fully constituted positive totality is inconsistent.⁵⁴

As commentator Adrian Johnston notes, Žižek italicizes “is” rather than “no” when he says “there *is* no cosmos” drawing our attention to the fact that for Žižek being itself *is* this inconsistency, not merely our knowledge of it, because “being ‘is’ this very acosmos, this unstable absence of a cohesive, unifying One-All.”⁵⁵ And for Žižek’s Hegel, because there is no beyond, no consistent *Ding-an-sich* in its unknowableness, the play between appearance and essence, and understanding and reason must change, leading to a changed understanding of both substance and subject.

The problem with Kant is that he does not push his critical philosophy far enough because he continues to presuppose that *das Ding* “exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation,” where as Hegel pushes this critique by claiming that “there is *nothing* beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation.”⁵⁶ In other words, when traditional philosophy makes a distinction between something’s mere appearance and its true essence, Hegel always opts for the appearance.

Žižek makes this point regarding appearance and essence with reference to Hegel’s distinction between positing reflection, external reflection, and determinate reflection.⁵⁷ Taking hermeneutics as an example, ‘positing reflection’ is a naïve reading of a text, claiming immediate intelligibility because the text itself is perspicuous. It is ‘positing reflection’ because it directly posits its object. But under pressure of diverse and

⁵⁴ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 60.

⁵⁵ Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 130.

⁵⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 205 (italics in original).

⁵⁷ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 213.

conflicting interpretations, ‘positing reflection’ gives way to ‘external reflection’ that posits the essence of the text, its true meaning, as existing behind the text in an unattainable realm transcending our knowledge. ‘External reflection’, then, is the admission and accumulation of distorted pieces of the text’s true meaning, reflected through our finite capacities. This is the Kantian position that the appearance of the text hides its true essence, which stands behind or beyond the mere appearance. The move from ‘external’ to ‘determinate reflection’ is to become aware that the positing of an eternal essence is internal to appearance itself as appearance. According to Žižek, the necessity of postulating an essence behind the text is that which allows the text itself to appear. Or as Žižek says, “what appears, to ‘external reflection, as an *impediment* is in fact a *positive condition* of our access to Truth” because “‘*essence*’ itself is nothing but *the self-rupture, the self-fissure of the appearance*... The fissure between appearance and essence is internal to the appearance itself.”⁵⁸ This is all another way of indicating Hegel’s ontological extension of the Kantian critique of epistemology.

This difference between ‘external’ and ‘determinate reflection’ is mirrored in the difference between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*). For Hegel, understanding (*Verstand*) functions in the realm of the Kantian critique, of ‘external reflection’, positing a beyond in which objects reside, eluding our discursive grasp. The movement to reason (*Vernunft*) is not to add something new to the understanding; it is not raising the understanding to a higher level within the Absolute. Rather, reason merely subtracts ‘the beyond’ from the understanding. Between understanding and reason is not a choice between the two, but the choice to deactivate reference to any ‘beyond’ because

⁵⁸ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 214 (italics in original). See also, Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 106.

“Understanding, deprived of the illusion that there is something beyond it, is Reason.”⁵⁹

In the end, one is always at the level of understanding, it just depends on whether there is reference to a beyond or not. The Hegelian logic of reason (the notion) is not another logic which accomplishes what the understanding failed to do (knowing things-in-themselves), but is rather the repetition of the logic of understanding without reference to a beyond, realizing itself as pure self-relation.⁶⁰ This mirrors the claim that one is always on the level of appearance, whether or not one posits that the essence stands behind appearance or one posits that appearance creates the illusion of essence. This complex issues will be further explored in the next chapter when we examine Hegel’s *Science of Logic*.

A further consequence of this relationship between understanding and reason is that the typical explanation of Hegelian dialectic as moving from an initial harmony of immediate self-identity into a disharmony of difference, then resulting in a new harmony of a higher and more complex order, is shown to be false. Instead, as with the difference between appearance and essence, and understanding and reason, this new harmony is in fact just the consummation of the loss of the original harmony, rather than a new substantial unity.⁶¹ Hegelian dialectics does not overcome disharmony or difference, but accepts difference ontologically rather than merely epistemologically. Therefore, “far from being a story of progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts—‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective

⁵⁹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 86.

⁶⁰ Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 124.

⁶¹ Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 105.

position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity.”⁶²

On this view, rather than instituting the totalizing system par excellence, Hegel is advocating for the very displacement of every totalizing system.⁶³

Self-Divided Substance, and Subject

The interplay between appearance and essence and between understanding and reason, each moving through or beyond reference to a ‘beyond,’ takes us to the heart of the Žižekian project by helping us understand what Hegel means in the *Phenomenology* when he says that the Absolute, or Truth, be conceived “not only as Substance, but also as Subject.”⁶⁴ For Žižek this should be taken as meaning exactly the opposite of what many suppose it to mean. The subject is not elevated to the status of some absolute substance or cosmic mind, swallowing all substantial content according to is all devouring dialectical process. Rather this phrase refers to the debasing of substance to the status of the divided or fractured subject. Žižek points out that the *Phenomenology* is the story of the repeated failures of the subject to truly account for the world and itself. For Žižek, when Hegel says that the Absolute is “not only Substance, but also Subject,” this does not mean that subjectivity is constitutive of reality, but rather that

*there simply is no such ‘absolute subject’, since the Hegelian subject is nothing but the very movement of unilateral self-deception... ‘Substance as Subject’ means precisely that this movement of self-deception, by means of which a particular aspect posits itself as the universal principle, is not external to Substance but constitutive of it.*⁶⁵

⁶² Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 6.

⁶³ Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 130.

⁶⁴ Here I am following Žižek’s translation. Miller translates “*nicht als Substanz, sondern ebenso sehr als Subjekt*” as “not only as Substance, but equally as Subject” (PS ¶17/PG 23).

⁶⁵ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 76.

The subject, then, is not elevated to the dignified status of substance, but rather substance is lowered to the fragmented level of the subject, always trying yet failing to make sense of the world. The main point for Žižek is that it is the subject that, incessantly searching behind appearances for an enduring essence, fails to understand it (the subject) is the one positing the essence behind the appearances. Hegel's idealism begins when this illusion is given up. For Žižek, “‘unmasking this illusion’ does not mean that ‘there is nothing to see behind the phenomena, [for] there is nothing *but this nothing itself, ‘nothing’ which is the subject.*”⁶⁶ What Žižek is proposing here is not a simple denial of reality within an anti-realist perspective, which is nothing but the subjective idealism of Kant, but rather the positive functioning and existence of ‘nothing.’ The point around which sensible, phenomenal reality is organized and made meaningful is *nothing*, a nothing that *is* the subject who suspends all meaning.⁶⁷ Meaning is ‘suspended’ by the subject in its twofold sense: that from which something hangs or is held up, or the barring or prohibiting of an action.

That subjectivity is the *nothing* around which meaning/appearance gathers means that subjectivity is always pathologically biased, limited, and distorting because while there can be no reality apart from the constituting subject (pace Kant), every subject is situated within reality while at the same time cut off from itself.⁶⁸ As Žižek says, “There is no ‘absolute Subject’—subject ‘as such’ is relative, caught in self-division, and it is *as such* that the Subject is inherent to the Substance.”⁶⁹ This structurally biased and split

⁶⁶ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 195 (italics in original).

⁶⁷ Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 59.

⁶⁸ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 78-79.

⁶⁹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 89.

subject, as substance, keeps Hegel from being merely a ‘subjective idealist’ like Kant because the subject, instead of functioning as a *Ding-an-sich*, is itself both a mere appearance while also projecting an essential substance.

Subjective Destitution and Sociality

On a superficial reading it might seem that, while expressing their positions in drastically different conceptual schemes, Pippin and Žižek are really in broad agreement. Both seek to reconnect the Hegelian project to the Kantian critique against the superficial historicist appropriation of the dialectic. Both articulate how the subject must assume responsibility for the world one inhabits: Pippin speaking of *Geist* as the normative realm of self-legislating reason; Žižek speaking of the lack of an ‘absolute subject’ guaranteeing the consistency of reality. But both lead toward the realization that every subjective position is biased, and therefore constructed. Both see the realm of *Geist* as a normative distinction within thought and language placing human freedom as an achievement beyond nature, yet still within it, and therefore as non-supernatural. Or as Žižek says, spirit is “the domain of signification, of the symbolic; as such, it can emerge only in a creature which is neither constrained to its bodily finitude nor directly infinite...but in between, a finite entity in which the Infinite resounds in the guise of...Another World.”⁷⁰ But these semblances hide a profound difference between the two, revealed in their understanding of the political significance of Hegel.

Unlike Pippin who builds from the normative idea of social self-legislation, as a historical achievement constituted through various practices of mutual recognition,

⁷⁰ Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 60-61.

Žižek's Hegel does not build up toward a social theory. Instead, Žižek's exposition seeks only to repeat the same constitutive failures within differing conceptual frameworks (appearance/essence, understanding/reason, substance/subject). For Žižek, Hegel in method and in practice never moves forward in his analysis unless progress is measured by uncovering deeper conceptual failures. This Žižekian perspective reveals the difference between Pippin's evolutionary perspective of a socially normative practice of mutual-recognition, and Žižek's revolutionary perspective that the dialectic exposes the ideological frame in which such social practices exist and the radical means by which to exit, in order to transform, those structures.

One way of understanding this is to situate Žižek alongside other political theorists through his deployment of the concepts of perversion and hysteria. Much of postmodern political theory looks to the excessive or transgressive aspects of life violently repressed by the reigning socio-political order. Inverting Hobbes, who sought to circumscribe the riotous passions of the multitude according to the law of the sovereign, these theorists seek to re-inscribe all forms of life within the political order. In this way, an ever broadening and inclusive political field emerges through endless re-negotiations and re-articulations of the political field. Žižek's main targets are of a continental variety, such as Judith Butler and Antonio Negri. But as will become clear, Žižek is also indirectly speaking to certain forms of Anglo-American pragmatists like Pippin. For Žižek, the problem with this view is two-fold. First, giving free reign to all transgressive identities and lifestyles through transgressive political action exactly mirrors the processes of global capitalism. The market revels in breaking every rule and crossing every line, all in the effort of creating new markets for selling new products to

new consumer-subjects who themselves are trained to transgress. Žižek complains that those promoting a ‘politics of multitude’ as an ever broadening of the political field exactly mimic the machinations of global capitalism. The “subject of late capitalist market relations is perverse” in its attempt to transgress all limits, yet in its very perversion maintains itself as a version of capitalism.⁷¹ Second, perversion remains within the Kantian matrix of external reflection by positing that the existing law is always partial and fragmented, and each transgression seeks to reveal this limit with reference to an unacknowledged beyond.

Why is this? Perversion, which Žižek uses in a technical sense drawing from Lacan, stays within the political order, albeit in the seemingly exterior form of transgression. Acts of perversion claim to know the symbolic law (whether the political laws of the land or the subjective laws of civility, sociality, sexuality, and rationality), and claim to know exactly how to resist them via overt transgressions. These transgressive acts, therefore, always ultimately point to the law. Knowing the law, and then, always with an eye toward the law, transgressing the law’s limit, shows the mutual implication of the existing political order and its own transgression. The law and its transgression make an articulate totality where the latter never moves beyond the frame of the former. To transgress in this way is actually a *reasonable* form of resistance within the political order because it seeks to move within the political field as a broadening, re-ordering, and re-articulation of current and future ‘forms of life.’ It does this in the form of transgression because if one were truly to move beyond, rather than merely transgress within, the socio-political order it would mean the loss all contact with

⁷¹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 248.

reality, unhinging all systems of meaning and significance, and thus foreclosing the possibility of reasonable political action. Transgressive acts, perverting the law, and therefore showing the law's own perversion, are different ways of describing what Pippin might call instances of the provisional and revisable nature of our practices and institutions seeking mutual recognition, the recognition of the reasonableness of one's actions. The law, its transgression, and the law's subsequent revision are, for Pippin, a desirable, evolving situation.

Žižek contends, however, that this transgressive strategy ultimately fails because it is still trapped within (because it mirrors) an economic system that feeds on transgressive forms of life even as it promotes these transgressions. This transgressive strategy is doomed to perpetuate the status quo in the form of evolutionary modifications, rather than offer any truly revolutionary break. Or said differently, this strategy posits an essence of freedom standing behind the partial and broken appearances of law. This transgressive social strategy, therefore, fails the fundamentally Hegelian lesson that positing an essence (of subjectivity, of law, of freedom) beyond its appearance is the ideological move par excellence, a failure many continental and pragmatic theorist have missed in their social theories.

For Žižek, the prevailing socio-political order cannot be *transgressed* in the form of perversion, but rather must be *traversed* in the form of hysteria.⁷² The hysteric is incapable of finding ones coordinates within the symbolic network, a breakdown that simultaneously puts the symbolic order in doubt and therefore puts one's own subjective position in doubt, causing what may seem to be irrational outbursts. The hysteric is in

⁷² Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 265-269.

doubt about the symbolic law, not knowing what the law wants from her, and therefore powerless in following the law.⁷³ Rather than transgressing the political order in vain attempts at incremental rehabilitation, Žižek proposes *traversing* the political order in the mode of hysteria, or as he elsewhere calls it, through a radical “subjective destitution.”⁷⁴ Rather than seeking subjective affirmation *from* (indicating source/origin) the political order (even in the guise of transgression because in transgression one can minimally affirm one’s own essence beyond the social appearances), for Žižek, one ought to enact a hysterical subjective destitution *from* (indicating separation/removal) the socio-symbolic order. The figure of this subjective destitution in which “the subject accepts the void of his nonexistence” is symbolic death.⁷⁵ Only in what we might call a ‘psychic suicide’ where one is biologically alive, yet dead to the symbolic coordinates of social, political, and economic life, is one placed in “the suicidal outside of the symbolic order,”⁷⁶ able to act with a revolutionary freedom. This is the case because the hysteric understands that she is just as divided as the social substance (the law) is. The hysteric is the political consequence of the philosophical idea that the absolute is “not only Substance, but also Subject.”

Many political theorist, however, are unwilling to entertain this type of symbolic death because it seems simultaneously too *excessive* as a stepping outside the bounds of rationality, reasonability according to certain accounts of political ‘realism’ and too

⁷³ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 112-114, and *The Ticklish Subject*, pp. 247-257.

⁷⁴ See *The Ticklish Subject*, 366; *Sublime Object*, 230; *The Indivisible Remainder*, 163-65.

⁷⁵ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 281.

⁷⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (NY: Verso, 2002), 99.

moderate in its apparently disinterested stance toward the current state of affairs. These theorists would claim that such a radical break makes it impossible to reform the political order because one is so utterly beyond it, so utterly detached: too ideologically minded to be any politically good. But this is exactly Žižek's intention when he speaks of subjective destitution as death, for only when one considers oneself dead to the existing order will one be able to actually *act* freely with regard to it.⁷⁷ Only then will one moves from piecemeal forms of transgressive resistance against the existing order toward creating the possibility of another order altogether. This subjective destitution is a radical transformation through a revolutionary *traversal* of the existing order, rather than a gradual evolution through *transgressional* reappropriations within it.

As a hysterical action of subjective destitution, this move beyond the symbolic law is characterized by a radical gesture of 'striking at oneself', the gesture which ultimately constitutes subjectivity as such.⁷⁸ This 'striking at oneself' is the means by which one becomes 'uncoupled' from the symbolic order, dying to ones own social substance. As noted above, perversion assumes some minimal subjectivity that 'knows' the limits of the law, and therefore posits itself as beyond the law. This is the ideological position that assumes an essence behind appearances, and therefore has failed to learn the Hegel's dialectical lesson that substance is divided, just as the subject is divided. The hysteric denies even this minimal subjective support within the social substance, and therefore is the true figure for political action.

Contra Pippin and Taylor, Žižek's Hegel only becomes Hegel when he abandons the Romantic project of the expressive unity of the social substance, achieved through

⁷⁷ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, pp. 260-264.

⁷⁸ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, pp. 148-150.

shared social practices, and instead beings understanding reconciliation not as a healing of the split between radical subjectivity and social objectivity, but a reconciliation *with* the split as a persistent aspect of the social field.⁷⁹ This reconciliation is the political implementation of what was already argued philosophically, that dialectical reconciliation is not a higher harmony, but a reconciliation to the persistence of fundamental disharmony. The fact that “‘Substance is [also to be conceived of as] Subject’ means that this explosion of the organic Unity is what *always happens* in the course of the dialectical process,”⁸⁰ and the new unity is not a new harmony at a higher, more explicit level, but rather the unity of persistent division, both within the subject and the social substance. Only the hysterical subjective position can persist within this place, for “a truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of coordinates, but I choose to change this set of coordinates itself” and therefore act as Christ did.⁸¹

Žižek’s many references to Christ underscores the religious aspects of Hegel totally absent from Pippin’s interpretation, and most non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel.⁸² Žižek understands Hegel as putting forth Christianity as the manifest religion because Christianity articulates this negative space beyond the symbolic law and its transgressive supplement, a new place from which political action pours forth.⁸³ For Žižek, “both Christianity and Hegel transpose the gap which separates us from the Absolute into the Absolute itself” such that substance and subject are always already

⁷⁹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 95.

⁸⁰ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 96 (bracket in original).

⁸¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 121.

⁸² A recent exception is Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸³ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 145.

divided.⁸⁴ Throughout *The Puppet and the Dwarf* Žižek seeks to unite fall and redemption, Adam and Christ, Judaism and Christianity, law and love according to the dialectic whereby the former is fulfilled by the latter, not in a new harmonious positivity, but rather through transposing the initial gap of the former into the latter itself. Ultimately, the gap separating God and humanity is internal to God, exemplified by the death of Christ. Rather than the death of God leading to our freedom from God, as for Nietzsche, Žižek claims that the death of God, and our participation in that death, allows us to suspend the symbolic law, just as Christ did. This is the forgotten core of Christianity, not that God is dead and we have killed him, but that God (the substance) is dead and all of us (subjects) have died with God.

Evaluation

Žižek's reading of Hegel is self-consciously politically oriented toward the successful breaking out of the regimes of global capitalism by offering a robust ontological account of the necessary failure of both the social structure and the subject, a failure which opens the very possibility of an authentic political act against and beyond the dominant order. While Pippin's Hegel offers few resources for this type of radical act putting previous justificatory practices into question, it seems that Žižek offers little reason why someone would enact a psychic suicide in order to enter the outside of the symbolic order.⁸⁵ Why not rather engage in perverse acts where one can have the

⁸⁴ Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 88.

⁸⁵ Bruno Bosteels critiques Žižek for equivocating between Lacan and Badiou on the nature of subjectivity and the act, an equivocation between the Lacanian subject which assumes the impossibility of subjectivity and the Badiouian subject faithful to an event. These two 'subjects' are, for Bosteels, irreconcilable. See his "Badiou without Žižek,"

symbolic cake and transgressively eat it too? Žižek, it should be noted, does offer numerous examples of people willing to make such an act (Antigone, Oedipus, Jesus, King Lear), but the use of such examples only return us to the problem of a prior social normativity. If Žižek's best arguments for prompting a radical act in others is to refer to a counter tradition of those resisting the status quo, then these example begin to function as a normative tradition for Žižek. But the use of such a counter tradition seems to imply its own law and its symbolic order, all of which Žižek seems opposed to in placing the subject beyond symbolic support.

Conclusion

After the metaphysical Hegel proposed by Taylor comes these two drastically opposed and yet typical interpretations. Broadly speaking, Pippin's Hegel offers a retrospective account of the emergence of normative practices as the pre-condition of freedom. He leaves aside, however, the emergence of the individual subjects capable of resisting such engrained practices. Žižek's Hegel is explicitly oriented toward offering an account of the subject within and beyond the ideological interpellation of society's dominant social practices. But the place from which this subject acts, the place of its own subjective destitution, is always a prior (counter-) normativity that Žižek must simultaneously presuppose and yet disavow. Pippin offers a Hegel emphasizing the self-transcending immanence of normative practices (yet assuming a prior subject formation), and Žižek offers a Hegel emphasizing the self-transcending immanence of the radical act (yet assuming a prior normative formation via religion). In either case, the normative

Hegel of evolutionary social practices and the radical Hegel of revolutionary subjective acts are interpretations of Hegel opposed to each other in fundamental ways. This fundamental opposition prompts the question of which is more adequate to the texts of Hegel and which is more adequate to the questions of contemporary political theory. Can Hegel hold together both normative social practices while also offering the possibility of a radical subjectivity capable of resisting such practices if the need were to arise? Being able to answer this question first requires a deep understanding of Hegel's philosophical systems. Only then will one be able to adequately assess his political implications. Chapter two will offer an entry into Hegel's system through an examination of his *Science of Logic* and then a reading of his *Phenomenology*. Chapter three will then assess Hegel's political philosophy with an eye toward resolving this fundamental opposition between Pippin and Žižek in regard to Hegel philosophy of self-transcending immanence.

CHAPTER 2: CONSCIOUSNESS AND FREEDOM: *LOGIC AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

When we think freely, voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us, in solitude, alone by ourselves—then we are purely at home with ourselves.¹

Introduction

The previous chapter focused primarily on the normative and the radical Hegel, displaying the divergent interpretations regarding sociality and subjectivity, especially in regard to politics. These divergent interpretations sought to unify Hegel's system and his *realphilosophie* rather than excluding the former in order to focus on the latter. To evaluate these interpretations it is necessary to explore Hegel's system in greater detail.

Essential to Hegel's philosophical system is the dual role of negation as the motor of conceptual development and the true infinite as the completion of the Kantian revolution. Hegel's understanding of negation and the true infinite allow him to deal with otherness as internal to the processes of consciousness (eventually expanded to intersubjective self-consciousness) rather than as an alien limitation to consciousness itself. Overcoming the limitations of otherness is required, for Hegel, in order to ensure consciousness as self-determining freedom. This chapter will focus on Hegel's development of the self-determining freedom of consciousness, leaving the practical and political implication of this freedom for the chapter three.

The first section of this chapter will establish the self-transcending immanence of Hegel's speculative philosophy. His system is self-transcending because thought is always process of 'going beyond itself'. But his system is ultimately grounded in

¹ E §31 A.

immanence because Hegel finally admits of no transcendence beyond this self-transcending movement of thought. This will be established through a reading of the opening chapters Hegel's *Science of Logic* where he deals with the dialectic of being-nothing and the finite-infinite. It will be argued that Hegel includes 'otherness' within consciousness through an initial exclusion of transcendence. This exclusion operates by prefiguring every 'beyond' as merely 'nothing', a 'nothing' that is then re-including as 'negation', the dynamic of thought itself. 'Nothing' is always deemed the indeterminacy of thought.

Hegel justifies this movement from 'nothing' to 'negation' in his *Logic* through reference to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, claiming that in the earlier work he overcomes the distinction between subject and object, showing that no-thing is outside or other than pure knowing. Because of this claim the second section of this chapter will examine the *Phenomenology* according to three instances in which consciousness encounters otherness: the encounter with the 'supersensible beyond' by consciousness in chapter III; the encounter with the Unchangeable (God) by the Unhappy Consciousness in chapter IV (an encounter only finally resolved at the end of chapter VI); and the encounter with the God-man by religious consciousness in chapter VII.² The parallel purpose in examining these encounters is to understand Hegel's developing notion of consciousness as the emergence of self-consciousness as *Geist*, culminating in the absolute knowing of chapter VIII. Throughout the exposition of the *Phenomenology* I will continue to make reference

² Certainly every form of consciousness encountered in the *Phenomenology* is an encounter with and movement through the otherness (or object) appropriate to that form. These three instances are chosen as exemplary cases of encountering otherness in its seemingly transcendent form.

to Hegel's deployment of negation and the movement of the true infinite in order to show the coherence of his thought throughout.

The third and final section will argue that Hegel does not prove his case concerning the unity of subject and object because instead of truly encountering all forms of otherness, pre-eminently the otherness of a transcendent God, Hegel always pre-configures this otherness as the indeterminate nothing of thought. By pre-configuring the otherness of God the *Phenomenology* merely assumes what it attempts to prove, trading on arguments that only properly belong within the *Logic*. In light of this circularity I will argue that the best place from which to make the argument concerning the unjustified exclusion of transcendent otherness is neither within Hegel's treatment of religion, nor the earlier encounter of the Unhappy Consciousness, but the earlier encounter with the 'supersensible beyond.' The goal, then, of this chapter is to show both that Hegel's philosophy is aptly described as self-transcending immanence, even while showing that Hegel only assumes but does not justify such a philosophical perspective.

Of course this summary cannot replace actual arguments and is hardly intelligible without them. This is the difficult journey before us, a journey into the freedom of thought, a "voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us...purely at home with ourselves" (E §31 A). Throughout we will follow Hegel as he attempts to fathom the depths of this infinite sea of thought, asking whether he has actually measured the depths of the infinite or only established the length of consciousness. Throughout I try to present the most favorable interpretation of Hegel's positions in order to both truly understand his project and to allay fears that I am criticizing a caricature. It is for these reasons this chapter is the longest and densest.

1. Nothing Is Infinite: *Science of Logic*

The Thought of the Logic

The purpose of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is to clarify the categories of thought and through them "to raise mind to freedom and truth" (SL 37/WL 5:27). This is not logic in the standard sense of rules governing logical argumentation, giving proper order to thoughts. Rather the *Logic* outlines what thought itself *is*. For Hegel, "logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought." To ensure its ontological and theological impact, he adds that the *Logic* "is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind" (SL 50/WL 5:44). To make sense of this Hegel distinguishes the science of logic as he conceives it from other sciences. In other scientific investigations the subject *matter* of the science (biology, physics, economics) is distinguished from the scientific *method* of investigation. But this is not the case when investigating thought because thought is both the matter and method, or the content and the form. Hegel emphasizes it is not the case that thought is merely a rational form given to a received content (as for empiricists and even Kant). It is not the case that the matter or content

of knowing is present on its own account as a ready-made world apart from thought, that thinking on its own is empty and comes as an external form to the said material, fills itself with it and only thus acquires a content and so becomes real knowing. (SL 44/WL 5:36-37)

Rather, content and form are already united in thought. Consequently, what logic *is* cannot be stated beforehand for this would again make logic into content external to

thought. Knowledge of what logic is emerges “as the final outcome and consummation of the whole exposition” (SL 43/WL 5:35).³

But if the way *into* logic is already *within* logic, how and where is one to make a beginning? And is the beginning really a beginning if the truth of the system can only be known at the end? If the goal of the *Logic* is to raise the mind to freedom and truth as the system of pure reason, while at the same time not taking for granted a presumed content, then for Hegel its beginning “*may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science” (SL 70/WL 5:69). As he says in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*,

All...presuppositions or assumptions must equally be given up when we enter into the Science, whether they are taken from representation or from thinking...Science should be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e. by total *presuppositionlessness* (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*). Strictly speaking this requirement is fulfilled by the freedom that abstracts from everything, and grasps its own pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking—in the resolve of *the will to think purely*. (EL §78)

This resolve to think purely, the resolve to “consider thought as such” (SL 70/WL 5:68) is the immediate beginning of logic. As Houlgate notes, the resolve to think thought “sets aside all assumptions about *what* it is, [and] is left with nothing to think but the simple thought *that* it is.”⁴ To this resolve to only think thought it must be added that the beginning be immediate. If the beginning were mediated it would no longer be a beginning for then it would be mediating between something else, something a presupposed. This immediate beginning must likewise be both without determination relative to something else or have any determinations within itself. For Hegel this

³ Hegel is reinforcing what he says in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, that “the way to Science is itself already *Science*” (PS ¶88/PG 80).

⁴ Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006), 31.

immediate and indeterminate with which logic begins is *pure being* (SL 70/WL 5:69), the beginning of a presuppositionless science of logic.⁵

The Presupposition of the Logic

Before following this beginning of pure being we need to pause a moment to understand the claims of this presuppositionless science. To do this we must look at the link between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*, setting the groundwork for the relationship between both explored in sections one and two of this chapter. Early critics criticized Hegel for failing in his supposed presuppositionlessness. Schelling claimed Hegel actually presupposed (1) the subject who thinks even while suppressing this subjective position, and Hegel (2) presupposes the absolute that is being thought.⁶ In Hegel's mind, however, these criticisms are knocking on an open door because both objections had already been granted by Hegel in his *Phenomenology*. Hegel had shown in that early work that one could not start with the subject of ordinary consciousness without inevitably ending up with the Absolute beyond the dichotomy of subject and object. The thinking subject and the overcoming of this subject and its object(s) within the Absolute arrive together. In the *Logic* Hegel points to the *Phenomenology* as having exhibited consciousness

in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the Notion of science for its result... Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of

⁵ See Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, 29-71, for a detailed account of the presuppositionless aspect of Hegel's *Logic*.

⁶ For a summary and rebuttal of Schelling's critiques, see Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 15-31.

consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought.* (SL 48-9/WL 5:42-3)

It is in this sense that Hegel claims that the *Logic* presupposes the *Phenomenology* because the *Phenomenology* “contains and demonstrates the necessity, and so truth, of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing” (SL 68-9/WL 5:67). On Hegel’s account, the claim to being presuppositionless rests on presupposing the conclusions of the *Phenomenology*. This of course raises the status of the *Phenomenology* as the presupposition of a presuppositionless science.⁷ But this will only become the focus in the second section of this chapter.

Being-Nothing and Becoming

Having established the interlocking presuppositions between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*, we will now examine the opening argument of the *Logic* concerning the

⁷ In a sense, the *Phenomenology* is an extended investigation in how *not* to start philosophical science by beginning with the presupposition that a subject (or consciousness) relates to an object. Beginning with this conception of consciousness is the optimal starting place for Hegel because it is from this perspective that Hegel’s opponents (Kant and Schelling principally) assume that consciousness always requires an external object which inevitably means that philosophical science can never be presuppositionless (i.e. self-determining), but must always presuppose an object in opposition to a subject. If this perspective, which claims the impossibility of a presuppositionless science, is overcome according to a *reductio ad absurdum* resulting in the Absolute beyond the dichotomy of subject and object, then the process of this overcoming would become the presupposition of a presuppositionless science. Therefore in Hegel’s mind and against critics like Schelling, presupposing the Absolute (which is exactly *not* presupposing the dichotomy of subject and object) and suppressing individual consciousness (but not thought as such) is exactly what a presuppositionless science requires. Of course this is only the case if the *Phenomenology* is correct in its conclusions. For an extended argument in this direction, see William Maker’s “Beginning,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic* ed. George di Giovanni (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 27-44, and his *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 83-98.

dialectic of being-nothing and its transition into becoming. As noted above, the beginning of a science of logic must be that which is most immediate and indeterminate, which Hegel claims to be *pure being*. “*Being, pure being, without any further determination*” (Sein, reines Sein, - *ohne alle weitere Bestimmung*). When considering the first category Hegel does not even use a copula. No predication of existence is given for this would add a determination to indeterminate being. The first negative definition of pure being, “without any further determination,” is given a farther negative expansion in the following statements:

In its indeterminate immediacy (*unbestimmten Unmittelbarkeit*) it is equal only to itself. It is also not unequal relative to another; it has no diversity within itself nor any with a reference outward.

Pure being has neither internal composition nor external relation. As such, for pure being “there is *nothing* to be intuited” because “it is only this pure [empty] intuiting itself” (*es ist nur dies reine, leere Anschauen selbst*). And because pure being is best thought as nothing, the nothingness of thought, Hegel concludes by saying, “Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than nothing.” (*Das Sein, das unbestimmte Unmittelbare ist in der Tat Nichts und nicht mehr noch weniger als Nichts*) (SL 82/WL 5:82-3). Pure being, the most basic thought from which Hegel seeks to derive his science of logic, in its complete and utter indetermination, has been found to pass into its opposite and has become neither more nor less than nothing.⁸

Of this nothing Hegel continues in the next section: “*Nothing, [the] pure nothing* (Nichts, das reine Nichts): it is simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content—undifferentiatedness in itself.” While re-worded

⁸ It is from here that Slavoj Žižek takes the title of his massive tome, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012).

slightly, the same basic phrases apply to nothing as they did to being. Nothing lacks all determination and is equal to itself without any internal differentiations. But amid the empty intuiting of nothing there is a distinction found between the empty intuiting of something (*etwas*) and pure nothingness. Because of this, “To intuit or think nothing has, therefore, a meaning: both are distinguished and thus nothing *is* (exists) in our intuiting or thinking” (*so ist [existiert] Nichts in unserem Anschauen oder Denken*) (SL 82/WL 5:83).⁹ The thought of nothing, it seems, has surprisingly found a basis of existence, an existence within thought. Through its absence of determination nothing *is* determined to be the same as pure being because nothing has existence within thought.

Being, then, slides into nothing and nothing into being. This is the being-nothing dialectic leading to the identity of being and nothing as each passes over into the other. Or rather, “the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being—does not pass over but *has passed over*—into nothing, and nothing into being” (SL 83/WL 5:83).¹⁰ In the manner of writing the first two paragraphs Hegel indicates what logically must occur, that being “has passed over” into nothing and nothing into being. This “has passed over” is already accomplished at the end of the paragraphs on being and nothing. By the time Hegel is half-finished describing being he is already articulating aspects of nothing, and once nothing is articulated it is found to have passed back into being.¹¹ In addition to the truth of the identity of being and nothing Hegel also claims that they are “not undistinguished from each other,” but “on the contrary, they are not the same” for they “are absolutely distinct.” Immediately after claiming this absolute distinction, however,

⁹ Parentheses in original.

¹⁰ Emphasis added.

¹¹ Dale M. Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 58.

Hegel adds that they are “unseparable and inseparable and that each immediately *vanishes in its opposite*. Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*” (SL 83/WL 83).

One way of understanding this is considering the identity and difference of the morning and evening star. While each has a difference sense both have the same reference, Venus. Likewise, being and nothing each have their own sense (being is that which applies to everything and nothing is that which applies to no-thing), even though they both have the same reference as the emptiness of thought.¹² This analogy emphasizes the identity of being and nothing.

To give full weight, however, to Hegel’s claim that being and nothing are “absolutely distinct” the opposite of this analogy is preferable. As Hegel’s exposition of being and nothing indicates, it is exactly the *logical* (or linguistic) sense of each term that is identical in that each is “indeterminately immediate,” but it is the ontological reference that is different, i.e. being is being and nothing is nothing. Instead of their senses (connotations) being different and their reference (denotation) the same it seems the only way to affirm the absolute distinction between being and nothing is to conclude that while their sense (connotation) is the same it is their references (denotations) that are different. If this is the case, then, as Michael Rosen says, it seems Hegel is claiming that being and nothing are “non-identical indiscernibles” and the concept of becoming is the mutual vanishing between them.¹³ But if “non-identical indiscernibles” accurately describes the non-relation of being and nothing, from where comes the difference

¹² Justus Hartnack, *An Introduction to Hegel’s Logic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 12.

¹³ Michael Rosen, *Hegel’s Dialectic and its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 150-152.

between them that gives rise to the category of becoming?¹⁴ If being-nothing are “non-identical indiscernibles” how is enough difference found between them to warrant

¹⁴ Critics point out that the dialectic of being-nothing only arrives at becoming because illicit presuppositions are smuggled into the process, or that becoming is merely assumed in advance. Beyond the objections to a presuppositionless beginning mentioned above (that Hegel assumes the absolute), critics claim that the very language used to express pure being predisposes the development toward becoming by presupposing later developments within the *Logic*, namely the categories of reflection developed in the second part on Essence. Terms such as “indeterminate immediacy” and “equal to itself” are negations of reflective categories such that pure being is determined through the negation of these categories. In addition, it is claimed that Hegel presupposes the everyday use of language in which thought originally lives leaving Hegel’s dialectic in need of retrieving its more primordial hermeneutic. In these ways it is claimed Hegel illegitimately makes use of what comes later in (or outside of) the *Logic* rather than letting the categories develop immanently (see Dieter Henrich, “Anfang und Methode der Logik,” in *Hegel im Kontext* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971], 85-90; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies* trans. by P. Christopher Smith [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], 93, 99).

One response is to ignore these objections all together by claiming that Hegel never seriously intended a presuppositionless science but always presupposed the totality of his system. Beyond presupposing the *Phenomenology*, Klaus Kartmann suggests Hegel’s *Logic* must be understood as a retrospective justification of the whole, or a reconstruction of the richness of thought back through its antecedents. Robert Pippin suggests that here as elsewhere Hegel is merely assuming a position which he already thinks is untenable in order to move beyond it, i.e. that the idea of “indeterminate immediacy” is always a failure (See Klaus Hartmann, “Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View,” in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, ed. Robert Stern [London and New York: Routledge, 1993], 154; Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 182-186).

A less dismissive response claims these criticisms move too quickly in that Hegel is not *defining* pure being, but is rather *describing* it with the available language. It is not the case that Hegel defines being as in-determinate (the negation of determinacy) or immediacy (the negation of mediation) for this would be to say too much by giving determinations to indeterminate being. Rather “indeterminate immediacy” and expressions like it turn ordinary language (which *is* naturally reflective) against itself so as to properly indicate the thought of pure being. Hegel uses “ordinary *determinate* words with rich and varied meanings to bring to mind (and “thematize”) an utterly *indeterminate* thought” (Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 84 [emphasis in original]. See also 82). In order to indicate pure being Hegel seeks to purify ordinary language of its presuppositions rather than building his argument upon them. These “self-canceling expressions” (Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 79), indicative of a “hermeneutic self-alienation” (Clark Butler, *Hegel’s Logic: Between Dialectic and History* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996], 27), are the means by which

another category? In other words, the problem is not the transition between the “indeterminate immediacies” of being and nothing, but how this transition transitions into something else, into becoming, moving from the indeterminate to the determinate.

The Failure of Being: From Verstand to Vernunft

To keep the mutual vanishing of being and nothing from reducing into a mere tautology admitting no productive movement then some minimal difference must be found through which the oppositions can be resolved.¹⁵ Hegel seems only to *state* that some minimal difference exists rather than *prove* that it does. As Gadamer says, “Though it is convincing that one cannot think Becoming without thinking Being and Nothing simultaneously, the converse, that when one thinks Being and Nothing one must

Hegel practices the “absolute culture and disciple of consciousness” required to dwell and labor in the realm of shadows, which is the system of logic (SL 58/WL 5:55).

¹⁵ One way of understanding this problem is to remember that Hegel mentions three moments of thought: 1) the understanding (*verständige*) fixes determinations, 2) dialectical or negative reason (*die dialektische oder negativ-vernünftige*) opposes these fixed and one-sided determination with others, 3) and speculative or positive reason (*die spekulative oder positiv-vernünftige*) unites opposed determinations (E §79-82 and SL 28/WL 5:16). If we apply these movements to the opening dialect in a relatively straightforward manner we see the understanding isolating pure being, abstracting and purifying its determinations, a process rendering pure being completely without determination. In seeking clarity and precision of thought the understanding inadvertently renders pure being unintelligible and therefore in fact nothing. In turning its attention to nothing the understanding finds that something is being thought and therefore nothing *is*. The understanding cannot isolate either concept without immediately passing into its opposition. This passing into oppositions is the natural consequence of understanding’s commitment to fixed determinations, giving rise to dialectical reason as the mutual vanishing of being and nothing into each other. Speculative reason resolves the opposition with the concept of becoming, which settles into a stable result from its unstable unrest (SL 106/WL 5:113). The problem is that this still does not get at the non-relational identity of being-nothing if speculative reason is not already presupposed. See John Burbidge *On Hegel’s Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 42-45.

think Becoming is not at all convincing.”¹⁶ Therefore, if Hegel is not to fall to the criticism that he either assumes becoming from the beginning or is relying on some subjective opinion (which he denies to be the case [SL 92/WL 5:95]), then there must be a reason that enables Hegel to justify the difference which gives movement at the beginning of the *Logic*. To see how he does this we must look more closely at the operations of *Verstand* and *Vernunft* at the beginning of the *Logic*.

The work of the understanding (*Verstand*) in relation to reason (*Vernunft*) is to separate and fix the abstract determination of any concrete object or idea, preparing it for the later unifying process of reason (SL 610-11/ WL 6:286-87).¹⁷ This is the ideal relation between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* where separating and fixing determinations slides seamlessly into a fluid unity of concepts.¹⁸ What this means for the beginning of the *Logic* is that the understanding begins the logical process by isolating pure being through a movement of abstraction, separating it from all other relationships.

But the question we must ask is “from what” is the understanding isolating and abstracting? Certainly it is not phenomenological consciousness for this would be to repeat the *Phenomenology*. The understanding is not isolating and abstracting from “determinate being” for this would be to presuppose a later category. If we are to take Hegel seriously that the *Logic* presupposes the conclusions of the *Phenomenology* then it

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Hege's Dialectic*, 87.

¹⁷ Also see the three-fold designation the separates *Vernunft* into the two moments of dialectical and speculative in addition to *Verstand* (E §79-82 and SL 28/WL 5:16).

¹⁸ Of course Hegel often takes a negative perspective of *Verstand* as the failure of Kantian philosophy which only fixes determinations, sets up rigid dichotomies, and erects limits (*Beschränkens*) to thought, refusing to move beyond this perspective and thinking itself the apex of philosophy. Especially in his early essays Hegel would oppose *Verstand* and *Vernunft* (FK 62, 64-65/GW 296, 299-300; DS 90-91/Diff 21-23; SL 45/WL 39) even while also indicating their significant relationship (compare PS ¶32/PG 37 and DS 94/Diff 27; E §79-82 and SL 28/WL 5:16).

follows that the understanding is isolating and abstracting *from* “the standpoint occupied by pure knowledge” (SL 68-9/WL 5:67). As David Gray Carlson explains: “The beginning [of pure being] is simply the *immediate* version of absolute knowing” as constructed by the understanding.¹⁹ The understanding isolates and abstracts from within and out from absolute knowing. If this is the case then the difference noted in the vanishing of being and nothing is not the difference *between* being and nothing. Rather the difference is *between* pure knowing (as known by *Vernunft*) and the pure immediacy of being (as articulated by *Verstand*). The concept of becoming does not come on the scene through the dialectic between being and nothing. Rather, becoming is better thought as marking the difference between the immediacy of pure being (as spelled out by the understanding) and its difference from pure knowing (as known by reason). “Pure being was *supposed* to be absolute knowing—the Understanding’s propositional summary of it. But it ended up being nothing at all—a failure,” a failure speculatively resolved in the positive movement of becoming.²⁰

In light of this failure of the understanding to provide a true beginning, what precedes becoming is not the mutual vanishing of being and nothing, but the fact of vanishing itself, that *thought* is vanishing from itself. “What precedes ‘becoming’ is *thinking* which *fails* to form a thought of its own being,” finding itself to be nothing at all.²¹ This failure of thought (by the understanding) in comparison to pure knowing (by reason) generates the perspective from which the difference between being and nothing is

¹⁹ David Gray Carlson, “The Antepenultimacy of the Beginning of Hegel’s Logic,” in *Hegel’s Theory of the Subject*, ed. David Gray Carlson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 211.

²⁰ Carlson, “The Antepenultimacy of the Beginning of Hegel’s Logic,” 207.

²¹ Carlson, “The Antepenultimacy of the Beginning of Hegel’s Logic,” 217.

discerned. Becoming is the true first thought of the *Logic*, not because becoming was presupposed, but because being-nothing failed to be a thought.

We must, however, press more deeply into this failure of thought. As Angelica Nuzzo suggests, while the *Logic* certainly begins *with* being, it actually begins *from* nothing.²² When Hegel asks, “With what must science begin?” his answer is being. But Nuzzo suggests that *how* Hegel actually begins is different. When Hegel begins with being we are told nothing about it. We are not even given an actual propositions but mere phrases (*Sein, reines Sein...Nichts, das reine Nichts*). And as we have seen, it is not the case that nothing vanishes into being and being into nothing, but an “already having vanished” into each other. This pure vanishing is nothingness, “the most radical challenge to the logic of the understanding,”²³ proving to be the downfall of *Verstand* in its failure to think.²⁴ Here Hegel is staging the last stand of the critical (Kantian) philosophy that makes function as its own absolute. The promise and failure of Kantian philosophy is exposed in these short paragraphs where *Verstand* is shown to immediately falter when separated from *Vernunft*. The encounter with nothingness as the mutual vanishing of being-nothing reveals the immediate deadlock of *Verstand* when elevated to a systematic position, revealing the needs for its assimilation within are larger vision of

²² Angelica Nuzzo, “Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How Does Hegel’s *Logic* Begin,” in *The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (London: Continuum, 2010), 23.

²³ Nuzzo, “Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason,” 20.

²⁴ Therefore, those like Gadamer who claim the being-nothing dialectic is a failed thought are right in their observation but wrong in their conclusion that this failure invalidates Hegel’s logic. See Gadamer, *Hege’s Dialectic*, 88. Sympathetic interpreters like Pippin also claim the thought of pure being to be a failure, but that it was intended to be. See Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism*, 184.

Vernunft. The failure of *Verstand* to think results from its encounter with nothingness, the nothingness of thought.

In view of this conclusion, while the *Logic* formally begins *with* being, true thought only begins *at* becoming, and all this comes *from* nothing(ness). Of course, if the *Logic* begins *from* nothing then it seems to have fulfilled the conditions of a presuppositionless science. This science is freely self-determining exactly because *nothing* is determining it. When isolated from *Vernunft*, *Verstand* realizes that *nothing (nothingness) is out of reach* (negatively).²⁵ But, when *Verstand* is integrated with *Vernunft*, it is equally true that *nothing (no-thing) is out of reach* (positively) because now thought thinks both all that *is* and the *nothing* that is not. The nothingness of thought as the failure of thought is now is now barred from being beyond thought (a Kantian beyond), and is re-included as the non-thought of thought issuing in the concept of being which transitions into determinate being (*Dasein*).²⁶ As we will see, this initial internalization of nothing in the form of non-thought becomes the productive power of negation within thought. This science, then is neither indeterminate as abstract nor determined by external content, but is fully self-determining.

Finite-Infinite and the True Infinite

The immediacy of pure being gives way to the new concept of determinate being (*Dasein*). Determinate being, through many twists and turns, finally culminates in the

²⁵ Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason," 21.

²⁶ To say that "*nothing (nothingness) is out of reach*" for the understanding rebounds from the non-thought of nothing to the first thought of becoming as unstable unrest. But to say "*no-thing is out of reach*" is to enter the stable result of becoming—determinate being—the next immediacy understanding takes under consideration.

contradictions of finitude, leading to our desired goal of the true infinite. These contradictions of determinate being stem from the relationship between something and its other. With the concept of determinate being comes the problem of distinguishing one determinate being from another. Hegel shows that's the concept of something (*Etwas*) logically entails something else as part of its own internal structure. The color blue is only truly known through its opposition to other colors, just as sea is distinguished through its opposition to land. In this way "negation is now *immanent*" in each determinate something as its relationship to its other (SL 125/WL 5:135).²⁷ This immanent negation is the limit (*Grenz*) between both something and its other such that to pass beyond this limit is to change into something else (SL 126/WL 5:135). Being within its limit is the only way determinate being can *be* itself without changing into its other. But this limit is also its *limitation* (add German) in relation to its other (add reference). In other words, having a limit is also to be limited, and this being-limited is the internalization and embrace of something's (*Etwas*) own non-being (i.e. the being of its other is something's non-being). Embracing this contradiction (being through non-being) is the condition of finitude.

The contradiction of finitude is that the limit of something is both its being and non-being such that finite things both *are* and yet are coming to an *end*. As Hegel says:

Finite things *are*, but their relation to themselves is that they are *negatively* self-related and in this very self-relation send themselves away beyond themselves, beyond their being. They *are*, but the truth of this being is their *end*. The finite not only alters, like something in general, but it *ceases to be*; and its ceasing to be is not merely a possibility, so that it could be without ceasing to be, but the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of decease as their being-within-self: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death. (SL 129/WL 5:139)

²⁷ Emphasis in original.

Finite being, which is the logical consequence of determinate being, reveals itself to be a permanent ceasing-to-be because things (determinate beings) are always changing into something else; constantly being birthed and yet always tending toward their own death. In this way negation reigns on the level of the finite as the ceaseless process of ‘becoming.’

But the reign of negation within the finite sows the seeds from which the infinite will grow. This reversal happens because the perpetual ceasing-to-be of finite being is not a passing into nothingness, for this would place thought back into the position of non-thought with which the dialectic began (SL 131/WL 5:141). Finite being does not cease to be as a return to nothing, but constantly passes over into another finite something.

Taylor summarizes it in this way:

A finite thing goes under of necessity. But in going under it does not simply disappear. The negation from which it suffers is itself a determinate one, and hence in breaking up it is replaced by another determinate thing—e.g., wood which is burnt become smoke and ash.²⁸

In its ceasing-to-be, finite being itself has not ceased to be even if a particular finite thing has. This process goes on perpetually as a transition between determinate beings. Finite being, in going beyond itself (in ceasing to be), unites with itself (as continual process of ceasing to be) and thus is found to be infinite (SL 136-7/WL 5: 148-9).

The arrival of the infinite is given much fanfare by Hegel. He proclaims that “at the name of the infinite the heart and the mind light up for in the infinite the spirit is not merely abstractly present to itself, but rises to its own self, to the light of its thinking, of its universality, of its freedom” (SL 137-8/WL 5:150). The freedom of thought, so earnestly sought from the beginning, is now glimpsed in the thought of the infinite. This

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 242.

celebration, however, is prematurely ruined by the understanding (*Verstand*) and its ‘spurious infinite’. We must pass through this spurious infinite in order to achieve the true conception of the infinite. For as with the being-nothing, there is a dialectic between finite-infinite that must be properly grasped.

The spurious infinite is “the infinite of the understanding” (*das Unendliche des Verstandes*) which strictly opposes the finite and infinite. The understanding sets up a determinate opposition so that “*there are two worlds, one infinite and one finite, and in their relationship the infinite is only the limit of the finite and is thus only a determinate infinite, an infinite which is itself finite*” (SL 139-40/WL 5:152).²⁹ The understanding thinks the infinite as the ‘beyond’ or ‘negation’ of the finite, acting as the limit of the finite. The infinite is in-finite, the negation of the finite, and is therefore connected with the finite as its opposite. As a negative determination in relation to finitude, the infinite only exists through this negation as a structural opposition. Because of this structural opposition the infinite has the finite as its limit. But as Hegel has shown, everything with a limit is in fact finite. Therefore to make the infinite the non-finite is exactly to reduce the infinite to finitude.

The spurious infinite, as the negation of the finite, merely extends the dilemma of something and its other and their infinite alteration. As with the pure alteration from one finite thing to another in the ceaseless process of ceasing-to-be that gave rise to concept of the infinite in the first place, now the concept of the infinite itself is caught in a continuous alternation between one infinite and its finite limit. This first infinite, reduced

²⁹ As I will show later, this mirrors the problem the understanding runs into in the *Phenomenology* when it tried to account for sensible appearance by invoking a supersensible world.

to finitude, turns around and generates its own infinite, which is again reduced to finitude, *ad infinitum*.³⁰ In this situation of structural opposition between the finite and infinite, all that is left is “the alternating determination of the *finite* and the *infinite*” (SL 141/WL 5:155), an alteration that Hegel calls an “infinite progress” where the finite and infinite mutually affirm and negate each other in their attempts at independence (SL 142/WL 5:155-56). Hegel summarizes the problem created by the understanding and its fixed determinations (opposing the finite and infinite) as the problem of an “abstract transcending of a limit, a transcending which remains incomplete because *it is not itself transcended*” (*indem über dies Hinausgehen nicht selbst hinausgegangen wird*) (SL 142/WL 5:155). What Hegel means by this is that the categories and perspective of finitude (i.e. determination through a limit), which is essentially the perspective of the understanding, cannot grasp the truth of the infinite because it instead reduces the infinite to the finite. The finite perspective of the understanding (*Verstand*) needs to be transcended again (this suggests a certainly parallel between the being-nothing and finite-infinite dialectic to which we will return below).

To transcend this perspective one must move from what is implicitly present in the ‘infinite progress’ to what is implicitly present in the ‘infinite alteration.’ As Hegel says, “In this alternating determination of the finite and the infinite from one to the other and back again, their truth is already implicitly *present*, and all that is required is to take up what is before us” (SL 143/WL 5:156). What he means is that from the perspective of the understanding the finite and the infinite each come into being through the other. From the side of the finite, the finite is negated and the beyond of the finite is seen as the

³⁰ Houlgate gives an excellent summary of the relation of the two series of infinite alterations in *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 409-412.

infinite. But this negation is again negated (or transcended [*Hinausgehen*] as Hegel typically says here) and the finite is returned to itself through its other. The finite is therefore united to itself *through* the infinite (the other of the finite). Likewise, the infinite is negated by the finite as the limit of the infinite (that through which the infinite is known). With the positing of the finite comes a limit that must be transcended such that the infinite returns to itself through the finite (the other of the infinite). Each is the self-sublation of the other, or rather “both the finite and the infinite are this *movement* in which each returns to itself through its negation” (SL 147/WL 162). What the understanding overlooks is

the negation of both which is actually present in the infinite progress, as also the fact that they occur therein only as moments of a whole (*Ganzen*) and that they come on the scene only by means of their opposite, but essentially also by means of the sublation (*Aufhebens*) of their opposites. (SL 147/WL 5:162)

This becoming itself through its other is the true meaning of ‘negation of negation.’ With the union of these moments (the finite becoming itself through the infinite and the infinite through the finite), both thought and the thought of being are truly self-relating as the true infinite, and therefore it is the highest instance (so far) of self-determining thought now seen as self-transcending (a transcending of the need to transcend a limit). In this it is “a matter of complete indifference which is taken as the beginning” because each is a derivation of the other (SL 148/WL 5:163). Only the finite perspective of the understanding (*Verstand*) seeks to claim the priority of one over the other.³¹

The significance of the true infinite lays in it being the truth of becoming. Hegel makes this clear when he emphatically notes that the determination of the true infinite

³¹ Note the problem of religious readers who claim that Hegel has preserved transcendence within the finite because he does not claim to reduced the infinite to the finite.

cannot properly be called the “unity of the finite and infinite” because this would imply a static and inert relationship. Rather the true infinite

is essentially only as *becoming*, but a becoming now *further determined* in its moments. Becoming, in the first instance, has abstract being and nothing for its determinations; as alteration, its moments possess determinate being, something and other; now as the infinite, they are the finite and infinite, which are themselves in the process of becoming. (SL 148/WL 5:164)

Only by conceiving the true infinite *as* becoming does its true nature manifest itself. The true infinite resolves the contradiction of finite being, which is the result of the conceptual development beginning with determinate being (*Dasein*), such the true infinite “as the consummated return into self, the relationship of itself to itself, is *being (ist Sein)*” (SL 148/WL 5:164). Inversely, the true infinite reveals the true nature of the finite as actually lacking *being*. Indeed, the finite, known through the moments of the finite-(spurious)infinite dialectic, is merely *ideal*. Only the true infinite actually *is*, a proposition Hegel claims every true philosophy and religion affirms (SL 154-5/WL 5:172; E §95R). This then is the true infinite, the basis of Hegel’s idealism and the benchmark of true philosophy, around which his entire system rotates. This true infinite springs from ‘negation’ within thought (negating the opposition between finite and infinite) as the overcoming of the ‘nothing’ beyond thought.

Why Nothing Is Infinite

To fully appreciate Hegel’s derivation of the true infinite (and its significance for other parts of his system) we must connect the first movement of being-nothing and becoming with the later movement of finite-infinite and true infinite. After all, with the arrival of the true infinite Hegel suggests the circle is the proper the image for the true

infinite because in the circle “the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without *beginning* or *end*” (SL 148/WL 5:164). The circular nature of this his thought suggests it is appropriate to retrace earlier moments. To connect the beginning with the end (the true infinite) it is first necessary to set out the structural analogues between being/nothing and finite/infinite. After this the implications will be discussed concerning the nature of self-determining, or self-transcending thought.

We must first notice that just as the finite and the infinite are moments within the true infinite so too are being and nothing moments of becoming. In the earlier discussion on being-nothing Hegel remarked on the deficiency of claiming the direct “unity of being and nothing” because this expression is a one-sided truth that cancels out the absolute distinction between them (SL 90-3/WL 5:92-6). Hegel likewise adds a remark about the deficiency of emphasizing the unity of the finite and the infinite because a commitment to their unity must be immediately corrected by an opposing commitment that they “are absolutely different and opposed to each other” (SL 151/WL 5:167). But he then points out that this new position must also be corrected again by claiming again that the finite and infinite are “inseparable” (*untrennbar*). Because of this need to pile on qualifications, the infinite process mutates into the alternating determination of the unity (*Einheit*) and separateness (*Trennung*) of the finite and infinite, which *is*, nevertheless, inseparable (*untrennbar*) (SL 151/WL 5:168). In the end, for Hegel, the emphasis lands on the inseparability of the finite-infinite, after proper qualification.

It is exactly at this point, however, that the same question presents itself concerning the difference between being and nothing, but now in the reverse form. For being-nothing it was asked how their *difference* was maintained within their mutual

vanishing. Specifically, from where was the difference marked? But here the question concerns the affirmation of the *inseparability* of finite-infinite. In other words, why the necessity of inseparability? To answer this question we must take our previous analysis of how the *Logic* actually begins and extend it to the dialectic of the finite-infinite.

The previous analysis concluded that while the *Logic* formally begins *with* pure being, true thought only begins *at* becoming, and all this comes *from* nothing.

Concerning the dialectic of the true infinite, finite being now stands in the place of pure being and the spurious infinite for nothing. Hegel supports this himself by identifying the spurious infinite as “the nothing of the finite” (*das Nichts des Endlichen*) (SL 139/WL 5:151), which is here explicitly under the rule of the understanding (*Verstand*). As with the being-nothing alteration, the finite-infinite alternation ultimately collapses into an inseparable unity-in-separation, all governed by the understanding (*Verstand*) in its encounter with *nothing* (the nothing of the ‘beyond’ being rather of ‘pure’ being).

As with becoming, the true infinite comes also *from* nothing in the form of the spurious infinite, the nothing of the finite. The nothing that is *beyond* every finite as its limit is equal to the nothing *before* becoming, each governed by *Verstand* in its isolation from *Vernunft*. The failed thought of the spurious infinite (the ceasing-to-be which itself must cease to be, or the perpetual transcending of a limit which must itself be transcended) is just the explicit articulation of the initial failure of *Verstand* to think pure being as a beginning.

Is it any wonder, then, that after each of these failures Hegel adds remarks about the impossibility of a beginning? After his discussion of being-nothing Hegel comments on the impossibility that the world had a beginning. To ask about the beginning of the

world is to deny the unity of being and nothing, giving nothing its own independence from which being would then come. But this cannot be the case because “in nothing—or nothing—is no beginning (*im Nichts oder das Nichts ist nicht Anfang*) (SL 104/WL 5:110). As noted above, one cannot start *with* or *in* nothing, only *from* nothing as non-thought. Likewise, after the dialectic of the finite-infinite Hegel considers the question, “Can the infinite become finite?” He answers that the meaning of this question presupposes the separability of the infinite from the finite such that the infinite could then go into or become finite. But this is a denial of their inseparability. As Hegel states, either the infinite has eternally gone forth in finitude (which is Hegel’s position and is his denial of *creatio ex nihilo*), or the infinite has remained by itself “without having its other present *within it*” (SL 154/WL 5:171), a reversion back to the spurious infinite. The thought of nothing and the thought of the spurious infinite are both non-thoughts. Or rather, both encounter nothingness under the guidance of the understanding, and therefore fail.

As before, the failure of the spurious infinite reveals the failure of *Verstand* in isolation from *Vernunft*. Just as the difference between being-nothing was not the difference between them but the difference between the beginning of *Verstand* and the pure knowing of *Vernunft*, so too the inseparability of finite-infinite is not truly between the finite and the infinite but between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. Finite-infinite is deemed inseparable because *Verstand* has found that it is inseparable from *Vernunft* if it is to function properly, a lesson taught to *Verstand* through its two encounters with nothingness. In this way the nothing of understanding (*Verstand*) becomes the infinite of reason (*Vernunft*).

While Hegel does not explicitly make this claim, he has shown all along why ‘nothing *is* infinite.’ Taken in the negative sense in regard to the spurious infinite, it is ‘nothing’ cancels the spurious infinity and its beyond, i.e. there is no-thing beyond the finite now known as the true infinite. As a proposition this would claim, ‘The spurious infinite is nothing.’ On the other hand, taken positively concerning the true infinite, ‘nothing’ is the non-thought necessitating the true infinite, i.e. it is *from* nothing that true infinity comes. In both cases the nothingness of thought produces the self-enclosed infinity of being. That ‘nothing *is* infinity’ is another way of saying that Hegel takes into account both the immanent and the self-transcending nature of thought. Thought is immanent to itself because Hegel has attempted to show that there is ‘nothing’ *before* thought (within the being-nothing dialectic) and ‘nothing’ *after* thought (within the finite-infinite dialectic), and ‘negation’ is ‘nothing’ as it functions *within* thought. Thought is self-transcending because it is that which goes beyond all limits, preeminently seen in the transcending of the mutual limitations between the finite and the infinite leading to the true infinite.

Self-Transcending Immanence

This, then, is the logic of thought thinking itself that references nothing other than itself. ‘Nothing’ and its resultant infinity is the ‘key’ to unlocking the *Logic*, and Hegel’s system. Dieter Henrich claims one must have this key in order to understand the *Logic*, but laments that one never finds an exposition of this key within the *Logic* itself.³² The above analysis shows that we need not glean this key as a global inference from Hegel’s

³² Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lecture on German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 316-319.

system, but rather we find the key of nothing through the operations of pure knowing integrating *Verstand* with *Vernunft*, traced through the movements of being-nothing and finite-infinite. The self-transcendence of thought includes the logical category of ‘nothing’ by excluding nothingness as a non-thought, thereby internalizing ‘nothing’ as dialectical development through negation. In these opening chapters of the *Logic*, Hegel has shown the self-transcendence of thought within the very immanence of thought. Thought is self-transcending as the transcending of itself (as *Verstand*) by itself (as *Vernunft*). And yet it is an immanent because these movements have always been discerned from the perspective of *Vernunft* as pure knowing, the perspective by which thought discerns the difference between being and nothing, and the inseparability of the finite and infinite. These movements are the self-transcending immanence of thought thinking itself.

In a very Hegelian sense, to take up this key is to ‘have already’ opened the door and entered in. This is the reason for the eerie sense of always having been inside Hegel’s philosophy, especially when reading the *Phenomenology* or the *Logic*. One never meets Hegel at the door, but rather finds oneself already quite at home in his system, not sure how you got in or perhaps how to get out. Or even better, when we take up this key we find ourselves already deep at sea on the waters of free thought. For when Hegel says that “when we think freely, voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us, in solitude, alone by ourselves—then we are purely at home with ourselves,” (E §31) we must understand him quite literally, that there is ‘nothing’ under thought (below or before being) and ‘nothing’ above thought (beyond being).

This first section has argued that while the *Logic* formally begins *with* pure being, true thought only begins *at* becoming, and all this comes *from* nothing. The *Logic* includes ‘nothing’ by first excluding it as the non-thought of being. The *Logic* then internalizes this ‘non-thought’ as the productive process of negation. The failure of ‘nothing’ is taken up as ‘becoming’, which is developed as determinate being through its internal negations. This development culminates in the contradictions of finitude and finally issues in the thought of the true infinite. This section concluded with why ‘nothing *is* infinite’ and how this exemplifies the self-transcending immanence of thought for Hegel.

The *Logic*, however, only concerns *what* self-transcending immanence is in its element of pure thought or pure knowing. It is the *Phenomenology* that attempts to explain *why* one would adopt such a stance. Because it attempts to justify taking this stance, the *Phenomenology* acts as the presupposition of the *Logic*. Now that we have come to grasp what Hegel thinks to be the center of his system, i.e. the true infinite known through the self-determining development of thought itself, begun from nothing but itself, it is now time to examine the presupposition of such thought as it is articulated in the *Phenomenology*. As we will see, nothing and the true infinite are integral to the project of the *Phenomenology*, each playing prominent roles in the unfolding drama of consciousness.

2. Infinite Self-Consciousness: *Phenomenology of Spirit*

If nothing as negation is the key to Hegel’s system, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was intended to be the door. From the side of the *Logic* we noted Hegel’s claim that the

Phenomenology left behind the oppositions of ordinary consciousness that separates subject and object (form and content), and thus demonstrating the necessity of the standpoint of absolute knowing. To pass through the door of the *Phenomenology* is to exit the realm of ordinary consciousness and enter the abode of speculative philosophy. This second section will examine just how Hegel seeks to accomplish this passage into absolute knowing and ask whether he actually accomplishes it.

On the side of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel indicates his goal to elevate natural consciousness into the airy realm true knowledge (PS ¶77/PG 72), a process that can lay aside “the love of knowing and be actual knowledge” (PS ¶5/PG 14). Instead of speaking of immediacy and mediation or the question of beginnings as in the *Logic*, Hegel frames his discussion as understanding truth “not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*” (PS ¶17/PG 23), which entails that “all content is its own [Substance as Subject] reflection into itself” (PS ¶54/PG 53). Uniting content and form as substance and subject is accomplished through the patient labor and suffering of the negative (PS ¶18-19/PG 23-24). The system of true knowledge “that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed through the representation of the Absolute as Spirit (*Geist*),” and when *Geist* knows itself as *Geist* becomes the science Hegel intends to establish (PS ¶25/PG 28-29), becoming the presupposition of the *Logic*.

As Hegel hopes to show, the life of *Geist* does not shrink back from death, but endures and dwells in death as a “tarrying with the negative” (PS ¶32/PG 36). Here H. S. Harris sees an allusion to Jesus as the first figure to embrace death as an individual *subject* representing universal *substance*, preparing the reader for the Calvary of absolute

spirit at the end of the *Phenomenology* (PS ¶808/PG 591).³³ This tarrying with the negative feels like death for ordinary consciousness unaccustomed to the rigors of scientific thought. To purify ordinary consciousness of its commitment to representational thinking (a thinking which separates subject from object) it must pass through its own stations of the cross (PS ¶77/PG 72),³⁴ a “way of despair” that acts as the “*education of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science*” (PS ¶78/PG 72-73). This emphasis on negation as the feeling of death reveals the fundamental congruence between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* regarding the way of thought. Within the austere atmosphere of the *Logic* there is no need to speak of life, death, or despair. But below, in the rough and ready world of phenomenal consciousness, Hegel is bracing the reader for a severe journey.

The goal of this journey is that “point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond [transcend] itself (*sich selbst hinauszu gehen*), where knowledge finds itself, where Notion (*Begriff*) corresponds to object (*Gegenstande*) and object to Notion” (PS ¶80/PG 74). Two things to note from this formulation: first, that the Notion and object would correspond and vice versa is exactly what the *Logic* assumes as its beginning in pure knowing. And, second, the idea of something not needing to go beyond itself should immediately remind us of the status of the true infinite as self-transcending. But Hegel continues by making this key statement: “Consciousness, however, is explicitly the *Notion* of itself. Hence, it is something that [immediately] goes beyond limits, and since

³³ H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 78, 107 n. 139.

³⁴ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, 175.

these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself” (PS ¶80/PG 74).³⁵

Having encountered the *Logic*, when we read that consciousness is that which goes beyond or transcends (*das Hinausgehen*) limits, we should immediately think of how Hegel describes the true infinite as having transcended the transcending of limits. He is saying that consciousness is that which transcends all limits, and is therefore self-transcending as that which “goes beyond itself.” Hegel is preparing us for the eventual realization that consciousness (expanded into self-consciousness and *Geist*) is itself the true infinite as absolute knowing.

As our interest is both on the role of *Verstand* in placing limits (especially the limit of the beyond, *Jenseits*), and how consciousness transcends these limits, we will trace three movements in which consciousness goes beyond its own limits. And because Hegel likens the freedom of thought to “voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us” (E §31), this investigation of the *Phenomenology* will take the form of three sounds in which Hegel seeks to plumb the deep sea of consciousness. The first sounding concerns the understanding (*Verstand*) and its encounter with the supersensible beyond, an encounter that prompts the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. This transition into self-consciousness sets up the second encounter between the Unhappy Consciousness and its in God as transcendent other. The

³⁵ The full text reads, “*Das Bewußtsein aber ist für sich selbst sein Begriff, dadurch unmittelbar das Hinausgehen über das Beschränkte und, da ihm dies Beschränkte angehört, über sich selbst.*” The particular difficulty is with the phrase “*dadurch unmittelbar das Hinausgehen über das Beschränkte.*” Miller unfortunately drops *unmittelbar* altogether, but attempts to catch the nounal form of *das Hinausgehen* as “something that goes beyond.” Pinkard translates this phrase more literally as “and as a result it immediately goes beyond the restriction” but loses the distinctive sense of *das Hinausgehen* by making it into a verb thereby (over)emphasizing the activity of consciousness rather than its nature as “the going beyond” of limits.

movement beyond this limit encompasses the rest of the *Phenomenology*, provisionally accomplished on the socio-historical level through mutual forgiveness at the end of chapter VI, but made explicit by Christianity in the incarnation and crucifixion in chapter VII. This explicit encounter within Christianity constitutes the third and final sounding we will take, noting how it issues into the thought of pure knowing as the absolute. These soundings, especially the second one, will also lay the groundwork for understanding Hegel's social theory examined in the next chapter.

After these soundings are made this section will end by asking whether Hegel has indeed accomplished his goal of uniting subject and object by overcoming all otherness. It will be shown that just as the *Logic* only includes 'nothing' by first excluding it as a non-thought, so too the *Phenomenology* includes 'the beyond' and 'otherness' by first excluding them as non-thoughts. This inclusion through preemptive exclusion results in a lack of true encounter with the 'beyond' or 'other' of thought, always reducing it to the indeterminacy of non-thought. And if this is the case then Hegel, even in the *Phenomenology*, will merely have assumed his own argument rather than having proved it.

Consciousness and the Infinite: First Sounding

Force and Understand

The *Phenomenology* opens with three chapters on consciousness, examining three forms of consciousness and the types of objects that are opposed to this consciousness. In each form consciousness is attempting to secure certainty of knowledge regarding the object with having to make reference to itself. In each case this ultimately fails. The first

two forms of consciousness (chapters I and II) seek to establish certain knowledge of the object by referencing, first, a purely sensuous ‘This’, and second, a perceived ‘Thing’. The sensuous ‘This’ succumbed to internal contradiction as space (‘Here’) and time (‘Now’) were introduced to identify the ‘This’, a space and time quickly multiplying into a plurality of Here’s and Now’s creating a structural instability only resolved through the introduction of the activity of consciousness. Likewise, the supposedly independent ‘Thing’ entered a plurality of relationships with itself and other things rendering its supposed independence void. Attempting to avoid making consciousness the constitutive center of the object, the understanding next posits ‘force’ as the unity of objects. Chapter III of the *Phenomenology* investigates this attempt to establish knowledge of objects through reference to ‘force’. From the perspective of the understanding (*Verstand*) the new object of investigation in chapter III is “force,” but for the phenomenologist looking at the entire process (which is the perspective of Hegel and the reader) the new object is the understanding itself.³⁶

The first move of the understanding is to substantialize force, thereby saving this new object as somehow *in* the world. This force is both the inner ‘principle’ unifying each thing and the outer ‘expression’ of its diverse properties (PS ¶135/Pg 109-111). As both ‘principle’ and ‘expression’ force is the “unity of itself and its externalization.”³⁷ But substantializing force way causes its two moments (inner and outer) to split into two forces, the active and passive forces within and between objects. The substantializing of force causes it to fall apart into the play of many forces.

³⁶ Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, 263.

³⁷ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. by Samuel Cherniak and John Henkman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 121.

While moving quickly and somewhat forced,³⁸ Hegel's claim is that the understanding's attempt to give force substance results in placing the 'truth of force' within the 'thought of force'. If the 'truth of force' is at the same time the 'thought of force' then "the realization of Force is at the same time the loss of reality" because force cannot be *perceived* in things as a substance but only *conceived* behind, above, or beyond, these things (PS ¶141/PG 115). For Hegel, this realization is the movement from the first thought of force (as substance) to the second thought of force as only "an *object for the Understanding*," an object which "is the *inner being* of things *qua* inner" (PS ¶142/PG 115-16).

With the realization that force is the inner *qua* inner of things (not the sensible, perceived, or substantial), and that it is *through* the understanding that this non-sensible inner is known, the understanding comes to see that *it* is that which "*looks through this mediating play of Forces into the true background of Things*" (PS ¶143/PG 116). This admission of the necessity of mediation is a conclusion consciousness has been attempting to deny ever since positing the immediacy of sense-certainty (against the mediation of space, time, or language), or by positing the immediacy of the perceived object (against the mediation of other objects).

But the understanding again attempts to dodge this result by externalizing its own mediation between the sensible and the inner world of things by positing 'appearance' as that which mediates between the understanding and the inner world (of the things) (PS

³⁸ Hyppolite comments that "this whole dialectic concerning the being of things for consciousness prefigures a dialectic of spirit, a dialectic which seems to be more profound in the world of spirit than in nature. Here, Hegel's subtlety strikes us as somewhat empty and forced. What is essential is to understand the direction of his whole argument: to lead us to see the dialectic of intelligence in the dialectic of the real" (*Genesis and Structure*, 124).

¶143/PG 116-17). Appearance is the sensible (*sinnlichen*) world of experience in contrast with the supersensible (*übersinnliche*) world of the beyond (*Jenseits*) (PS ¶144/PG 117). The construction of this syllogism (between consciousness and supersensible mediated by appearance) is the first time consciousness willfully posits a mediation rather than suppressing it, inferring the supersensible on the basis of the sensible (PS ¶145/PG 117). The positing of this supersensible beyond as a means understanding the unity of experienced objects brings us to the cusp of our first sounding.

Understanding and the Beyond

Concerning the supersensible beyond, Hegel begins with a typically Kantian conception of it as “*empty*, for it is merely the nothingness of appearance,” the unknowable “inner being of Things” (PS ¶146/PG 117). Hegel contends that this emptiness is not based in any limitation (*beschränkt*) of reason (*Vernunft*), but merely because the terms demand that the beyond of consciousness (*Jenseits des Bewußtseins*) to be an empty void in which nothing is known (PS ¶146/PG 118). This initial definition of the beyond should immediately remind us of how the *Logic* began with the nothingness of pure being as the failure of thought, a failure of thought indicating the failure of the Kantian understanding (*Verstand*) concerning the limits of reason (*Vernunft*). Here Hegel is not concerned with the derivation of the categories of logic, but with exposing the false priority of *Verstand* within Kantian epistemology.

Unlike Kant who understood the noumenal realm as marking the limits of reason, Hegel faults the conception. If the supersensible beyond has no link with sensible phenomena then every quest for true knowledge will fail. But because the supersensible

beyond (*übersinnliche Jenseits*) has come into existence as a inference from the sensible, the supersensible beyond must be connected intelligibly to appearance, such that the supersensible is the *truth* of the sensible. Or as Hegel says, “the supersensible is therefore *appearance qua appearance*” (PS ¶147/PG 118). To say that the supersensible world is the truth of appearance means the supersensible world is the true interpretation of the sensible; it is appearance thought *through*.³⁹ To understand this we must closely follow the thread of Hegel’s argument concerning understanding and force.

When the understanding looks upon the “play of forces” known as the world of appearance, it learns to think the supersensible beyond standing behind this play. The understanding posits a law as that which gathers and guides this play of forces (Phen. ¶148/PG 119-20), such that the “absolute alternation”⁴⁰ of the play of forces contrasted to the *law* as the “*stable* image of unstable appearance” (PS ¶149/PG 120). While the sensible world is known as the incessant change of alternating forces, the understanding posits a law within the supersensible world acting to balance all equations, uniting the difference on both sides of the equal sign.

But, as could be easily guessed by Hegel’s typical procedure, the stable image of the supersensible world rapidly runs into its own internal contradictions. Indeed, the “tranquil kingdom of laws, the immediate copy of the perceived world, is changed into its opposite” (PS ¶157/PG 127). This occurs because law as an abstraction is empty and

³⁹ Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, 281. See also E §5 on how philosophy thinks-over (*Nachdenken*) things.

⁴⁰ What is rendered here as “absolute alternation” (*absoluten Wechsel/absolut wechselnde*), following Harris (*Hegel’s Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997], 283) is “absolute flux” in Miller (¶148 and ¶149). Miller’s “flux” seems to emphasize the chaos and movement of the sensible world to the detriment of the more ordered movement of opposites which “alternation” brings to the fore.

indeterminate. If this is the case then the supersensible beyond still as empty as a Kantian beyond and is therefore of no use for securing knowledge. Only *a* law is determinate. But no single law can explain the multiplicity of forces leading to plurality of laws within the supersensible beyond.

The understanding, however, moves to blame itself for these failures, suggesting that the multiplicity of laws is merely its own attempts to “explain” the inner workings of the supersensible world. This attempt fails because these explanations are themselves tautologies, making distinctions (within understanding) without a difference (to the supersensible world) (PS ¶154-55/PG 124-26). In taking up “explanation” as a possible solution the understanding begins to see itself as “the *law of appearance*.” If these explanation have no relationship to the supersensible beyond then this beyond is again rendered empty. To avoid this situation all the distinctions created by the understanding’s attempt at ‘explaining’ the multiplicity of laws must also be posited within the supersensible world for otherwise connection to knowledge of the object would again be lost (PS ¶156/PG 126-27). Because of this, the “absolute alternation” of forces thought to be mitigated by understanding’s explanation is now see to have penetrated into the heart of the “tranquil kingdom” causing its inversion into a “second supersensible world (*zweite übersinnliche Welt*)” (PS ¶157/PG 127). This is an inversion from the stable kingdom of laws to the unstable alternation of laws.

The admittance of second supersensible world is the second time the understanding is compelled to do something it otherwise would not want to do. The first was the initial admittance of the supersensible beyond after the understanding failed to describe force as a substance available to sensuous perception. In the attempt to find a stable realm of laws

behind the world of fluctuating appearance, understanding has instead found that nothing is ever at rest, neither itself nor the supersensible world. Both the sensible and the supersensible are worlds in constant motion. Instead of perpetually seeking to find stability in a realm beyond change, the understanding must altogether eliminate “the sensuous [representation] of fixing the differences” (*die sinnliche Vorstellung von der Befestigung der Unterschiede*) within a stable order as an attempt at securing knowledge and must instead allow that the supersensible is itself “pure change” (*reine Wechse*), or “inner difference” (*der Unterschied als innerer*) (PS ¶160/PG 131). Rather than positing an infinite regress of supersensible worlds (third, fourth, fifth, etc.), which it would do while under the sway of “sensuous representation” (*sinnliche Vorstellung*), the understanding must eliminate this way of thinking and learn to think “pure change” as the “inner difference” of objects themselves. When the understanding does this it learns to think the totality of differences within the supersensible “as an *infinity*” (*als Unendlichkeit*), which is nothing other than itself (PS ¶160/PG 131).

Understanding and Infinity

This incredibly compressed argument makes sense when compared to the derivation of the infinite in the *Logic*. Here in the *Phenomenology*, the sensible plays the role of the finite while the supersensible is the spurious infinite. To halt an infinite regress of higher supersensible worlds posited to guarantee the truth of the sensible, the understanding must change its perspective on the situation, just as was the case for the spurious infinite. To do this the understanding must think the pure change of “inner difference” (*innern Unterschiedes*) as “a *difference* which is no *difference*” (*ein*

Unterschied, *welcher kein Unterschied ist*) (PS ¶161/PG 131). This “inner difference” where sensible and supersensible are united through ““a *difference* which is no *difference*” parallels the need to view the finite and the infinite in their separateness (*Trennung*) while remaining inseparable (*untrennbar*). In both cases the infinite is the name Hegel gives to that change of perspective needed to resolves the inner contradictions off an infinite regress.

What this means for the development of consciousness within the *Phenomenology* is that the three terms previously held apart, the two extremes ends of (1) the understanding and (2) the supersensible mediated by (3) appearance, have all collapsed together. The understanding comes to know that the supersensible is nothing other than its own experience of itself (its operations of knowing). The understanding had misrecognized this situation because it had posited something besides itself (the supersensible beyond) as the cause of the sensible world. As Hegel says rather poetically, when the (sensible) curtain hanging in front of the inner being of things is taken away, consciousness comes to sees itself there in the empty place (PS ¶165/PG 135). The pulling of the curtain in which consciousness sees itself expresses the mirroring effect of consciousness becoming aware of itself through its own process of thought. Consciousness, now conscious of itself, is therefore a *self-conscious* consciousness (PS ¶164/PG 134-5).

As was the case in the *Logic*, Hegel’s opening investigation into the operations of consciousness culminates in a failure that is a success. At each step, consciousness has failed to secure the independence of the object. The object of sense-certainty vanished within emptiness of spatial and temporal indexicals. The object of perception was lost

within its contradictory relationships. And the supersensible beyond only proved to be the work of the understanding itself. In each case, but especially with the supersensible beyond, consciousness attempted to separate substance (object) from subject (consciousness). But these failures redoubled in consciousness coming to know itself as self-consciousness. The failure of consciousness to secure knowledge of its objects without reference to its own operation has revealed that consciousness is also self-consciousness.

This failure, preeminently as the collapse of the supersensible beyond, constitutes the first sounding of the *Phenomenology* as consciousness encounters its beyond. Consciousness has come to know itself as a self-transcending immanence because it transcends its objects of knowledge even while remaining immanent to itself as a conscious self-consciousness. The exposition of this self-consciousness and its own form of the beyond we will now turn in the second sounding as we follow Hegel in plumbs the depths of thought.

Self-Consciousness and the Infinite: Second Sounding

With the curtain of appearance raised, the social drama of self-consciousness begins. Moving from the shadows of the “nightlike void of the supersensible beyond,” self-consciousness now steps center stage, lit by the “spiritual daylight of the present” (PS¶ 177/PG 145). Now an engaged actor, rather than passive observer, self-consciousness participates in the dramatic struggle of life and death, demands recognition, confesses sins and offers forgiveness. Certainly the shadowy figure of the

‘beyond’ will make a return appearance, but for now all attention is focused on self-consciousness.

The stage on which self-consciousness acts is “the native land of truth” (PS ¶166/PG 137) on which self-consciousness now seeks its own self-certainty rather than the certainty of its objects.⁴¹ As Gadamer says, “truth is no longer like the foreign country of otherness into which consciousness seeks to penetrate.”⁴² Instead of transgressing the barriers of a forbidden land (i.e. the supersensible beyond), self-consciousness is now at home in the land of truth, the master of its own domain. Unfortunately, self-consciousness soon finds other forces at work in this land, and most importantly, finds that it is not alone.

The focus of this sounding will not be on the social and political aspects of Hegel’s theory of self-consciousness and recognition, as these will be investigated more closely in the next chapter. Rather, the focus will be on how Hegel places of self-consciousness between the otherness of life *below* and the otherness of the *beyond* above. The former reveals how self-consciousness is in truth a spiritual being not reducible to natural life. The latter indicates the potential problems of this spiritual being, its failures and success. While many focus more on the middle section of chapter IV concerning the master/slave dialectic, we will spend more time on the before and after his dialectic seeking to understanding how self-consciousness as *Geist* separates itself from both natural life and a supernatural God.

The Self-Conscious Life as Desire

⁴¹ Hegel’s title for chapter four is “The Truth of Self-Certainty,” and is the only chapter within section B on “Self-Consciousness.”

⁴² Gadamer, *Hege’s Dialectic*, 59.

With the shift to self-consciousness we should not think that consciousness is forgotten or discarded. Instead, the rather static consciousness is contained within the more dynamic self-consciousness. Explaining this in reference to otherness (the problem so fundamental to consciousness), Hegel notes that self-consciousness “is essentially the return from *otherness*” such that in this return consciousness and “the whole expanse of the sensuous world is preserved” (PS ¶167/PG 138-9). In the return from the otherness of objects (which were found not to be truly other but already within constituted by the understanding), self-consciousness now finds itself at home in the world. It is no longer merely aware of the world and its forces, but is aware of itself within a world that is its own. As Harris says, “Being at home in the world is a matter of *making* a home in it.”⁴³ This making of a world rather than observing it is what Hegel calls desire. Indeed, “self-consciousness is *Desire* in general” (*es ist Begierde überhaupt*) (PS ¶167/PG 139).

Self-consciousness finds that rather than merely being a *thinking being* it is also a *living being*. Its own life, and the continuation of this life, is the principle object of desire through which objects are filtered (PS ¶168/PG 139-40). That self-consciousness is a living being means it no longer has theoretical objects of cognition but practical objects of desire. But the demands of this biological life threaten the independence of self-consciousness and its life of thought. To regain its confidence as more than mere biological life self-consciousness eliminates other objects (through consumption or destruction) in an attempt to prove that they really *are not* and that it really *is* (PS ¶174/PG 143). In this way self-consciousness gains its self-certainty as more than merely natural; i.e. self-consciousness (as infinite thought) goes beyond itself (as finite life).

⁴³ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, 320.

This elimination of other objects proves that self-consciousness is still the master of its domain. The desire for self-certainty (that is its more than a living being) is satisfied as self-consciousness returns from the otherness of life.

This satisfaction, however, is short lived. This is the case for two reasons. First, another desire is always produced by the needs of biological life. And second, whenever self-consciousness negates an object as proof of its mastery self-consciousness simultaneously destroys the condition by which it proves its own mastery (PS ¶175/PG 143). The satisfaction of self-consciousness seems forever deferred within the endless task of negating natural objects.

This is the case unless a new kind of object appears. The problem with natural objects is that self-consciousness is the one negating them. But if there were an object that “effects negation within itself” (*selbst die Negation an ihm vollzieht*) because “it is *in itself* the negative” (*er ist an sich das Negative*), then self-consciousness could achieve its goal (PS ¶175/PG 143). This new kind of object, able to negate itself, would persist before self-consciousness because the needed negation comes from the side of the object. Because this negation is a self-negation of and by the object itself, this new kind of object would give a lasting confirmation that self-consciousness is truly a self-consciousness. But the only object that is (1) independent of the self-consciousness but (2) can also self-negate its own independence and thereby prove the independence of self-consciousness, is another *self-consciousness*.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 52.

If this is true, then “*self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*” (PS ¶175/PG 144).⁴⁵ The desire of self-consciousness to confirm itself as more than mere biological life is satisfied only through another self-consciousness who is also more than its biological life. This recognition, gained through another, is the means of securing self-certainty for self-consciousness. When the desire for life is transformed into the desire for another self-consciousness (the desire to be recognized by another self-consciousness), then self-consciousness enters the more than merely natural life of *Geist*. As Hegel says in anticipation of later developments, the fullness of this life of *Geist* is the “unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses” as they enjoy “perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (PS ¶177/PG 145). Unfortunately, the full experience of this “I that is We and We that is I” must await the long process of *Geist*’s development ending in chapter VI (to which we will turn at the end of this sounding).

What concerns us for the moment is the movement of the infinite in the process of recognition. Hegel tells us “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another” (PS ¶178/PG 145). All of this occurs through a “process of recognition” between two self-consciousnesses which is “infinity realizing itself in self-consciousness” (PS ¶178/PG 146).⁴⁶ Hegel goes on to elaborate how the first self-consciousness comes to recognize itself through its other and how this other self-consciousness comes to recognize itself through the first self-consciousness (PS ¶184/PG 147). This elaboration parallels Hegel’s discussion of how, once the true

⁴⁵ Hegel emphasizes the entire sentence.

⁴⁶ Translation from Pinkard. Miller inexplicably overlooks this entire phrase (*der sich im Selbstbewußtsein realisierenden Unendlichkeit*) in his translation.

infinite is understood properly, it makes no difference whether one starts with the finite or the infinite because the finite always receives itself back from the infinite and the infinite receives itself back from the finite. As he says in the *Logic*, each is the self-sublation of the other, or rather “both the finite and the infinite are this *movement* in which each returns to itself through its negation” (SL 147/WL 162). If we replace finite and infinite with self-consciousness and its alternate self-consciousness, then we have the process of recognition whereby each returns to itself through the its other. This is the movement of the true infinite played out on the level of self-consciousness, a movement of recognition that Hegel calls “spiritual unity” (*geistigen Einheit*) (PS ¶178/PG 146).

Through this process of mutual recognition Hegel is explaining “the transition from a natural to a spiritual being,”⁴⁷ such that within the native realm of truth self-consciousness is a spiritual being within/as *Geist*. For Hegel this is the nature of self-consciousness as it returns from otherness: it first returns from the otherness of cognitive objects and then the otherness of another self-consciousness.

The Unhappy Consciousness

This opening investigation into self-consciousness is necessary before encountering Hegel’s famous ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ and its confrontation with an extreme form of otherness, the Unchangeable God. As just noted, for self-consciousness to truly recognize itself (to gain self-certain of itself) another self-consciousness is required. But Hegel’s account of the initial encounter between these two self-

⁴⁷ Axel Honneth, “From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Account of Human Sociality,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide* ed. by Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

consciousnesses is not a cordial mutual recognition. Rather, this process of recognition begins as a struggle to the death, a struggle then raised to a new level of opposition between the Stoic and Skeptic consciousnesses, culminating in the Unhappy Consciousness as the internalization of both, all experienced as a contradictory of existence (PS ¶206/PG 163).

From where does this experience of contradiction come? It comes initially from the incomplete movement of recognition between the master and the slave. In the struggle for recognition one self-consciousness fights another for the right to be recognized, resulting in one negating itself (denying its independence) before the other. The slave thinks it better to side with life rather than pursue its own self-recognition in the face of death. But the master's victory is short lived. In the self-negating act of the slave, moving from independence to dependent, the slave becomes unequal to the master and therefore loses its ability to confirm the mastery of the master (PS ¶191-2/PG 151-2). The condition of possibility for recognition is lost in the servitude of the slave. Because of this loss, as Jean Hyppolite says, "the path of mastery is a dead end in human experience; the path of servitude is the true path of human liberation."⁴⁸ The path of servitude leads to liberation because while working for the master the slave comes to understand itself as both the master of itself and master of the world, even if not yet master of another self-consciousness. Rather than merely consuming objects as the master does, the slave learns that it can create objects. Through these independent objects of creation, the slave comes to see its own independence from the master (PS ¶195/PG 154).

⁴⁸ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 174.

Through this work the slave remembers (returned through the otherness of its created objects) that it is not merely a living being, but also a thinking being. From this achievement of independence comes a new experience of freedom in the form of Stoic self-consciousness. The Stoic understands its true identity as thought freed from the servile work in the world below, dwelling instead within in a tranquil kingdom above. The Stoic expresses the “pure universality of thought” whether on the throne or in chains, seeking to “maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence...into the simple essentiality of thought” (PS ¶199/PG 157). Much like how the understanding posited the “supersensible beyond” as the dwelling place of inner essences, now the Stoic places itself in the pure realm of thought above the polluting fluctuations of everyday life.

But this abstract freedom of thought cannot persist. Just as there was no tranquil kingdom of law for the understanding but instead only constant alteration (*Wechsel*), so too the abstract and lifeless freedom of the Stoic is inverted as the permanent change (*Wandel*) of everything (PS ¶205/PG 161). The Skeptical self-consciousness understands that because it is essentially *thought* it is unchangeable, but because it has *thoughts* it is also always changing. The Skeptic revels in this contradiction between unchangeable thought and changeable thoughts by focusing this contradiction outside itself, rather than within. This is, however, a self-contradictory state for the Skeptic who willfully suppresses its own duplicity (ignoring its own embodied existence) even while exposing the duplicity of the Stoic (PS ¶205/PG 161). In the end, neither the Stoic nor Skeptic have embraced existence below, each opting for different escapes into the realm of thought above. Only the Unhappy Consciousness knows that it cannot use the freedom

of thought to flee its finite existence (i.e. it is both a living and a thinking being) (PS ¶206/PG 163). The Unhappy Consciousness comes on stage as the full expression of the contradictory existence of self-consciousness caught between infinite thought (unchangeable) and finite being (changeable).

All throughout, however, self-consciousness has not given up its attempt to gain self-certainty. In view of this desire, the Unhappy Consciousness seeks to unify itself with the Unchangeable (now projected as God) as a way to garner a minimal level of self-certainty. The Unhappy Consciousness seeks this unity with the Unchangeable in three phases: the immediate phase of pure feeling; the external phase of work and enjoyment; and the mediated phase of penance. The first seeks union with the Unchangeable through the “pure feeling” of devotion through its “infinite yearning.” But in seeking to lay hold of the Unchangeable in its beyond (*Jenseits*), the Unhappy Consciousness only ends up laying hold of its own feeling because it cannot think the beyond, much less go into there to find the Unchangeable. “Where that ‘other’ is sought, it cannot be found, for it is supposed to be just a *beyond*, something that can *not* be found” (PS ¶217/PG 169). Hegel’s positioning of the Unchangeable God in the ‘beyond’ (*Jenseits*) of thought parallels the understandings encounter with the “supersensible beyond” (*übersinnliche Jenseits*), revealing the symmetry between consciousness and self-consciousness.

After this failure of immediacy, the Unhappy Consciousness goes back into the world to find union with the Unchangeable (PS ¶218/PG 170). The Unhappy Consciousness now finds the world not merely as something to negate through its consumptive activities, but as already both null (*nichtig*) in its separation from the Unchangeable and yet sanctified (*geheiligte*) as created by the Unchangeable, mirroring

the plight of the Unhappy Consciousness itself (PS ¶219/PG 170-1). This return to the world again takes the form of work as it had for the slave. In its work and the enjoyment of the goods produced, in recognizing the gifts of creation and the power of freedom to work the land, which both come from “the Unchangeable beyond” (*dem unwandelbaren Jenseits*) (PS ¶220/PG 171), the Unhappy Consciousness gives thanks and therefore gains a sense of unity with the Unchangeable (PS ¶222/PG 172). But this unity again breaks down because the thanksgiving is an inauthentic surrender to the Unchangeable. The Unhappy Consciousness knows that it was active and free in its work, not the Unchangeable to whom is attributed true activity and freedom. The Unhappy Consciousness has only recapitulated the freedom of the slave at a more fundamental level (PS ¶222/PG 172-3).

In having proved itself independent through work and yet still lacking union with the Unchangeable, the Unhappy Consciousness renounces all such attempt to negate something in its search for self-certainty, and instead considers its own independence as if it were itself nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*) (PS ¶224/PG 173). Self-consciousness repents of its pursuit of self-certainty and negates *itself* before the transcendent master, the Unchangeable God. In this way the Unhappy Consciousness has made itself nothing. Of course the irony for the reader of the *Phenomenology*, and especially readers of the *Logic*, is that the beyond (*Jenseits*) of the Unchangeable is itself actually nothing, a truth that the Unhappy Consciousness is not yet privy.

But as always, the failure of thought as it encounters nothing, in this instance the Unhappy Consciousness (as something made into nothing) before the Unchangeable (a nothing thought to be something), is productive for thought. While the Unhappy

Consciousness knows itself to be nothing, this knowledge of itself as nothing comes only in *relation* to the Unchangeable. The self-negation of the Unhappy Consciousness (through repentance) is mediated through an experience of the Unchangeable (PS ¶226/PG 174). This mediation is accomplished between the Unhappy Consciousness and the Unchangeable by a middle term “which presents the two extremes to one another, and ministers to each in its dealings with the other.” This mediator, likely a priest though only called a servant (*Diener*) (PS ¶228/PG 175), administers the forgiveness of the Unchangeable to the individual consciousness that has surrendered itself in repentance. When the Unchangeable is mediated to the Unhappy Consciousness it receives its self-certainty through the Unchangeable, but in an unequal manner (PS ¶230/PG 176-7).

Forgiving the Unhappy Consciousness

It is hard to underestimate the full significance of this resolution for the Unhappy Consciousness and the introduction of a mediator. The role of the mediator (priest) is essential because it re-inserts humanity within the process of recognition. The full significance of this is not experienced until the end of chapter VI where ‘conscience’ overcomes of the moral point of view at, setting the stage for the expression of mutual, rather than one-sided, forgiveness.

In Hegel’s view, Kantian morality mirrors Stoic detachment resulting in the impossibility of actually knowing and acting morally. The rise of ‘conscience’ breaks this deadlock because one’s actions are *immediate* known to be morally good (PS ¶637/PG 468). Moral deliberation according to abstract maxims is replaced with the immediacy of personal moral conviction. Conscience makes itself objective in the world through its

actions. The problem, however, with basing one's morality on one's own conscience is that every (objective) action can elicit divergent (subjective) interpretations. Because every individual conscience believes itself to be good, each actor must consider alternative interpretations of its actions (by rival consciences) to be evil (PS ¶649/PG 477-8). This ends in a plurality of individuals acting conscientiously, all claiming the good for themselves and evil in others (PS ¶653-9/PG 479-85). This conflict repeats the earlier struggle for recognition, but now on the level of justifying moral action.

This conflict of interpretations splits the individual consciences between those who act and those who judge. Those who act bite the bullet and risk entering their action into the conflict of interpretations, opening themselves to the interpretations of others who seek to unmask their convictions as mere self-serving hypocrisy. In this way, the ones who act commit themselves to the truth and goodness of their action, even if others might call it evil (PS ¶662/PG 486). Those who judge refuse to enter into such a conflict of interpretations and would rather retain their moral purity as the judge of those who act (PS ¶664/PG 487). The former (actors) take their stand within changeable particularity and the latter (judges) within unchangeable universality. This is a repetition of the estrangement between the Unhappy Consciousness and the Unchangeable, but now on the intra-human (social) level between those who act and those who judge.

This creates a situation of mutual hostility and moral instability between the estranged parties. The solution for Hegel is for each party to confess its one-sided commitment to either particularity (actors) or universality (judges), and thereby forgives one another. When mutual forgiveness occurs then reconciliation between the two parties is accomplished. This reconciliation allows for the achievement of a true mutual

recognition. This confession make here is not abject debasement of oneself as it was in the act of penance for the Unhappy Consciousness (actor) before the Unchangeable (judge). Rather, this confession is a giving over of a one-side and subjective position in light of a dawning equality of one-sidedness (PS ¶666/PG 490). In other words, each confesses the sinfulness of their own finitude.⁴⁹ The actor and the judge each desire to claim the perspective of infinite thought within finite being. Only in confessing their own one-sided commitment (to either acting or judging) and only in forgiving each other can each come to recognize one another, realizing that infinite thought within finite being is only accomplished through their mutual recognition.

Hegel states that this process is how “the wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind” (PS ¶669/PG 492). The beginning of this wound goes all the way back to the struggle for recognition, a wound deepened in the encounter between the Unhappy Consciousness and the Unchangeable. This wound appears in various forms throughout the *Phenomenology*: from the divide between duty to family (Antigone) and duty to city (Creon) in the Greek city-state up to the divide between Enlightenment Freedom and Revolutionary Terror. All of these wounds are resolved in the mutual forgiveness within a community of actors/judges that unites infinite thought and finite existence. Through mutual forgiveness self-consciousness accomplishes what it has been seeking from the beginning of chapter IV. In mutual forgiveness it has now achieved self-certainty through a process of mutual recognition.

What we have seen in this sounding from IV of the *Phenomenology* (completed only at the end of chapter VI) is the development of self-consciousness as that which

⁴⁹ On the sinfulness of finitude see Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 519-521.

“goes beyond itself.” As that which goes beyond itself as more than natural, self-consciousness did not achieve recognition in its struggle to the death, eventually developing into the Unhappy Consciousness limited by God (the Unchangeable). This limitation was provisionally mitigated by the mediation of God’s presence through another human being. Self-consciousness only goes beyond this limit in a community of those who confess and forgive their mutual limitations (the sinfulness of their finitude). This mutual forgiveness is the infinite process of mutual recognition expressing the “I that is We and the We that is I” as perfect freedom and independence (PS ¶177/PG 145).

In this mutual forgiveness, Hegel says, God is no longer the Unchangeable above humanity, but is now found within human community, mediated not through a priest set apart, but through each person who renounces their own one-sided perspective. As Hegel says in the concluding lines of chapter VI:

The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two ‘I’s let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the ‘I’ which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and in its complete [emptying] (*Entäußerung*) and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge. (PS ¶671/PG 494)

In the mutual forgiveness that secures mutual recognition and self-certainty, God is seen to be no longer locked in the beyond above, but walking on the earth below, manifested in the infinite recognition between individuals. This life of *Geist*, as mentioned earlier, is the “unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses” as they enjoy “perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (PS ¶177/PG 145). This unity of ‘I’ and ‘We’ as an accomplished mutual recognition, securing the self-certainty of self-consciousness as more than merely life below and yet not limited by God above, is our second sounding. This second sounding has shown how Hegel seeks to overcome the

otherness of natural life and the otherness of the God beyond through the mutual recognition within human community. This overcoming of otherness in human community is the life of *Geist*. By “going beyond itself” as more than life below shows self-consciousness to be self-transcending. By eventually establishing mutual recognition without reference to a beyond self-consciousness shows itself to be immanent. In this way Hegel establishes self-consciousness as self-transcending immanence.

Religion and the Infinite, and Beyond: Third Sounding

Our third and last sounding concerning Hegel’s system relates to the “God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge” (PS ¶671/PG 494), but now known explicitly from the standpoint of religion rather than from morality. At the beginning of chapter VII Hegel makes it clear that religion has already made its presence felt along the way, even if unrecognized. Religion first appeared for consciousness in the form of the supersensible (*Übersinnlichen*) of the understanding (*Verstand*), and then for self-consciousness in the form of a beyond (*Jenseits*) for the Unhappy Consciousness (PS ¶673/PG 495).⁵⁰ But now, with religion comes the explicit self-consciousness of *Geist* as *Geist* instead of the implicit form encountered in the community of mutual forgiveness (PS ¶672/PG 495).

As with the other soundings, it is impossible to cover in detail all that Hegel has to say regarding religion. Instead we will again focus on those parts that present his philosophy as self-transcending immanence. This means we will jump from God

⁵⁰ The other instances of religion that Hegel notes are the underworld for the Greeks, heaven for the medievals, and the re-instatement of the ‘supersensible beyond’ in the Enlightenment.

appearing (*erscheinende*) in the mutually forgiving community to God revealed (*offenbare*) as the basis of such reconciliation, focusing primarily on Christological issues rather than Hegel's Trinitarian reformulation. This sounding will again outline the encounter between self-consciousness and its beyond, showing how Hegel attempts to move beyond the object/subject divide (or the substance/subject divide) as a means of articulating his philosophy of self-transcending immanence.

Incarnation

Hegel's concise definition of the "simple content of the absolute religion" focuses on the "incarnation (*Menschwerdung*) of the divine Being, or the fact that it [divine Being] essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness" (PS ¶759/PG 552). For Hegel, through the Incarnation divine Being reveals itself as a self-consciousness, breaking down the divide between substance and subject. But how does this object (the Incarnation) reveal God to be both substance and subject?

To understand how the incarnation reveals divine being to be substance and subject we must look at the unity established by and the movements of the Incarnation as Hegel understands it. On a historical level, the Incarnation unites the two previously disparate movements of consciousness found in Greek ethical life and Roman law. On a religious and historical level, the development and contradictions of Greek ethical life and Roman law recapitulate the developments of the Stoic, Skeptic, and Unhappy Consciousness (PS ¶748-53/PG 545-49). In Hegel's mind, these forms of consciousness "stand impatiently expectant round the birthplace of Spirit (*Geist*) as it becomes self-

consciousness” (PS ¶754/PG 549). The allusion, of course, is to the birth of Christ (situated within world history but stripped of its place in Israel’s history).⁵¹

Hegel calls the Incarnation the unity of these two movements (Greek and Roman). He reminds us that implicitly, “Spirit has in it the two sides which are presented above [Greek ethical life and Roman law] as two converse propositions: one is this, that substance [empties] (*entäußert*) itself from itself and becomes self-consciousness; the other is the converse, that self-consciousness [empties] (*entäußert*) itself from itself and gives itself the nature of a Thing, or makes itself a universal Self.” (PS ¶755/PG 549).⁵² It should be noted that each is an self-emptying of itself, not caused by another. Through this reciprocal self-emptying (*gegenseitige Entäußerung*) where each becomes the other, “Spirit comes into existence (*Dasein*)” (PS ¶755/PG 550). This dual self-emptying should of course immediately remind us of the dual self-emptying in the form of confession and forgiveness needed to complete of mutual recognition (PS ¶671/PG 494). Likewise, this movement of dual self-emptying should remind us of the dual movements through otherness of the finite and infinite, and the mutual vanishing of being and nothing.⁵³

⁵¹ “Hegel does *not* seem to be arguing that Christianity per se was a necessary development. He is, however, arguing that something very much *like* Christianity is the proper fulfillment of the possibilities opened up by Greek life and its Roman aftermath; Christianity contingently happened to be the religion that stepped into the ‘social space’ opened up by stoicism, skepticism, and the Hellenistic forms of the ‘unhappy consciousness’” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, 253).

⁵² Miller translates *entäußert* as “alienates” but later in the same paragraph translates *Entäußerung* as “externalization.” Miller tries to mitigate his translation by inserting “kenosis” (which is not in the text) after his first use of “externalization”. For consistency and clarity of exposition I will follow Pinkard by using “empties” and “emptying,” respectively, which implies divine kenosis without distorting Hegel’s text.

⁵³ See Dale M. Schlitt, *Hegel’s Trinitarian Claim*, 180-184.

Through the unity of these movements *Geist* has entered existence and becomes an object of “complete immediacy” such that “God is sensuously and directly beheld as a Self, as an actual individual man” (PS ¶758/PG 552).⁵⁴ As we know all too well, however, immediacy is always problematic for Hegel. That *Geist*, the supposed unity of consciousness and self-consciousness, is in the Incarnation as an immediate individual means that the Incarnate One is merely a sensuous other standing against consciousness. The Incarnate God-man is merely a sensuous ‘this’ or a perceived ‘thing’ (PS ¶762/PG 555).⁵⁵ To resolve the deadlock of immediacy and its indeterminacy, the immediate self, as the “*immediately present God*,” must vanish (*Verschwinden*) into its negative moment (*negatives Moment*) so that it might be taken up into “the universal self-consciousness of the [religious] community, a self-consciousness which reposes in its own substance, just as in it this Substance is a universal Subject” (PS ¶763/PG 556). The Incarnate God-man must vanish from immediate, individual existence so that it can be taken up within the universal, communal self-consciousness. This vanishing allows for a more proper union between Substance and Subject because now the Incarnation is not merely an immediacy in opposition to self-consciousness.⁵⁶ The necessity of vanishing and the moment of

⁵⁴ *VPR* 3:236-8 speaks in more detail on immediacy of incarnation (also 3:251).

⁵⁵ Although we did not look closely at Hegel’s discussion of the *aporias* of sense-certainty, it should be noted that Hegel is here reducing the Incarnation to the level of the sensuous, just as he had do for the Eucharist host (PS ¶217/PG 169). This reduction to indeterminate immediacy should be seen as Hegel’s positioning of these conduits of the ‘beyond’ as nothing more than empty, needing to be filled by self-consciousness. See the comments by Peter Kalkavage, *The Logic of Desire: An Introduction to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2007), 147.

⁵⁶ Here Substance and Subject can both be applied to either the divine Being or the communal self-consciousness. In vanishing, the divine Being as Substance enters the religious community which is Subject. Or, in vanishing, the divine Being as Incarnate is the individual Subject that enters the Substance of the religious community.

negativity prompts Hegel to deepen his account of the Incarnation by referencing the crucifixion.

Crucifixion

As mentioned, the immediacy of the incarnate one must vanish (*Verschwinden*) in order to be raised up into universal self-consciousness as the unity of substance and subject. Unlike the conceptual vanishing between being and nothing, on the historical level of existence this vanishing becomes the necessity of death. To make sense of this Hegel turns to his account of the Trinity as a framework for understanding the necessity of the death of the Incarnate One in order to move into life in the Spirit. Hegel maps the Trinity onto his logical framework of 1) abstract indeterminacy, 2) determinacy as and through otherness, and 3) return from otherness as self-determinacy.⁵⁷ The first moment of the Trinity is that of pure thought, or the content of consciousness as “pure substance,” the Father. The second is a passing into otherness, “or picture-thinking as such” (*das Vorstellen als solche*), identified with the Son or Word/Logos. The third moment “is the return from picture-thinking and otherness” to “the element of self-consciousness,” which is Spirit (PS ¶767/PG 557-8). Hegel expands this by first considering the immanent Trinity (PS ¶769-72/PG 558-61) and then the economic Trinity in creation and the community of reconciliation (PS ¶773-87/PG 561-74).⁵⁸ In each case, in the thought of

⁵⁷ Along with his presentation of the Trinity, Hegel tirelessly reminds us that the “*form of picture-thinking (Form des Vorstellen)* constitutes the specific mode” of *Geist* in the religious community (PS ¶765/PG 556) and thus speak of “begetting” within the Trinity (PS ¶769/PG 559) and of the Trinity “creating” the world (PG ¶774/PG 561), all of which are the improper form of conceptual thought, even if it is the proper content.

⁵⁸ Considerable attention has been given to Hegel’s Trinitarian thought. See Schlitt, *Hegel’s Trinitarian Claim*; Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of*

the religious community, picture-thinking (*Vorstellen*) dominates as the “standpoint which takes the moments of the movement which Spirit is, as [if they were] isolated immoveable Substances or Subjects, instead of transient moments,” making the speculative truth of the Trinity into an heirlooms of religious traditions (PS ¶771/PG 560).

The main concern for our purposes is the transition from the second to the third moments, from the Incarnation of the God-man to the community of *Geist*, as the complete content of the manifest religion. Hegel had introduced the Incarnation as the culmination of the Unhappy Consciousness in the historical sequence of Greek and Roman life, now adding how the Incarnation is a moment in the conceptual life of the Trinity. As for pure being, which could not remain abstractly indeterminate but had to become determinate being (*Dasein*), so too divine essence in its abstraction must take on existence. But as we have seen, this immediate existence must again become universal as its return from otherness. The first other-ing of itself as divine Being (its self-emptying) in Incarnation must be negated by a second other-ing so that it might be raised to universality again. This second other-ing, or second negation, is the death of the God-Man, so that it can then pass into the life of *Geist*. As Hegel says, “This death is, therefore, its [divine Being] resurrection as Spirit” (PS ¶779/PG 565-6). Why?

Two points will make this clear. First, when self-consciousness could not secure the truth of itself, it turned into the Unhappy Consciousness in its wretched changeability

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion trans. by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1990), pp.303-348; Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: SUNY, 1994); Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.127-140.

and posited beyond itself the Unchangeable. The Unhappy Consciousness could not unite itself with the Unchangeable, and instead had to confess its own brute existence as evil (in its non-unity with the Unchangeable). Happily, the Unhappy Consciousness was absolved of this burden by the priest, the middle term between the changeable and unchangeable. In this way the Unhappy Consciousness could claim for itself a mediated union through self-negation. The evil of existence (finitude) is partially overcome through this mediation. But, secondly, we must also remember the figure of the one who acts out of conscience and is considered evil for doing so. The action is deemed evil because by definition because it is both finite in its objective occurrence and finite in its subjective interpretation (the self-interpretation of the actor but also of those judging the action). Only when the actor and the judge renounce their (sinful/evil) particularity and forgive each other can they enter a universal self-consciousness as “reciprocal recognition which is *absolute Spirit*” (PS ¶671/PG 493).

What Hegel has already mentioned as the outcome of self-consciousness before the Unchangeable (the feeling of wretchedness) and as the process of conflicting interpretations concerning moral action (the imputation of evil), is now rendered explicitly ontological in the Incarnation.⁵⁹ In the Incarnation the divine essence takes on the (evil/sinful) finite existence.⁶⁰ And this assumption of finitude is only complete with

⁵⁹ Criticisms concerned about Hegel making evil part of creation itself or an aspect of God (or both) are true, but miss the point. Evil is not merely a Gnostic claim about existence as such, but rather a claim that finitude and particularity always raise a conflict of perspectives and that only the universal perspective of the community can finally deem what is or is not evil in each instance.

⁶⁰ On the sinfulness of finitude see Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 519-521.

the death of the God-Man, for the nature of finite things is always their ceasing-to-be.⁶¹ Therefore, in unity with human nature and its natural existence, the divine essence must die. But this death loses its merely natural meaning (natural life/death is no use to self-consciousness in seeking its self-certainty) and becomes “transfigured” (*verklärt*) from the “non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in [its] community” (PS ¶784/PG 571).⁶² Once this universality is achieved, this transfiguration of death allows the spiritual community to die daily (confess its evil particularity/finitude) while also be daily resurrected (into universality/infinity). The incarnate one must die so the spiritual community can learn to mutually forgive itself of its finitude. In this way, self-consciousness is able to “go beyond itself” (PS ¶80/PG 74), surpassing the natural limit of finitude.

But this is only what happens from the human side of the divine-man. Hegel also considers what happens from the side of divine essence, and it is here that he reintroduces the idea of a mediator, first seen as the one who mediated between the Unhappy Consciousness and the Unchangeable.⁶³ Hegel says, “The death of the Mediator is the

⁶¹ “The *death* of the divine Man, *as death*, is *abstract* negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in *natural* universality” (PS ¶784/PG 570). See also LPR 3:124-5/VPR 3:60 where Hegel say, “The pinnacle of finitude is not actual life in its temporal course, but rather death, the anguish of death; death is the pinnacle of negation, the most abstract and indeed natural negation, the limit, finitude in its highest extreme. The temporal and complete existence of the divine idea in the present is envisaged only in Christ’s death. The highest divestment of the divine idea... is expressed as follows: ‘God is dead, God himself is dead.’ [This] is a monstrous, fearful picture (*Vorstellung*) which brings before the imagination the deepest abyss of cleavage.”

⁶² Miller translates *seiner* in “*der in seiner Gemeinde lebt*” as “his” as if referring to the death of the divine-man. But, following Pinkard, it is better to translate *seiner* as “its” referring back to the now achieved universality of *Geist*.

⁶³ Technically, Hegel had only mentioned the middle term (*diese Mitte*) or servant (*das Diener*) earlier (PS ¶228/PG 175), whereas now he calls the divine-man the mediator (*Mittlers*).

death not only of his *natural* aspect...but also of the *abstraction* of the divine Being” (PS ¶785/PG 571). Hegel goes on to explain this is the death of divine abstraction by saying that this death

contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction* of the divine Being which is not posited as Self. That death is the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God Himself is dead*...This feeling is, in fact, the loss of substance and of its [taking a stance] (*Gegenübertretens*) over against consciousness; but it is at the same time the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself which it lacked when it was object, or the immediate, or pure essence. This Knowing is the inbreathing of the Spirit (*Begeistung*), whereby Substance becomes Subject. (PS ¶785/PG 572)

Hegel has been preparing us all along for this painful feeling that “God is dead,” appearing now at the apex of the journey of consciousness in its purification. We have finally entered the way of the cross whereby self-consciousness learns to “tarry with the negative” (PS ¶32/PG 36).

This loss of divine substance in its abstraction is at the same time the recovery of this substance in the form of subjectivity. Through the collapse (death) of the mediator, the previously opposed terms of divinity and humanity now collapse into the “subjectivity of substance,” mirroring both the collapse of the opposition between the understanding and the supersensible beyond mediated by appearance, and the collapse of the opposition between the one who acts and the one who judges mediated by mutual confession. As with the overcoming of the beyond (*Jenseits*) for the understanding within consciousness, in the death of the mediator the God of the beyond has now emptied itself into the community of *Geist*. Within this community there is no longer a ‘beyond’ to go beyond because the need has been transcended. Consciousness expanded into self-consciousness, as that which “goes beyond itself” (PS ¶80/PG 74), no longer needs to go beyond itself into a ‘beyond’, but has return to itself through its other (in this

case, divine Being). Therefore, just as consciousness came to terms with its supersensible beyond as its own activity, so too self-consciousness comes to terms with the divine beyond through the death of the mediator. What was the drawing back of the curtain (of appearance) by which consciousness came to see itself is now, in the death of the mediator, the tearing of the veil (in the Temple) by which self-consciousness comes to see itself as divine within *Geist*.

The death of the God-man shows that the God of the beyond is not really other than self-consciousness, uniting Substance and Subject. This content of the manifest religion expresses the same movement of mutual self-forgiveness (PS ¶786/PG 572). That the moral community of mutual forgiveness and the religious community express the same content is block for the religious community because its thought is still governed by *Vorstellung*. The religious community, therefore, takes the emptying (*Entäußerung*) of Substance to be an action of Substance itself (as God), rather than as the action of self-consciousness as both Substance and Subject (PS ¶787/PG 573). Because of this the community of *Geis* must make one final step on its journey to absolute knowing.

Absolute Knowing

If chapters VI and VII of the *Phenomenology* each end with mutual forgiveness, on the social and religious levels, it is because these two movements represent the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness in the form proper to thought itself. The initial shift from consciousness to self-consciousness was that of replacing a theoretical stance of knowledge with a practical one, i.e. self-consciousness seeking its own self-certainty

through objects and then through others. But this practical quest resulted in the debasement of self-consciousness before the Unchangeable beyond.

The odyssey of self-consciousness arrived on the shores of moral ‘conscience’ as the immediate conviction of moral knowledge, the unity of theory and practice. After the division of this community of conscience (into those who act and those who judge) comes its reconciliation through the mutual renouncing of one-sidedness and the offering of forgiveness for sin of finitude. In this way the unity of theory and practice is not within the particular existence of individuals but the universal self-consciousness of the community as *Geist*. This is the moment of “God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge” (PS ¶671/PG 494), the moment that prompted the movement through religion. After passing through religion, Hegel reiterates this social reconciliation as the appearance of pure knowing (PS ¶793/PG 579), and now shows how they must fit together as two moments of true reconciliation, or absolute knowing.

Religion and conscience are two sides of the same reconciliation. The former possesses an “absolute content” (the religious *Vorstellung* of incarnation and crucifixion), while the latter is “a form devoid of content” (the moral action of conscience), the unification of which “closes the shapes of Spirit” (PS ¶794/PG 579). In a manner that draws together several strands throughout our exposition, Peter Kalkavage summarizes:

In religion, reconciliation is only *in itself* or divinely objective, in morality [reconciliation is] only *for itself* or humanly subjective. Each side must make up for the lack in the other by giving itself to the other. The objective divine must be infused with the *form* of self-certainty, and moral action must be infused with absolute *content* or truth. Once this mutual infusion occurs, self-consciousness will experience the world in which it actually lives as the home of divine

presence, the house of God. It will know divine truth divinely, that is, as Science.⁶⁴

However, unlike Kalkavage, we cannot only emphasize that the world is now filled with the presences of God. It was self-consciousness that had entered world as the “native realm of truth” seeking its self-certainty there, a search it has never given up (PS ¶166/PG 137). For Hegel, self-certainty has now been *raised* and divine truth has been *lowered* to self-consciousness as the community of *Geist*, the community of pure knowing. This is the case because the *form* of self-certainty achieved from the human side as the unity of substance (mutual recognition through forgiveness) and subject (individual conscience and action) is united with the *content* of truth in the form of divine substance that has now become subject. Because the (religious) content was in the form of *Vorstellung*, and therefore only *implicit* as absolute knowing, the unification must come from the side of a communal self-consciousness as a giving itself its own content (PS ¶797/PG 582). In realizing that *Geist* is that which gives itself its own content it comes to know that it is both substance and subject as pure knowing.

Consciousness, as that which expanded into self-consciousness as the community of *Geist*, has encountered and moved through the dual ‘beyonds’ of consciousness (the supersensible) and self-consciousness (the Unchangeable), such that truth can now be considered both substance and subject. Consciousness no longer presupposes an independent object existing over and against it, but knows itself through its other. This purifying of ordinary consciousness, its elevation into *Geist* through *Geist*, is the preparation for philosophical science. From this elevation *Geist* can enter the ether of Science (PS ¶ 805/PG 589), or as Hegel says later “the realm of shadows, which is the

⁶⁴ Kalkavage, *The Logic of Desire*, 430 (brackets added).

system of logic” (SL 58/WL 5:55). This ending leads us to the beginning of the *Logic* with pure being, returning us also to the beginning of this chapter.

Beyond Others: Summary

These, then, are the three soundings taken from the *Phenomenology*. This has been a long journey through the cultivation of consciousness beyond the limits of the understanding, to the emergence of self-consciousness and its search for recognition, and the self-consciousness of *Geist* in coming to know itself in religion. Each of these soundings encountered the ‘beyond’ and exhibited the movements of the true infinite in overcoming this ‘beyond’.

First, when the understanding begins by positing an infinite regress of supersensible worlds in order to account for appearance, the understanding finally acknowledged the supersensible as its own operation. The supersensible beyond that began as a pure void (nothing) and then found to be pure change (negativity), is finally known as the operations of the understanding in reference to the true infinite, a realization that splits consciousness into the consciousness of its objects and the consciousness of itself, or self-consciousness. This is the first and most important, though understated, encounter with a ‘beyond’ that is found not to be a beyond after all.

The second sounding concerned this self-consciousness and its search for self-certainty. When another self-consciousness is encountered a process of mutual recognition occurs that fulfills the desire of self-consciousness to know itself through its other (not other objects, but another subject). Hegel calls this process of recognition

“infinity realizing itself in self-consciousness” (PS ¶178/PG 146),⁶⁵ where each self-consciousness becomes the middle term by which each returns to itself through the other. This dual movement mirrors the movements of the true infinite.⁶⁶ This spiritual unity between self-consciousnesses is the first step within the life of *Geist*.

This, however, was only the immediate and abstract conception of mutual recognition. As we saw, the actual existence of such mutual recognition quickly bumped up against a limitation from above. Springing from the failed attempt at recognition between master and slave, passing through the stages of the Stoic and Skeptic, the Unhappy Consciousness could not reconcile its own finite being with the infinity of its thought, both of which (being and thought) it equality *is*. The Unhappy Consciousness, therefore, posited the Unchangeable as the truth of thought and assumed the position of the changeable. This is the second instantiation of the ‘beyond’. The Unhappy Consciousness makes peace with this situation by seeking union with the Unchangeable through a mediator. This uneasy mediation with the beyond is only overcome much later in Hegel’s narrative in the recognition of mutual forgiveness within a moral community. This forgiveness overcomes the one-sidedness of either a commitment to existence through action (being) or to the moral purity of non-action (thought). In this community of forgiveness self-consciousness has now been reconciled to itself, and as Hegel noted, God is no longer locked in a beyond above, but dwells with and among humanity below.

The third sounding is a repetition of the second but explicitly from a religious point of view, seeking to understand the self-consciousness of *Geist* within human

⁶⁵ Remember that Miller omits this phrase (*der sich im Selbstbewußtsein realisierenden Unendlichkeit*) in his translation.

⁶⁶ “Both the finite and the infinite are this *movement* in which each returns to itself through its negation” (SL 147/WL 162).

community. The apex of this journey was the incarnation and crucifixion of the divine-man as the content of the Manifest Religion. From the side of the divine, thought and being (or subject and substance) are reconciled through the dying of the abstract God of the beyond. This process begins with mediation by a third term (mirroring the priest of the Unhappy Consciousness), but ends with the vanishing of this mediating term (mirroring the canceling of appearance between understanding and the supersensible), resulting in self-mediation through the other. Through the Incarnation and death of the divine-man, the ultimate other as the God of the beyond is now part of the movement by which self-consciousness comes to know itself in its other.

Each of these soundings resulted in an encounter with the infinite as the resolution to, or reconciliation of, various impasses posed by the 'beyond'. In each sounding, seeking to fathom the depths of thought, Hegel lets out more line until he is able to reach the bottom (or the beyond) of thought and rebound back to the surface as the self-certainty of self-consciousness. But has Hegel really measured the depths, or has he merely measured length of consciousness's line? In the English system, the measurement of depth is recorded in fathoms. A fathom is the approximate distance between a man's outstretched arms, coming from the Old English *fæthm* meaning outstretched or embracing arms.⁶⁷ With this Old English meaning in mind, we will conclude this chapter by asking if Hegel has actually fathomed the depths of thought and being or only embraced everything within the reach of consciousness, excluding all the rest? Have the depths truly been measured or merely been made fathomable to consciousness?

⁶⁷ See *fæthm* (*fætdm*) in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, eds. Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Toller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 268.

3. Beyond Nothing and the Unfathomable

In answering these questions, to begin directly with the infinite in the *Phenomenology* is already to begin too late. Nor is it helpful to question the exact relation between the finite and the infinite in the *Logic*. The problem criticisms of Hegel focused on the true infinite is that this engages Hegel at the end of his arguments rather than at the beginning. One cannot ask about the possibility of an infinite beyond the true infinite because this leads to the immediate reply that the form of the question belies the operations of the *Verstand* and its fixed oppositions.⁶⁸ To ask whether Hegel has truly fathomed through we must return to the beginning and ask about how Hegel positions the unfathomable.

Nothing Other Than Thought

As we saw in our initial survey of the *Logic*, the dialectic of the finite-infinite that results in the true infinite (the one we find in operation throughout the *Phenomenology*) is based in the earlier dialectic of being-nothing resulting in becoming. There it was argued that while the *Logic* formally begins *with* being, true thought only begins *at* becoming, and does this all *from* nothing. This *nothing* was the failure of *Verstand* to think any thought (i.e. pure thought, “thinking thinking thinking”). It was concluded that the nothing *beyond* finitude is equal to the nothing *before* becoming, each governed by *Verstand* in its isolation from *Vernunft*. In this way the nothing of understanding (*Verstand*) becomes the infinite of reason (*Vernunft*). In both cases, the nothingness of

⁶⁸ This is a typical tactic of Hegel and Hegelians against critics. One example is Stephen Houlgate’s criticism of the infinite deployed by Levinas. See Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 432-435.

thought produces the self-enclosed infinity of being. This is the key to Hegel's dialectical development as the internalization of nothing through negation. By excluding 'nothing' as non-thought, has Hegel really fathomed all thought and being or reduced thought and to the embrace of consciousness?

In other words, is reducing the 'beyond' of thought to non-thought thinking the beyond? Is nothing the source of thought only as a failed thought? Plato certainly posited the good beyond thought and being and did not consider this good as merely indeterminate and abstract (or in any other way deficient).⁶⁹ Following the lead of Plato's *Parmenides*, Neoplatonists developed a conception of the 'one' beyond being and thinking, identified as itself unlimited,⁷⁰ insights that developed into the tradition of negative theology. The impulse for positing the good or one beyond being is similar to Hegel's motivation in preventing an infinite regress when explaining phenomena. But as we have seen, Hegel's opening moves in the *Logic* bar this approach of stopping the regress in a plentitude beyond thought and being. As a philosophy of self-transcending immanence, Hegel desires an alternative to a 'good' or 'one' beyond being and thinking, for these would inhibit self-determining freedom (at least in the horizons of German Idealism). Hegel preemptively eliminates these options by excluding everyone beyond consciousness as merely 'nothing' and then re-including this nothing as negation.

⁶⁹ *Republic* VI 509 B 8-10.

⁷⁰ Plotinus says "we go back everywhere to *one*. And in each and everything there is some *one* to which you will trace it back, and this in every case to the *one* before it, which is not simply one, until we come to the simply one...It is certainly none of the things of which it is origin; it is of such a kind, though nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life" *En.* 3.8.10. These three senses speak of Plotinus' three hypostases summarized as *proton hen*, the first One, the *hen polla*, or One-Many, and *hen cai polla*, the One-and-Many (*En.* V.1.8). For the one beyond being see *En.* V.1.10.

As we saw in the first section, Hegel has not really argued against considering such a transcendence that could be productive beyond or other than being and thought. He has only shown that ‘nothing’ is that from which thought must recoil in its journey toward pure knowing. In essence, he only presupposed the lack of true transcendence. Because the presupposition for this *Logic* is found in the *Phenomenology*, to criticize the *Logic* in this way requires stepping back and asking whether the *Phenomenology* has actually accounted for all forms of ‘otherness’ in its attempt to break down the divide between object and subject (Substance and Subject).

Nothing Other Than Consciousness

In turning to the *Phenomenology*, the place to start is not Manifest Religion and its content of incarnation and death of the divine-man. Certainly this passage initiates various death of God and/or post-metaphysical theologies,⁷¹ as well as less radical interpretations of Christianity.⁷² While Manifest Religion seems the most explicit encounter between consciousness and its other, and therefore the best place by which to judge whether the *Phenomenology* has truly encountered all others, this encounter is already thoroughly saturated by the themes of mutual recognition and the movements of

71 See Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (London: Westminster Press, 1966); Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Slavoj Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

⁷² See Hans Kung, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought As Prolegomena to a Future Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 1987); Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: SUNY, 1982); Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the infinite. This saturation of themes makes it very difficult to know whether consciousness is truly encountering its transcendent other or if consciousness has already pre-formed this religious content on its journey toward pure knowing.

Moving back to the Unhappy Consciousness and its encounter with the beyond in the form of the Unchangeable is also a false start. This encounter was also already configured by the (failed) process of mutual recognition in its search for self-certainty. The freedom of self-consciousness is initially limited by its natural life from below. Through the sublimation of natural desire in the form of social desire (the desire for recognition), self-consciousness enters the domain of *Geist*. This spiritual life, however, cannot be given from a supernatural beyond for this would also set up another limitation, now from above rather than from below. Hegel needs to show that self-consciousness as *Geist* is neither natural nor supernatural, even while being spiritual.⁷³ Indeed, the entire movement from the Unhappy Consciousness to Manifest Religion is Hegel's attempt to articulate the spiritual but not supernatural nature of self-consciousness. This is the case because, for Hegel, the supernatural, the beyond, or transcendence, is assumed to be a detriment to the self-determining nature of consciousness, an assumption basic to post-Kantian German Idealism.

Because the encounter of the Unhappy Consciousness with the Unchanging is also already saturated by the process of mutual recognition as self-determining freedom, the best place from which to question Hegel's encounter with otherness is the first one with the supersensible beyond (*übersinnliche Jenseits*). There we saw that the understanding conceived of the supersensible as "merely the nothingness of appearance"

⁷³ It is for this very reason that those like Pippin and Pinkard leave *Geist* untranslated or just substitute it for 'sociality' or 'intersubjectivity.'

(PS ¶146/ PG 117), mirroring how the spurious infinite was conceived as the nothing of the finite. But this indeterminate nothingness was quickly filled through an attempt to articulate the truth of appearance as supersensible. It was only when the understanding eliminated its commitment to sensible representation that it could then conceive of the supersensible as itself “pure change” or “inner difference” (PS ¶160/PG 131), based in the idea of infinity. After the arrival of the true infinite the understanding came to know that the supersensible and appearance as the productive power of the understanding itself. When understanding saw this it was able to shift from mere consciousness to self-consciousness.

Other Than ‘Nothing’

But as we asked for the finite-infinite and being-nothing dialectics, from where does this unity of appearance and the supersensible come? The conception of the spurious infinite cannot be used to justify the introduction of the true infinite here in the *Phenomenology*. The arguments concerning the true infinite in the *Logic*, no matter how tempting it is to import as explanations, are invalid from the standpoint of the *Phenomenology*. For Hegel, rather than allowing an infinite regress to proceed *above* consciousness, being only stopped with reference to a beyond in some form (God, the One, the Good), the infinite regress is halted by positing the unity of the supersensible and appearance *within* consciousness as the understanding’s own product. Hegel would rather bite the bullet of contradiction *within* consciousness rather than admit it *above* consciousness. Crafting his argument in this way only reveals that Hegel had already assumed the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* (and the arguments of the *Logic*) in these

opening movements. But if he has assumed these conclusions then he has not overcome all opposition between subject and object and has not overcome all otherness to thought. He has only preemptively excluded the types of otherness that would challenge his system.

As with the *Logic* where ‘nothing’ as the first other of thought is included an indeterminate non-thought, here in the *Phenomenology* the first true other of consciousness is returned to consciousness as the “nothingness of appearance”, that which is *not* an object of consciousness. This other is already determined (by consciousness) to be indeterminate and therefore deficient. That ‘nothing’ is determined to be indeterminate by thought ensures that thought can become self-determining. The possibility that this other of thought could be ‘overdeterminate’ and therefore productive of thought, rather than merely deficiently indeterminate as a thought, is not possible for Hegel.⁷⁴ It is not possible because anything other than indeterminate ‘nothing’ would allow for the persistence of something other than consciousness and therefore inhibit the self-determining nature of thought as the unity of subject and object. For Hegel, it is consciousness and consciousness alone which ‘goes beyond itself’ as a self-transcending immanence.

Conclusion

It these three soundings from the *Phenomenology* we have found that Hegel does not reach the bottom of thought (or being). Rather, he takes the end of the line (the self-

⁷⁴ ‘Overdetermination’ is a term frequently used by William Desmond. See Desmond’s *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2012), 3-43.

transcending nature of consciousness) as the determination of thought and claims that nothing else exists. In many ways, the act of lowering this line was merely the pretense for catching a glimpse of consciousness reflected in the water. Hegel has perhaps given a persuasive gloss on his metaphysical vision,⁷⁵ but has not justified it without circularity (between the *Phenomenology* and *Logic*: i.e. relying on the derivation of the true infinite of the *Logic* to make compelling the various transitions within the *Phenomenology*). If these criticisms hold then we have achieved the goal of this chapter, to show both that Hegel's philosophy is aptly described as self-transcending immanence, even while showing that Hegel only assumes but does not justify such a philosophical perspective.

Of course, these criticisms only hold for certain interpretations of Hegel. They challenge strong logical and ontological interpretations of Hegel committed presuppositionlessness of Hegel's philosophy.⁷⁶ If one assumes the *Phenomenology* as the presupposition of the *Logic* then one would still need to account for the lack of any real encounter of a transcendent beyond which is not already preconfigured and made amenable to consciousness by reduction into indeterminate nothingness.

These criticisms also challenge religious interpretations that support Hegel's reconfiguration of Christianity. Given Hegel's strong aversion to ontological beginnings, the only theistic reading of Hegel would have to be panentheistic, reading God as the

⁷⁵ Charles Taylor is found of saying that where Hegel fails at a conceptual proof he succeeds with a persuasive interpretation. See his *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 233, 239.

⁷⁶ This would be those like Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*; Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*; Richard Dean Winfield, *From Concept to Objectivity: Thinking Through Hegel's Subjective Logic* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

infinite irreducible to the finite and creation as the finite irreducible to the infinite.⁷⁷ But as we have seen, while on the one hand Hegel notes the necessary separability of the finite and the infinite, he more strongly insists on their radical inseparability within the immanence of thought. Indeed, Hegel's self-transcending immanence puts him at considerable distance from Christian orthodoxy, more than most supportive religious interpreters acknowledge because they are happy to begin with the finite-infinite dialectic (the end of Hegel's arguments) rather than being-nothing dialect (the beginning).

These criticisms, however, do not effect the normative or radical interpretations offered by Pippin or Žižek. These interpretations like already Pippin's or Žižek's assume that the pursuit of modern freedom needs no further justification or proof, and that Hegel had always presupposed this position. These types of interpretation cannot be criticized on logical or ontological grounds. Rather to meet them we must enter the practical arena of political freedom. Indeed, just as Hegel always positioned his critique of Kant within the practical realm of morality, so too must we now turn to Hegel as he seeks to actualize modern freedom beyond the self-transcending immanence of thought into the social self-determination of ethical life.

⁷⁷ This is the position of Lauer and Hodgson who both just assume Christianity is open to pantheism and panentheism, respectively, without making a case for it. See Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, 243-282, and Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 248-259.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIETY AND FREEDM: *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

*For that is just what freedom is: being at home with oneself
in one's other.*¹

Introduction

The last chapter outlined Hegel's philosophy as a self-transcending immanence. There I argued that this self-transcending immanence of thought functioned through an exclusion of the overdeterminate through its reduction to an indeterminate 'nothing', re-included as the negativity of thought expressed as the true infinite. In this way 'nothing' as negativity appears within consciousness, expanding into social self-consciousness, as that which "goes beyond itself." I argued there that Hegel had not included all otherness within thought, but excluded in advance what could not be assimilated into the project of absolute knowing, meaning that his system is not truly presuppositionless.

These criticisms of Hegel, however, only applied to the more traditional readings of Hegel that seek either to justify his system or coordinate it with Christian orthodoxy. The critique that Hegel does not presuppositionlessly establish his system, however, does not apply to those who understand Hegel as offering an interpretation and justification of modern freedom as self-determination (like Pippin and Žižek) because they see Hegel affirming the project of modern freedom. The previous critique of Hegel's logical system and its lack of presuppositionlessness fails the more political interpretations of Hegel who claims that his entire project exactly presupposes modern freedom. Interpreters like Pippin and Žižek, as noted in the first chapter, do not think Hegel attempted to independently justify his system through a presuppositionless beginning. Rather, they

¹ E §24 A2.

see Hegel as offering an interpretation of modern freedom that both presupposes the value of modern freedom itself and refuses reference a transcendence beyond. To engage these interpretations I will have to step off Hegel's phenomenological ladder, come down from the logical ether, and enter the realm of socio-political existence as Hegel understands it.

This chapter will consider Hegel's political philosophy as articulated in his *Philosophy of Right*, particularly examining his understanding of a free will within ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) as the unity of individual subject and the ethical substance, extending the unity of substance and subject gained in the *Phenomenology*. After this exposition the limits of ethical life will be explored around the questions of societal change and transition, showing why Hegel did not offer a theory of society transformation. This chapter will conclude by indicating the impossibility of holding together ethical substance with individual subject, illustrated by the immediate breakdown of the Hegelian legacy, a bifurcation continued in interpreters like Pippin and Žižek. This breakdown of the Hegelian project indicates the inherent instability of self-transcending immanence as an orientation from which to think political subjectivity, directing us to rethink its very possibility. From that breakdown we will then move to the second part of our investigation and explore the Augustinian orientation toward transcendence and immanence as more productive of a political subjectivity capable of offering social critique and initiating social change.

1.The Subject and Substance of Politics

Unlike Karl Popper's depiction of Hegel as the reactionary advocate of Prussian

totalitarianism,² it is much more accurate to think of Hegel as “a reform-minded liberal who based his political philosophy on the analysis and fulfillment of individual human freedom.”³ As we have seen throughout, Hegel is profoundly concerned with the freedom of thought, which if it is not to remain indeterminate must become determinately expressed in actually existing individuals and institutions. Indeed, only through the mediation of individuals and institutions is modern freedom truly expressed and experienced as the “I that is We and We that is I.” This first section will examine the relationship between subjective will and social substance in Hegel. The second major section will examine the institutions of modern life: family, civil society, and the state.

Against the negative freedom of non-interference, Hegel develops the tradition running from Rousseau and Kant of a more positive freedom in which society is not a necessary restriction on freedom but is both the positive expression and condition of one’s freedom.⁴ Hegel attempts to combine the unity of the individual and general will of Rousseau with the moral self-legislation of Kant. To do this Hegel unites the subjective (individual) and substantive (institutional) aspects of the will, such that the will retains its identity through its other.

² Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

³ Kenneth Westphal, “The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234. For a critique of the ‘totalitarian Hegel’ see also Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 115-132; Adriaan Peperzak, *Philosophy and Politics: A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 15-31; Paul Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 123-39.

⁴ We already explored how Pippin marks this relationship in chapter one. See also Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, 1-32; Neuhausser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, 55-81.

Unlike interpreters who would sever Hegel's speculative from his political philosophy,⁵ Hegel bases the *Philosophy of Right* solidly on his logical system and deploys its common terms: indeterminate, determinate, self-determinate, negation, and otherness. The immediate topic, however, is not the logical realm of reason, but the practical realm of freedom (which in the end are the same for Hegel):

The basis of right is overall, the domain of spirit [or spiritual] (*Geistige*); its more precise location and standing point is the will, which is free. Freedom thus constitutes the substance and determination of right, and the system of right is the realm of actualized (*verwirklichten*) freedom, the world that spirit brings out of itself as a second nature. (PR §4)

Here Hegel outlines the key aspects of the *Philosophy of Right*. First, freedom is an issue of the will, a free will, for a “‘will,’ without freedom, is an empty word, just as freedom is actual only as will, as subject” (PR §4A). But what does it mean for a will to be free? Hegel's answer leads to the second key aspect: actual freedom (of the will) is a system of determinations acting as a spiritual second nature.⁶ This is the substantive side of freedom. Hegel is attempting to unite freedom as substance and subject, just as he had done for truth in the *Phenomenology*. And just like the *Phenomenology*, this freedom must pass through otherness in its return to itself. As he says in the *Encyclopedia*, freedom is a process of self-recognition through otherness in which *Geist* is “purely at home with itself, and thereby free, for that is what freedom is: being at home with oneself in one's other” (E §24 A2). This first section will move through two sub-sections. I will first explain freedom as it concerns the form and content of the will from the subjective

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 537-571; Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-6. Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, and Neuhausser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, generally follow this trajectory.

⁶ See Robert B. Pippin, “Hegel's Political Argument and the Problem of *Verwirklichung*,” *Political Theory* 9/4 (1981): 509-532.

side as articulated in the Introduction of *Philosophy of Right*. Then I will investigate the substantive side concerning ethical life and its interaction with the subjective as discussed in the third part of the book.

Form and Content of the Will

Hegel begins his *Philosophy of Right* with the form or the concept of will, following the familiar movements of indeterminate, determinate, and self-determinate. The will contains two essential moments, which together (as a third moment) form the unity of the will. The first moment is the act of pure, abstract indeterminacy that suspends every immediately given content, be it from nature, needs, desires, or drives (PR §5). This is the one-sidedness of “negative freedom, or the freedom of the understanding” (PR §5R). By negative freedom Hegel does not mean the freedom of non-interference of the classical liberal tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Mills), but the freedom that comes through abstraction, to abstract oneself from among possible alternatives or contents.⁷ Left in its one-sidedness, this conception of the will thinks of freedom as the capacity to choose between options, which for Hegel “has to do only with the abstraction of freedom, not with its idea and its truth” (PR §10R). The second moment of the will is the transition from pure indeterminacy to a concrete determination in a particular action. In this movement “the I steps into existence (*Dasein*) in general; this is the absolute moment of the finitude or particularization of the I” (PR §6). This act is the negation of infinite possibilities through the active willing of limitation (*Beschränkung*) in order to

⁷ Franco, in *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 178-182, offers a very good discussion of the difference between Hegel as compared to Isaiah Berlin's characterization of negative and positive freedom.

enter a determinate course of action (PR §6A).⁸ In this moment the will renounces its merely abstract ability to choose between alternatives and instead chooses to make itself determinate through a particular action. These alternative moments of the will mirror Hegel's discussion of the beautiful soul as it splits into the one who judges and the one who acts. But as we will see, here in the *Philosophy of Right* the overcoming of this contradiction is not a movement into religion but into an ethical life guided by habits and dispositions. But this is to get ahead of Hegel's argument.

These two moments of the will are, for Hegel, only abstract moments unified by a third moment in which (1) the abstract indeterminacy and (2) the determinate limitation of the will becomes "at home with itself" as "the self-determination of the I" (PR §7). This third moment is less an actual moment in a sequence of willing, and more of a stance of the will toward itself. Rather than finding itself alienated in its own action (alienated because self-consciousness knows itself to be infinite but finds itself within the finitude of its action), the subject renounces this one-sidedness and determines itself to be that which is self-determining because it has determined its own course of action. This self-determination of the I is best understood as the "relating of negativity to itself," a self-relation that does not deem determinacy an alien limit. Rather, this limit is a limit that the will chooses for itself (PR §7). This "relating of negativity to itself" is the practical correlate of how 'nothing' and negativity functions within logical thought. The unity of the will as a process of consciousness "going beyond itself" in setting its own limits (the determinate negation of abstract negation) is the process by which the will can

⁸ "A will that, like the one analyzed in the previous paragraph [§5], wills only the abstract universal, wills nothing and is therefore no will at all. The particular that the will wills is a [limitation] (*Beschränkung*), for the will must, in order to be will [limit] (*Schranke*) itself in general" (PR §6A).

be at home with itself (neither merely indeterminately abstract nor lost in the world of determinacy). The unity of these moments constitute the freedom of the will, mirroring the true infinite as “negativity relating itself to itself” (PR §7R). This is the form of the will as self-relating negativity going beyond every limitation except the ones it sets for itself (i.e. self-determines).

But from where does the content of the will come? As with the objects of thought in the *Logic*, if the content of the will comes from outside itself, then the will cannot be self-determining and free. This problem is carried over into the first instance of the will, the natural will, in that its content comes from outside itself. The “immediate or natural will” is compelled by “drives, desires, and inclinations through which the will finds itself determined by nature” (PR §11). These drives, desires, and inclinations direct actions toward the continuation of life and are therefore necessary. This content, however, is not yet self-determined. This lack of self-determination is compounded because even the process of determining to act through an evaluative hierarchy of desires does not make this content self-determining. It just highlights the mere subjectivity of the finite will (PR §14).

This evaluative hierarchy, sometimes confused with true freedom, is called willfulness (*Willkür*) by Hegel. It consists of the ability to abstractly choose between options that are not one’s own (i.e. natural drives and desire) (PR §15). Hegel notes that this is the most common idea of the will (the ability to chose between alternatives), but he claims this is only the partial truth of the will, caught half way between natural determinism and actual freedom. Willfulness, in this regard, is only the will within the contradiction of finitude (PR §15R). It is caught in this contradiction because at one time

it might choose a certain course of action. But later, in the same situation, the will might just as well choose another course. The mere willfulness (*Willkür*) can always change its mind in the future and therefore never transcends its finite situation but only embarks along a spuriously infinite series of disconnected choices (PR §§16-18). Therefore, beyond the natural immediacy of drives and desires and a contingent willfulness, there is a need for a rational organization of the will that unites its form with a self-determining content.

As was the case with thought needing to be purified of its common sense separation of subject and object, true freedom must move through the purification (*Reinigung*) of natural determination (form) and subjective willfulness (content) according to a “rational system of the will’s determinations” (PR §19). When natural drives and subjective willfulness have been purified, cultivated, or educated into a rational system (PR §20), then the will becomes a “self-determining universality” (PR §21). This “self-determining universality” takes up its natural content and making this content its own as a second nature.

If a rational system can cultivate the will properly, then, the will becomes “truly infinite because its object is itself, and therefore is neither other to it nor a [limit] (*Schranke*) for it; instead, in its object it has returned into itself” (PR §22). Here Hegel expresses the same ideas used to speak of self-consciousness: the truly free will returns to itself through its other, which in this case is both the *other* of its own determinate action in which it finds itself, and as we will see, the *other* as “the rational system of the will’s determinations” giving truly free content to the free will’s form (this second ‘other’ is the theme of the next sub-section).

After this Introduction, the elaboration of this rational system is the task Hegel sets for himself in the *Philosophy of Right*, a task that moves through the two initial moments of ‘abstract right’ and ‘morality’. Abstract right examines the immediate freedom of persons in relation to objects, and morality investigates the mediated freedom of subjects in relation to themselves.⁹ But as usual, each of these are only abstract moments needing unification within a more comprehensive category, which in this case is ‘ethical life’ (*Sittlichkeit*) giving substantive existence to the subjective will (PR §§33, 141). To this *objective* ethical life we will now turn, giving special attention to how it perfects the *subjective* will.

The Substance and Subject of Ethical Life

Hegel’s discussion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is immediately preceded by his reflections on morality, culminating in the interrelation of the good and conscience.¹⁰ While conscience seeks to directly will the good as the objectively absolute, the center of conscience acting out of conviction (inaccessible to others) tends to make subjectivity absolute.¹¹ This occurs because the good, as the “substantial but still abstract universal of freedom” requires practical determination. This practical determination ends up being

⁹ Hegel uses ‘person’ (*Person*) or ‘personhood’ (*Persönlichkeit*) to describe the sphere of abstract right (PR §35), and ‘subject’ (*Subjekt*) or ‘subjectivity’ (*Subjektivität*) within the sphere of morality (PR §§105-6). Roughly, a person wants things (freedom through things) and a subject wants itself (freedom through reflection).

¹⁰ While much more thorough in his critique of conscience and the problems of the evil will, the conclusions in the *Philosophy of Right* reflect the same concerns outlined previously in the *Phenomenology*. Allen Wood sees the *Phenomenology* as focused more on the problem of German Romanticism and its celebration of the individual, and the *Philosophy of Right* as focused on Jakob Friedrich Fries’ ‘ethics of conviction’ (*Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 174-75).

¹¹ Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, 220.

conscience itself. But “conscience, as the purely abstract principle of determination” requires that it to be universally objective (PR §141), can only reference itself as this universal. This leads to a vicious cycle accenting on subjectivity because the only path to the universality of the good comes through the subjective conviction of conscience. Because of these deficiencies the good that is discovered within the morality degenerates into a sophisticated form of willfulness masked as conscience. The emptiness of the good and its filling by subjective conscience are the backdrops against which Hegel shapes his doctrine of ethical life.¹²

For Hegel, ethical life is the unity of the objective and subjective determinations of freedom. Ethical life is the “concrete identity of subjective will and the [objective] good” (PR §141).¹³ Ethical life is not merely indeterminate or abstract, but is

the living good that has its knowing, willing, and, through its acting, its actuality, in self-consciousness, but that has its foundation—which is in and as itself—and its motivating aim in ethical being. This is the concept of freedom that has become both a present world and the nature of self-consciousness. (PR §142)

What was previously thought to be an opposition between the objective good and subjective will, bridged through subjective conscience, is now unified by ethical life, not requiring a bridge translating thought (the universal good) into (particular) action. Just how these are unified requires looking at ethical life from both an objective and subjective point of view.¹⁴

¹² Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 222.

¹³ “The unity of the subjective and objective good that is in and as itself is ethicality” (PR §141A).

¹⁴ “It follows that we can display the Idea of freedom in the modern world in two complementary fashions. We can focus on the (philosophical) self-understanding of modern individuals and show how this is expressed in the norms of the ethical domains they inhabit (Family, Civil Society, and State), or we can focus on these ethical domains directly, describing them as they are encountered in the modern world and explaining

As Hegel sees it, the problem of (Kantian) morality is its lack of determinate content by which to direct and motivate one's life. Reference to an abstract good does not ensure freedom but instead perpetuates individual caprice under a moral veneer. What is needed is a concrete "ethical objectivity" practically accessible to all so that each can practice the good while knowing it to be good (beyond mere subjective conviction). The good, in ethical life, becomes a stable and objective content through its laws and institutions. These laws and institutions becomes the ethical (objective) substance that is then made concrete in each individual subjectivity (PR §§144). Unlike typical forms of liberalism that prioritize the individual, ethical life is the foundation of the individual's expression and experience of freedom and therefore must be given priority. This is so much the case that Hegel claims that the objectivity of ethical life is the substance and necessity in which individuals are mere "accidents" (PR §145, §145R). Priority must be given to the "substantiality of the ethical" for otherwise one must "proceed atomistically and build up from the foundation of the individual," a procedure that "is devoid of spirit because it leads only to an aggregate. Spirit, however, is not something individual; it is the unity of the individual and the universal" (PR §156A). This perspective agrees with Hegel's continuing emphases that individuality, whether of objects or subjects, must pass

how the norms that structure them are internalized in the motivation of the inhabitants. Taking the first route, we portray Ethical Life as a condition of *subjective freedom*. Taking the second route, examining the institutions which make up the moral world, we illuminate the conditions of *objective freedom*...[T]hese should not be represented as two independent perspectives from which the details of Ethical Life can be charted. They are interdependent or complementary aspects of it. We cannot articulate the norms of subjective freedom without showing how they are actualized in the institutional structures of social life. And we cannot describe the institutional or practices of social freedom without detailing how these institutions are constructed from the intentional activity of those moral subjects whose behaviours such institutions comprise" (Dudley Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* [London: Routledge, 2002], 223-24). See also Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 196-98.

through otherness as an essential constituting moment.¹⁵ Atomistic individualism (and its aggregate) can never fully express the life of *Geist* in its passage through otherness and therefore cannot be the basis of *Geist* and its ethical life.

Prioritizing ethical life, over and beyond individual subjectivity, often raises fears of a creeping totalitarian impulse in Hegel, of which liberal individualism has always been thought to be the cure. The trepidation that individuals are merely disposable ‘accidents’ within the necessities of ethical life is only compounded when we read that the state (the highest instance of ethical life) is “God’s march in the world” as the “might of reason actualizing itself as will” (PR §258A). But one should not be too hasty in these concerns as Hegel frequently claims that the freedom of subjectivity is neither abolished nor abandoned, but fulfilled in ethical life:

The right of individual humans to be subjectively determined as free is fulfilled when they belong to an ethical actuality, because their certainty that they are free has its truth in such an objectivity; within the ethical they actually possess their own essence, their inner universality. (PR §153)

Ethical life is not the negation of individual particularity, as if at first one is an individual who is then, later, absorbed into the ethical collective. This would merely be to first assume atomistic individualism (thereby giving it priority) and then to reverse that perspective ending up with ethical life. But Hegel’s ethical life is not a more thoroughgoing Hobbesian Leviathan sweeping up individuals as they renounce their individual right to unfettered freedom, all under cover of a sentimentality for the ancient Greek way of life. Rather, ethical life is the ground and foundation for individual freedom without which ethical life would have no “worldly being” or existence (*existiert*) (PR

¹⁵ Robert M. Wallace draws this connection clearly in *Hegel’s Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

§154).¹⁶ While giving priority to ethical life, Hegel understands this priority as the social and structural condition of individual freedom, without which ethical life would itself be an empty abstraction. The concern that Hegel is opening the totalitarian door can only be made from the liberal opposition between individual and society. But this is exactly the position Hegel refuses to allow because then subject and substance would persist in opposition to each other. But for this to be understood properly we must look at the subjective side of ethical life, its duties and habits.

For subjective self-consciousness, the objective determinations of ethical life (its laws and institutions) seem to present themselves as external objects (PR §146). This, however, is only an illusion or abstraction of the understanding. Ethical substance is “not something alien to the subject” but expresses the subject’s own inner essence and therefore constitutes its true selfhood (PR §147). The subject and substance of ethical life are so intertwined they admit only a conceptual distinction within their substantial unity. The substance of ethical life is the water in which subjective freedom swims unthematized and unreflected.

This unreflected immediacy (PR §147) is exhibited in the duties and habits of subjects, which partly constitute the “rational system of the will’s determinations (PR §19) (the other part being the objective laws and institutions). While duty within Kantian morality is always viewed as an external restriction (*Beschränkung*) to subjective freedom, in ethical life “individual humans are liberated to their substantive freedom” through duty because duty ensures both (1) liberation from natural willfulness and

¹⁶ “In Hegelian metaphysics a substance would be nothing actual without the accidents that manifest it...[thus] for Hegel, the dependence of substance and accidents is reciprocal” (Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 197).

individual moral reflection, and (2) the liberation from an indeterminate subjectivity that never attains actual freedom (PR §149). While this might seem counter-intuitive to the liberal mindset, Hegel is being perfect consistent with his conception of the will. He makes this clear saying,

Duty is a restriction (*beschränkt*) only on the willfulness (*Willkür*) of subjectivity; it collides only with the abstract good to which subjectivity adheres. When we say that we want to be free, this means at first that we want abstract freedom, and every determination and articulation of the state is taken to be a restriction of this freedom. But this reveals duty as a restriction not on freedom, but only on an abstraction of freedom [as willfulness]. (PR §149A)

This understanding of duty continues Hegel's critique of Kantian limitations and, by extension, liberal freedom as a whole. As Allen Wood concisely states, "Ethical duties are not only things I 'ought' to do, they are usually things I spontaneously *want* to do. Leaving them undone does not so much offend my [moral] conscience as empty my life of its [ethical] meaning."¹⁷ In Hegel's mind, what might seem 'other' to one's freedom is actually seen as "being at home with oneself" through the other of duty.

This spontaneous desire to do one's duty comes from a cultivated habituation resulting in virtue. Ethical life fully reflected in subjectivity takes the form of virtue, the highest of which is rectitude (PR §150). In an understated way meant to further question the supposed difficulties of modern moral reflection, Hegel notes that it is relatively easy to know what to do in each situation, and that virtue is not a great achievement. Virtue is merely doing "what is prescribed, expressed, and known to be appropriate for one in this situation" (PR §150R).¹⁸ Virtue is only thought to be a great achievement in ancient

¹⁷ Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 210 (emphasis in original).

¹⁸ "In a properly constituted ethical life, Hegel argues, it is not difficult to know what we have to do to be virtuous; it does not require great feats of self-reflection" (Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 227).

societies which have “not yet evolved into the free system of self-sufficient development and objectivity,” thus requiring the exceptionally virtuous person to compensate for the general lack of freedom (PR §150R). From a moral point of view, rectitude might seem like a subordinate virtue compared to the more heroic demands of the self-denying asceticism of Kantian morality. But Hegel think this is merely the posturing of Romantic individualism seeking praise for its own exceptionalism (PR §150R). Rectitude, rather, is constancy in doing one’s duty, turning the supposed exceptionalism of virtue into the banality of second nature.

Rectitude, as an “unreflected ethical disposition,”¹⁹ reaches its apex when it has become habitual, a “second nature” expressing the *ethos* of a people. This is Hegel’s final move against the Kantian separation of duty and inclination. Habituation into ethical life, a habituation cultivated and educated into individuals, becomes a “second nature...put in the place of the initial purely natural will” such that the previous inclinations directed by drives and desires have now become habitual inclinations directed by ethical duties (PR §151). Moral reflection intervening between duty and inclination is unnecessary within a properly rational society because our rational duties are experienced and expressed as habitual inclinations. The particular will of the individual conforms to the universal will of the community as the unity of duty and inclination.

When we look back at the *Phenomenology*, this fulfillment and highest achievement of the particular and universal will was only partially *experienced* by the Unhappy Consciousness when it received absolution for its sin (of existence), and only

¹⁹ Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, 229.

partially *expressed* as the mutual forgiveness between the doer and the judge. But as a movement beyond the *Phenomenology*, the practice of mutual forgiveness is wholly absorbed into the structures of ethical life and its attending duties (within the family, civil society, and the state). This habituation occurs through a pedagogical process. In a proper educative program, what is first thought to be natural is made spiritual in a process of being “born again” (*wiedergebären*), such that one’s “first nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual one so that what is spiritual within them becomes habitual” (PR §151A). This unreflective or prereflective habituation, based on the rational cultivation established in ethical life, is the manner in which Hegel conceives of the unity of ethical substance and ethical subjects.

Objections

But before raising more substantial concerns about the limits of Hegel’s ethical life I first want to answer criticisms concerning the unreflective nature of ethical life offered above. Allen Wood speaks the concerns of many when he comments that “the subjectively ethical...seems to be essentially unreflective. It is the attitude that follows ethical custom habitually and unquestioningly. Thus it might appear that the subjectively ethical, the ethical attitude or disposition, is essentially premodern, since it excludes the subjectivity found in the moral standpoint.”²⁰ This concern stems from the need to safeguard modern moral subjectivity from its submersion within ethical substance, whether it been premodern or Hegelian. In order to guard Hegel against criticisms of creeping totalitarianism, interpreters seek to emphasize the possibility of moral criticism

²⁰ Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 217.

within and/or against ethical life. Two examples are Frederick Neuhouser and Thomas A. Lewis.

Frederick Neuhouser seeks to find a substantial place for moral subjectivity within ethical life by opening up a gap between real and ideal societies and between reform and radically oriented social criticism. As Neuhouser reasons, because we live in a less than ideal (Hegelian) society there is always a need for morally based criticism if a society's customs and habits reinforce oppressive practices. But this social criticism is always reform oriented for Hegel (and Neuhouser approves of this) because radical criticism would call into question the very basis of modern freedom: that freedom as self-determination is the goal of modern social theories rather than freedom through rational harmony with nature. Neuhouser effectively seeks to harmonize Hegel's political theory with the most favorable aspects of the social contract tradition (from Rousseau to Rawls) by accentuating the place of moral subjectivity within the gap between real and ideal societies.²¹ He does this by separating the normative aspect of Hegel's social theory from his speculative logic, allowing him to justify the elevation of moral subjectivity within ethical life.²² One can certainly understand why Neuhouser would want to elevate moral subjectivity within a situation of oppressive social practices. But this elevation of moral subjectivity is not sustainable within Hegel's system without radical revision. The separation of Hegel's logic from his social theory leads Neuhouser to misunderstand how Hegel's transitions work, such that what comes latest, ethical life in this case, is always superior to and the grounding of what comes earlier, moral subjectivity. I will expand on this in a moment.

²¹ Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 225-280.

²² Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 270.

Thomas A. Lewis also attempts to read Hegel against Hegel by turning to the anthropology of “subjective spirit” where Hegel gives an extended discussion of habits as pre-reflective actions that separate and overcome natural impulses. These habits are themselves in need of reflection if they are to be a means of freedom rather than instruments of bondage. As Lewis says, “Through its further development, spirit can abstract from and reflect upon any of its particular habits. And, if spirit is fully free, it can change these habits as well—in order to will in accord with reason, not just to choose out of habit.”²³ This reading of habits from Hegel’s anthropology suggest that habits are a lower level of freedom, themselves needing the purifying action of reason. And because Hegel’s account of habits comes early in his account of subjective spirit, before the accounts of consciousness and self-consciousness, Lewis reasons that Hegel’s conception of ethical life must be pried apart, revealing a prereflective habitual side and a self-consciously reflective side, the latter of which is more developed and more fully rational.²⁴ The distance between prereflective habituation and reflective moral deliberation open a space for transformative social criticism.

But the introduction of these gaps, either between prereflective and reflective aspects (Lewis) or between the reality and ideality of ethical life (Neuhouser) reveals a lack of trust or faith in modern institutions that Hegel did not share. Indeed, Hegel thought that ethical life was so intimate, so immediate for individual subjects that the “relationless identity” (*verhältnislose Identität*) (PR §147R) between the substance and subject of ethical life is exactly more intimate than trust or faith because the stance of

²³ Thomas A. Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel: Reconsidering Anthropology, Ethics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 57.

²⁴ Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel*, 159, also 163.

trust and faith must first introduce a distance that is then traversed by trust or faith.²⁵

Hegel's theory of habituation within ethical life is meant to close any such gaps. Hegel in no way disallows critical distance from habituated practices. Critical distance belongs to the sphere of philosophy rather than as necessary for each citizen. Just as everyone does not engage in the struggle to the death to secure self-recognition, so also everyone need not reflectively endorse the rationality of habituated practices. Indeed, Hegel assume most do not have the desire or ability to do so. Therefore, interpretations that seek to minimize the habitual nature of ethical life in order to secure a larger place for moral subjectivity only indicate that they have less confidence in modernity and the rationality of its institutions than Hegel does, and are more concerned with the questions of transiting from a less free into a more free society, a concern which Hegel also does not share.

Rather than showing the promise of Hegel for contemporary political theory, do not these revisions of Hegel begin to show the very limits of Hegel? But, as should at least be clear, the limits of Hegel do not consist in him being a proto-fascist requiring blind submission to state authorities because Hegel's account always presupposes the rationality of ethical life as he explains it. But if such rational institutions do not yet exist then one is rightfully abandoned to the interior life of moral subjectivity (PR §138R), which, like Socrates, is often abandoned (to death) in return by such societies.

2. The Institutions of Ethical Life: Family, Civil Society, and State

But before continuing the line of questioning centered on our confidence in

²⁵ "This relationship [between ethical substance and subject] is immediately yet more like identity than are even the relations of faith or trust" (PR §147).

modernity or the possibility of social transformation with Hegel's system, we must look more closely at the social institutions in which subjectivity finds its home. These are the inter-locking institutions that make up ethical life: the family, civil society, and the state. Roughly, the family is the immediate unity of ethical life, or "the immediate substantiality of spirit" in which each member fulfills their duties according to the bonds of love (PR §158). Here one's personhood and individuality is submerged within the immediate unity of the family. The goal, however, of the family is to raise children who desire to move beyond this natural immediacy into the realm of self-sufficient freedom (PR §175). When this occurs, the immediacy of family life breaks apart and individuals enter civil society as the sphere which satisfies particular needs through a system of production and consumption. The immediate unity of the family passes beyond itself into the contradictory state where individuals are opposed to each other and to civil society as a whole (PR §182). Civil society is an initial self-relation through others in that while each person seeks its particular ends, this very pursuit is also the universal end or goal of all (PR §182A). Through seeking the immediate satisfaction of one's needs comes the mediated satisfaction of the needs of all, distributed through systems of goods and services. This explanation of civil society represents Hegel's appropriation of English political economy.²⁶

Hegel claims, however, the state as the true ground from which the family and civil society grow, and the goal toward which they aim (PR §256R). The state is different than and superior to civil society. It must not be confused with civil society for this would reduce the state to the merely negative aspect of protecting rights and property. If this

²⁶ Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right*, 265-69.

were the case then the state would be merely function as the protector of individual willfulness rather than securing substantial freedom. The state is the unity of subjective and objective freedom in a way that civil society cannot be because civil society functions within the opposition of particular and universal interests (PR §258R). But as the unity of particular and universal interest, the state “is the ethical whole—the actualization of freedom” (PR §258A). That the state is the ethical whole, the totality and apex of ethical life, means “the state is the actuality of the ethical idea” and “has its immediate worldly being in ethos, and its mediate worldly being in the individual’s self-consciousness” (PR §257). It is important to notice that the state’s ethos (its habituated second naturedness) is the state’s *immediate* existence while self-consciousness constitutes its *mediated* existence. Classical liberalism would reverse the placement of immediacy and mediation by emphasizing individuals as the immediate basis of the state and all the acquired habits and practices as merely its mediation. But true to form, Hegel prioritizes ethical life in its objectivity within which subjective freedom is expressed.

In light of unity subjective and objective freedom, “self-consciousness has its substantial freedom through its disposition within the state” (PR §257) practiced as a political disposition of trust (broadly thought of as patriotism). This political disposition is expressed as a “willing that has become habitual” (PR §268). This disposition is the

consciousness that my interest, both substantial and particular, is contained and preserved in the interest and aim of an other (i.e., of the state), i.e., in the other’s relation to me as an individual. In this way, the other is immediately not an other for me, and in being conscious of this, I am free.” (PR §268)

This is what Hegel means by freedom in one’s other, in which the otherness of other people is mediated through the otherness of the state. In this habitual disposition *within* the state (not *toward* the state for this would indicate reflective distance) one is

substantially free. True freedom is achieved through the state as a “being at home with oneself in one’s other” (E §24A2), or as expressed earlier in the *Phenomenology*, the state fully expresses the “unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (PS ¶177/PG 145). This unity of objective and subjective freedom is system of rational determination allowing for a truly self-determining will.

Hegel’s practical philosophy, then, builds seamlessly upon his speculative foundation seeking to reveal the actuality of freedom through otherness. This otherness is the otherness of ethical life, principally the state, which is not really other to consciousness but that in which consciousness finds its home. On the socio-political level, ethical life establishes the self-transcending immanence of self-consciousness, mirroring Hegel’s logical and phenomenological project. The individual subject transcends its own natural willfulness within the transcendence of the state through a cultivation and habituation into particular duties. But the state is nothing other than the immanent freedom of self-consciousness as *Geist*, floating above natural existence and yet not supernaturally constituted. Ethical life contains the self-transcending nature of consciousness within its immanent horizon as the state. Neither comprised by nature nor finding itself situated within a cosmic hierarchy, ethical life is the immanent plane on which self-consciousness transcends itself and returns to itself as that which “goes beyond itself.”

3. The Limits of Self-Transcending Immanence

What happens, then, when self-consciousness does not pursue “its substantial

freedom through its disposition within the state” (§257), pursuing it elsewhere or rejects such pursuits altogether? What happens when one does not find oneself “at home with oneself in one’s other” but finds oneself systematically excluded from such a home? What happens when the dependencies on which one finds oneself are not those which flourish freedom but hinder and destroy it? These questions of alienation or exclusion from a truly rational and free ethical life are, however, still not the heart of my concerns of Hegel’s system.

The questions before Hegel, the questions that came crashing down around his followers immediately after his death, concern the ability for Hegelianism to think societal change and transformation. At first it might seem strange to question Hegel about the lack of change within his speculative and political philosophy when the concept of becoming (the coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be) plays such a central role in the *Logic*, and when Hegel constantly discusses the contingent changes necessary for the development of *Geist* in its historical formation. Certainly Hegel conceptualizes the cultivation/purification of thought in its transformation from common sense *Verstand* to speculative *Vernunft*. Was this not the entire purpose of the *Phenomenology*? The central question must be, however, Can Hegel conceptualize the actual transformation from an irrational society of unfreedom *into* his conception of ethical life with its robust interlocking aspects of institutional rationality and subjective habituation? Does Hegel actually conceptualize this change itself or just posit its occurrence as having happened? And if he cannot conceptualize this change, what does this mean for Hegel’s speculative project and its political aspects?

Many interpreters have spent so much time distancing Hegel from the image of a

reactionary guardian of the Prussian state that they think it a great achievement that Hegel distinguished true rational actuality from merely contingent existence (this often centers around an interpretation of the notoriously difficult *Doppelsatz* in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: “what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.”).²⁷ These interpretations often entail claims that Hegel is neither a theorist of the contingently present (a protector of the status quo), nor a theorist of some idealistic future (an irrelevant theorist). The interpretive horns of the dilemma is that either Hegel has nothing to say to concrete realities because he is only building the ideal ethical state and therefore has nothing to offer those seeking to reform or radically transform existing political reality, or Hegel is so closely identified with his own socio-historical present that he is either merely justifying the political status quo of modernity as he sees it or enters into a perniciously relativizing historicism.

The real problem is that you can find justification for both positions in Hegel. On the one hand Hegel says he does not desire to offer any advice for those attempting to construct a rational state because his treatise only deals with how the rational state is known (PR preface/Grund. 7:26). While defects can always be found in particular existing states, Hegel only seeks to show what is affirmative in the rational state expressing the concept of freedom (PR §258A). On the other hand, by Hegel’s own definition of philosophy, if his explication of the actuality of freedom within ethical life merely remains as a regulative ideal then it has fallen into the Kantian ‘ought’ which never becomes an ‘is,’ a dichotomy Hegel’s entire philosophy is meant to overcome.

²⁷ Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right*, 63-86; Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, 123-39; Robert Stern, “Hegel’s Doppelsatz: A Neutral Reading,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44 (2006): 235-66; Michael Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 52-83.

But the desire to balance these positions (over-identification with status quo vs. over-idealized theorist) attributes to Hegel a problem he refuses to recognize. Hegel does not need to balance between over-identifying with historical existence and over-idealizing rational thought. As Hegel had already argued in the *Phenomenology*, he believed that historical existence *had* caught up to rational thought such that practice and theory had attained their highest freedom (all of which was definitively articulated by Hegel's own philosophy). This was the process of *Geist* becoming self-conscious of itself in time as substance and subject. This supposed unity of historical existence and rational thought mind helps us understand Hegel's statement that "it is as foolish to imagine that any philosophy could be beyond its present time as that an individual could leap out of his time" (PR preface/Grund. 7:26). On the one hand Hegel understands this according to his retrospective account of the development of *Geist* in its various forms such that he can both appreciate earlier developments (i.e. Greek ethical life) while still criticizing them for their lack of maturity (in the case of Greek ethical life, that it did not affirm subjective freedom). And when applied to himself, Hegel of course realizes that he also is a prisoner of his own time just as much as any other. But the difference is that Hegel thinks *Geist* had, in a definitive manner, entered not only its latest, but also its last, shape. Certainly minor adjustment could be made here or there regarding his own speculative logic or the details of the rational state. But these modifications would never entail a wholesale transformation in the magnitude of overcoming the inherent contradictions of Greek ethical life between Antigone and Creon, nor would current historical contingencies require the moral vigilance of a Socrates because of its irrational unfreedom.

It is exactly for these reasons that Hegel does not, indeed, cannot posit transitional forms and practices that would lead society toward more rational forms. Such transitions are no longer necessary. And if they were, philosophy could not think them because these historical shapes only contingently arrive on the scene and philosophy can only comprehend their necessity after the fact. This is all in line with Hegel's rejection of a moral or political 'ought', compelling him to articulate his philosophy as a self-transcending immanence. It is self-transcending in that it moves beyond mere natural or historical determinacy into the spiritual realm of freedom as self-determination. But it is immanent because it rejects any otherworldly beyond to anchor its claims for self-determination. This self-transcending immanence is the unity of substance and subject, a logical and political unity that Hegel believed was unfolding in the modern world and best articulated in his speculative philosophy.

The Breakdown of Substance and Subject

This unity of subject and substance, within the rising revolutionary atmosphere of Germany in the 1830s and 1840s, which resulted from a combination of political and industrial factors, began to tear apart due to its own internal tensions (or rather, due to its own internal optimism which seemed more and more out of place). With Hegel's death in 1831 came the slow breakdown of the systematic unity of substance and subject. The 'new-left' Hegelians took the immanence of Hegel's thought in a strictly anthropological manner and read Hegel as a humanist.²⁸ This humanist reading was most dramatically

²⁸ The 'new-left' Hegelians must be distinguished from the "old-left" of Hegel's immediate followers like Eduard Gans, often called the "young Hegelians" although the generational distinction is also misleading. See John Edward Toews, "Transformations

accomplished in Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel's system by reading *Geist* as a strictly naturalistic social theory and understanding God as merely a human social projection. This inversion was farther radicalized by Marx who understood self-consciousness less as a matter of the self-realization of freedom and more as a material process of production. Marx argued that "human consciousness itself is completely socially mediated by these material facts having to do with the 'forces of production' (what productive potential is available in a particular economic and social order) and the 'relations of production' (who owns what)."²⁹ Marx articulated a 'material substance' of economic forces and productions that determine the 'false consciousness' of the subject. This is the reduction of the unity of Hegel's substance and subject toward a strictly materialist substance.

Inversely, Kierkegaard sided with the subject, especially the faithful subject, against the substance of modern ethical life. For Kierkegaard, one can never overcome the Kantian problem that we are stuck between the infinitude of consciousness seeking to live its own life (according to its reason) and the finitude of existence exposing our lives as not really our own. All such Hegelian reconciliations between the "system" and the world are illusions hiding the fact that the Kantian problem remains. For Kierkegaard, as Pinkard says, "the *infinite* value of self-determination is both impossible to achieve and impossible to abandon," meaning that life is a paradox without resolution.³⁰ Or more

of Hegelianism: 1805-1846," in F. C. Beiser, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 378-413. See also his *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), and Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Younger Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 312.

³⁰ Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, 352.

precisely, it is a paradox without resolution by reason, requiring something more. Because one cannot think oneself out of this paradox one must leap out of it through a “leap of faith” which “must simply *acknowledge* that we are dependent on a power outside of ourselves.”³¹ In this way, by emphasizing the faithful subject, Kierkegaard moves in the opposite direction than Feuerbach and Marx, abandoning the implicit humanism of Hegel and opting for a more thoroughgoing transcendence beyond self-transcending immanence. This is the breakdown of the Hegelian unity of substance and subject in the direction of the subject, now reconnected to transcendence.

These breakdowns of the Hegelian substance and subject into either a materialist substance of historical modes of production or the existentialist subject and its leap of faith, and their later intermingling, have set the broad contours of continental philosophy ever since. Each in their own way attempted to think change and transformation beyond Hegel: Marx in theorizing the coming proletariat revolution and Kierkegaard through the moment of radical faith in taking up one’s life amid its paradoxes.

The Limits of Self-Transcending Immanence

This breakdown of the unity of substance and subject continues to be the destiny of Hegel as articulated by the two prominent interpreters we looked at in chapter one: Robert Pippin and Slavoj Žižek. In a sense, these are the only current options within left Hegelianism. Pippin represents an emphasis on the substance of normative practices enabling self-legislating freedom and Žižek represents a commitment to the subject of radical action. Each signifies the limits of Hegel’s self-transcending immanence.

³¹ Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, 352.

Beginning with Pippin, we noted that he attempts to navigate between a Kantian individual moral self-legislation and a communitarian social ontology governed by something other than liberal freedom. For Pippin, Hegel advocates for an ever-evolving practice of social normativity promoting a rational freedom such that authentic autonomy is achieved only through social inter-dependence. The evolution of these social practices constitutes the life of *Geist*, the self-transcending achievement beyond, yet within, the immanence of nature. This is Pippin's version of Hegel's self-transcending immanence.

Unlike Marx who sided with the materialist substance of economic production in order to theorize movements of societal change, Pippin bites the bullet of social transformation by focusing on the substance of normative practices. Pippin is explicitly against finding a more significant place for moral subjectivity as a means toward transitioning from an unfree to a more free society. This is the case because as mentioned above, this would betray the very foundations of Hegel's ethical life as critique of Kantian morality.³² Certainly Pippin often emphasizes that Hegel offers us a compelling understanding of past changes in normative practices (the breakdown of Greek ethical life for instance), but he is also emphatic that these are only retrospective reconstructions of historical events. Pippin concludes the substantive part of his reflections on Hegel's practical philosophy by claiming that

the account and justification of...moral progress can be given, but only 'at dusk,' never in a way that legislates 'what ought to be done,'...Marx was right about Hegel, in other word. The point of philosophy for Hegel is to comprehend the world, not to change it; and this for a simple reason that Marx never properly understood: it can't.³³

³² See Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 210-238, 263-4 (esp. 264 n. 35 where he engages Neuhausser's proposal concerning moral subjectivity).

³³ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 272.

Pippin can maintain such a position because he maintains a confidence in modernity and its institutions that many of Hegel's supporter do not. Because of this Pippin does not need to dwell on the conceptualization of societal change, just as Hegel did not.³⁴

But in seeking to comprehend the world, does not Hegel fail to account for those who *do* change the world? As we asked earlier, from where does an Antigone come who challenges Creon? From where does a Socrates come who becomes a gadfly? Or, because these could be merely the exceptionally virtuous within a premodern ethical life (although this should not blunt the questions), from where comes the judge who would renounce his hard heart and forgive the one who acts? Why would one allow the "wounds of the Spirit" in the first place, even if they were healed later? How does one come to learn how to forgive the sins of existence? In Hegel's account, one would do this in order to be reconciled to oneself and one's other in a process of successful mutual recognition. This, however, is only a retrospective justification of the process which does not take into account the motivations and understandings of the actors involved (actor and judge). Of course, in the *Phenomenology* it is religion that teaches us why and how to forgive ourselves. And yet Pippin does not avail himself of the religious aspects of Hegel.

But Žižek most certainly does appropriate the religious dimensions of Hegel's thought, but not as a means toward buttressing a substantive ethical life of normative practices, but toward creating a radical subjectivity beyond such normativity. As noted in chapter one, Žižek understands the significance of Christianity as revealing the death of

³⁴ See Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the God-man as that through which we come to be reconciled to ourselves as we assume the same process of subjective death. This daily dying is not a process of resurrection into new substantial unity but rather the persistent “tarrying with the negative” which is subjectivity itself. The death of God, for Žižek, is not the unmasking of a human projection such that once we are rid of it we will become reconciled with ourselves (as was the case for Feuerbach). Rather, the death of God and our participation in it allows for one to break free of normative and symbolic constructs. The subject, as that which is nothing but its own failure to become a subject, is the end and beginning of Žižek’s Hegel, focused on establishing the possibility of a radical political act intended to trigger a revolutionary change in existing socio-political formations.

Žižek also supports modernity, but it is a counter-modernity that lives into the gaps and lacks of contemporary society by understanding the movements of German Idealism exactly as the thoughtful articulation of active negation. Žižek places great emphasis on this subjective negativity and thereby redeems Hegel’s idea of world historical individuals through whom the development of *Geist* occurs.³⁵ Žižek calls these individuals “vanishing mediators” who dwell within the passage between normative orders, misunderstood and rejected by both sides (the old passing order and the newly established replacement).³⁶ These vanishing mediators are the heroes within the gaps of Žižek’s counter-modernity that, instead of being “the wounds that heal without a mark”, are much closer to an orthodox reading of Christianity where the wounds of the crucified

³⁵ Allan Wood gives an enlightening summary and evaluation of Hegel’s account of “world historical individuals” and the amoralism (or beyond ethicality) he ascribes to them (*Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 226-236).

³⁶ See Slavoj Žižek, *They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso Press, 1991), 179-197; *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 33-35.

one always remain. This emphasis on the radical subjective act is Žižek's version of Hegel's self-transcending immanence, an immanence of subjectivity able to transcend the status quo of normative constructs, persisting as a divided subject centered on nothingness.

However, as noted at the end of chapter one, Žižek does not give an account of this radical subjectivity in its motivation toward radical political acts. In fact, Žižek's alleged valorization of radical political action as the eruption of subjectivity is always conditioned by a literary counter-normativity (Antigone, Oedipus, Jesus, King Lear) that threatens Žižek's assertion that subjectivity at its base is always its own support within nothingness.³⁷ This is the reverse of the problem for Pippin for whom the substance of normative practices could not think the subjectivity of those who would change the practices. For Žižek it is now the case that the subjectivity of radical change both disallows but necessarily presupposes a certain normativity if it is to pass into an actual act rather than persist in radical, indeterminate negation. It seems, therefore, that Žižek can only think change without such change ever having any substance and Pippin can think substance without ever having any substantial change.

Conclusion

It seems, then, the breakdown of Hegel's substance and subject itself cannot be maintained without either forgoing the thinking of political change or abandoning

³⁷ Bruno Bosteels critiques Žižek for equivocating between Lacan and Badiou on the nature of subjectivity and the act, an equivocation between the Lacanian subject which assumes the impossibility of subjectivity and the Badiouian subject faithful to an event, two 'subjects' which are irreconcilable. See his "Badiou without Žižek," *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics* 17 (2005): 235-238.

political change within a solipsistic act of subjectivity. On the one hand is the normative Hegel of Pippin that can only admit that change happens, but always comes too late to participate in it. However, according to Hegel's own dialectic, this abstract indeterminacy of Pippin that stands above or behind change must become determinate as change in some manner. On the other hand, is the radical Hegel of Žižek that thinks the unthinkable nothing as the core of subjectivity. But these moments, as we have seen, are incomplete in themselves, mutually vanishing into its reverse. This oscillation between Pippin and Žižek suggests the need for a higher conceptuality through which to unify these two disparate interpretations of Hegel. Here it would be tempting to return Hegel's self-transcending immanence to its 'traditional' onto-theological interpretation as the reconciliation between the normative and the radical Hegel.³⁸ By way of this dialectical twist, instead of the traditional Hegel being the naïvely metaphysical interpretation that does not understand Hegel's critical commitments, the traditional reading could be seen as the only means of holding together his political theory. But as tempting as this might be it would only delay the above problems by transposing them as questions of causality within a panentheism framework.

Instead of resolving the dilemma between these three interpretations of Hegel, we should take leave of the entire project of a self-transcending immanence and its understanding of freedom. In its place, as a plausible alternative for thinking political change in its structures and subjects, is the intervention of transcendence within subjectivity and society.

³⁸ This is why interpreters like Charles Taylor, even though vigorously disputed by non-metaphysical Hegelians, offer more coherent readings of Hegel's entire corpus rather than just focusing on the part most amenable to assimilation by contemporary social theory (and its post-metaphysical tendencies).

CHAPTER 4: AUGUSTINE IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEOLOGY

*My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.*¹

Introduction

To see how Augustine offers a political and theological orientation beyond Hegel's self-transcending immanence, an orientation able to integrate the social practices and subjective positions capable of criticism and change, we must clear the air a bit about Augustine's recent political reception. This chapter will explore the recent interpretations of Augustine and his significance for politics offered by John Milbank and Eric Gregory. Exploring these two interpretations will simultaneously reveal the relevance of Augustine's political theology as well as the diversity of opinion concerning his relevance. John Milbank turns to Augustine to overcome modern liberalism and its postmodern variants. Essentially Milbank garners Augustine as an anti-liberal in which theology always outstrips the possibilities of secular politics. Gregory, on the other hand, turns to Augustine to revitalize liberalism by reintroducing civic virtues ordered by love, and for this end solicits Augustinian themes neglected by contemporary political theory. Both Milbank and Gregory stand against the Kantian framework dominating the political landscape, whether it be continental philosophies for Milbank or Rawlsian liberalism for Gregory.

This second part on Augustine will not follow the same pattern as the first on Hegel. The first part on Hegel began with Pippin and Žižek as dual interpretations of Hegel, passed through the Hegelian corpus, and then circled back to Pippin and Žižek,

¹ *conf.* 13.9.10.

showing that these two really did represent the only two viable appropriations of Hegelian thought, each articulating their own version of Hegel's self-transcending immanence. In this second part it will be argued that Milbank and Gregory do not represent the only two viable appropriations of Augustine's thought. The reasons for this, however, will not be entirely clear until we reach chapters five and six. Indeed, the goal of those chapters will be to enlarge the political interpretations of Augustine offered by Milbank and Gregory, while also showing how an Augustinian orientation to transcendence and immanence is more productive of a political subject capable of criticism and change than that available through Hegel. A critique and enlargement of Milbank and Gregory is always in service of the larger contrast between Augustine and Hegel.

1. Ontological Peace: Transcendence against Liberalism

John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* is a landmark text, dealing with much more than Augustine and his ontology of peace. While *Theology and Social Theory* does polemicize against social theory, the 'and' in the title should be taken seriously. It is not so much that Milbank is against social theory as such, but argues that theology *is* its own social theory without needing to out-source these matters to the secular sciences. The true polemic of Milbank's work concerns secular reason in its various forms of political liberalism, scientific positivism, radical dialectics, and philosophical difference (corresponding to the four parts of the book).

It is this last form of secular reason that most concerns us because the philosophers of difference examined there all emerge out of the breakdown of the

Hegelian unity of substance and subject, particularly as it is filtered through works of Nietzsche. It is against this post- and anti-Hegelian trajectory in 20th century continental philosophy that Milbank turns to Augustine's counter-ontology of peace as a resource for theology. Because of this relation to post- and anti-Hegelianism Milbank's analysis both works as a bridge between the breakdown of the Hegelian system by investigating the philosophers of difference, and his analysis reveals the promise of Augustine's political theology as a movement beyond such failed attempts. We will, therefore, briefly examine Milbank's criticism of postmodern philosophies of difference and then look at his deployment of Augustine as an alternative to secular reason. In this we will see how Milbank understands the relationship between transcendence and liberalism, a liberalism broadly equated with the autonomy of secular reason.

The Postmodern Problematic

After Enlightenment optimism concerning universal reason and the progress of history toward liberation and freedom comes the critique of Nietzsche and his philosophical progeny. This critique of Enlightenments takes three forms. The first is an absolute historicism undertaken through a genealogical critique of ahistorical reason. The second is an ontology of difference offered against a metaphysics of presence. The third is an ethical nihilism standing against all moral foundationalisms. Most postmodern philosophers, according to Milbank, are not nearly as clear-sighted as Nietzsche concerning the ethical implications of the first two critiques revealing a failure of consistency, if not of nerve.

As Milbank sees it, the entire postmodern problematic comes down to this failure of ethical consistency. The Kantian freedom of self-determination is precariously balanced between nature and history. But once it is granted, after Hegel, that the freedom of the will is not ahistorical but historically situated, then the freedom of the will promoting equality quickly degenerates into the inequality of arbitrary power. This is the turn in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche concerning the freedom of the will *as* the will to power. And if this is the case, “then how can one ever talk of there being more or less freedom in one society rather than another?”² But postmodern celebrations of absolute historicism long to keep the emancipatory potential of social criticism as a counter against consumer liberalism. As Milbank states it, “All recent French neo-Nietzscheans, if not Nietzsche and Heidegger, are loath to renounce the emancipatory claim, and are therefore doomed to smuggle back into their philosophies an ahistorical Kantian subject who is the bearer of freedom.”³ This is the perennial problem of those replacing Kantian humanism with postmodern anti-humanism. If one follows Nietzsche down the hole of thorough-going nihilism then the ability to critique the status quo is vacated for the mere management of regimes of power. Within the coordinates of secular reason the only place for securing a criticism of these regimes is a return to a Kantian subject of self-determination. But this return to a Kantian subject is always susceptible to Nietzsche’s critique. Milbank claims that postmodern philosophers of difference cannot escape this problematic within the horizon of the secular. For Milbank, this failure necessitates a return to theology as the place of emancipatory potential. To see why we will briefly

² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990/2006), 279.

³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 279.

examine Milbank's discussion of three interlocking themes (the critique of history, metaphysics, and ethics) and how these seek to reposition theological discourse, followed by his theological alternative to secular liberalism.

Historicism as Genealogy

The genealogical method inaugurated by Nietzsche, and extended by Foucault and others, begins with two ambiguously related claims. The first is the claim that all cultural formations are contingent and therefore arbitrary expressions of power masquerading as reason. No culture has any more inherent right to exist or more intrinsic goodness to claim in the face of other cultures. All that can be known is the endless procession of power formations in history. Second is the claim that this procession of power strategies can nevertheless be objectively narrated. The objectivity of this narrative, that it indeed reveals how 'power' governs the course of history, is what supplies the genealogical method its critical edge. Through its various interpretations genealogy gives us more than an interpretation of human history. It offers a positive tool for evaluating cultural formation as either more or less honest about its own strategies of power. But, Milbank asks, does this not make the identification of power with reason an ahistorical presupposition that transcends context that is then used to unmask power strategies?⁴

Of course the genealogical method cannot make a foundationalist claim for itself and must therefore prove its own plausibility by reading its most potent rival according to this narrative of power. For Milbank, the reason why Nietzsche's polemic is directed so

⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 282.

strongly toward Christianity is because Christianity has an opposed reading of power within history. If Nietzsche can show that Christianity is merely the most sophisticated version of power masquerading as reason then he will have overcome all opposition to his genealogical perspective. From Nietzsche's perspective, "if every denial of power is a ruse of power, then the absolute denial of power must be the final ruse of absolute power."⁵ This is the case because the natural human state is the ceaselessly creative power of will, a will to power contrasted with the reactionary refusal of such strength. For Nietzsche, this reactive stance to power is equated with Christianity and its celebration of weakness.

As a provisional response to Nietzsche, Milbank asks if the creative power of will might just as easily be equated with charity rather than dominion.⁶ Of course the genealogist would answer that all acts of charity place the recipient into a position of dependence and therefore can be one of the subtlest instruments of coercion. In the end, this counter-interpretation offered by the genealogist that every act of charity is an act of coercion only presupposes its genealogical narrative of power rather than proving it. Of course Milbank has not proven the possibility of Christian charity, only suggested its plausibility. It is for these reasons that the absolute historicism of genealogy must be supplemented with an ontology of difference as a means toward proving its legitimacy as a tool for social criticism.

The Critique of Metaphysics

⁵ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 286.

⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 289.

For those like Nietzsche generally, and Heidegger specifically, Western philosophy and its metaphysics is “the attempt to give a ‘total’ classification of being, and to ground the temporal and shifting in ‘truth’.”⁷ Heidegger claims that metaphysics is really a strategy for forgetting historical existence and the existential circumstances of life itself. For Heidegger, in Milbank’s words, this forgetting of “mortality and temporality is at one with our forgetting of ‘the ontological difference’, the difference between beings on the one hand...and Being itself on the other.”⁸ Rather than affirming the ontological difference, Heidegger sees metaphysics and onto-theology as obscuring and escaping this difference through speculative discourse. To overcome metaphysics means to enter the questioning of Being only through our own mortality, temporality, and finitude. Of course Heidegger knows that Being can never be directly encountered or experienced. He takes account of this not through the mystery of Being opening toward a theological discourse, but by claiming that Being is always both a concealing and unconcealing, indicating a primordial ontological rupture between and within beings and Being.

Here again Milbank questions the plausibility of this reading of both the ontological situation and the history of philosophy. Milbank does not so much dispute the claims of ontological difference or the importance of finitude, but rather the negative slant given to this difference. For “to give this concealment the overtones of dissimulation, of violence, of a necessary suppression” is a questionable matter for “one might want rather to say that as much as a being is a particular existence and not Being

⁷ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 295.

⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 299.

itself, it yet exhibits in its sheer contingency the inescapable mystery of Being.”⁹ Only if one has excluded the possibility of an analogical relationship of beings to Being is ontological violence necessary to explain the difference between beings and Being. Milbank’s claim is that no strong philosophical reason is given to support this necessary ontological violence beyond the preference for a non-theological reading of the ontological situation. But if this preference is as ungrounded as the one give by a theological description then theology should feel no need to adjust itself to postmodern philosophies of difference.

The Critique of Ethics

Beyond the preferential option of ontological violence being as ungrounded as an ontology of peace, Milbank concludes his discussion of the postmodern problematic by turning to ethics. It is his claim that postmodern philosophies of difference follow Nietzsche’s absolute historicism even while attempting “to claim for itself a continuing critical reserve” of Kantian freedom.¹⁰ As Nietzsche saw clearly, “the rigorous implication of post-humanism is this: freedom is only a reality as arbitrary power,” meaning that “the Rousseauian-Kantian egalitarian extension of freedom has been transformed into the asymmetrical extension of power.”¹¹ If this is the case then the critical reserve through which postmodern philosophers denounce exploitative systems evaporates into another strategy power. For

how is one to decide when to abide in illusion, and when to dismantle it? Either course is in a sense hopeless, and nothing can really guide our decision as to *when*

⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 302.

¹⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 318.

¹¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 318.

is the appropriate moment for one or the other. The decision must itself be arbitrary, and persuasion to either course a strategy of deception. In which case, it would appear, only a fascistic politics remains viable.¹²

Milbank claims this fascistic politics necessarily flows out of an ontology of difference.¹³

This is the dilemma of postmodern philosophy caught between its commitment to historicism and freedom. Milbank's articulation of this dilemma exactly explains the renaissance of Hegel in political theory (a renaissance beginning around the same time as the publication of *Theology and Social Theory*).¹⁴ If postmodern continental philosophy could not integrate Kant and Nietzsche then why not split the difference and return to Hegel as an alternative to both?

Of course Milbank's trajectory is different than, but analogous to, a return to Hegel. For him, if there can be no return to a Kantian humanism of universal freedom nor a dwelling in a Nietzschean anti-humanism of power, then one must return to a theology which can offer, in a non-foundationalist manner, a counter-history and a counter-ontology able to affirm both difference *and* peace rather than difference *as* violence. Milbank thinks that Augustine offers us such a theology.

Augustine and the Two Cities

To say that theology is its own social theory means that it is an explication of the socio-linguistic practices of the church as the true interpretation of human history. This approach "refuses to treat reason and morality as ahistorical universals, but instead asks, like Hegel, how has Christianity affected human reason and human practice" from within

¹² Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 319.

¹³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 319-23.

¹⁴ Both Pippin and Žižek published major works on Hegel in 1989, the year before the publication of *Theology and Social Theory*.

the history of the world?¹⁵ The task, then, is to offer a counter-history and a counter-ethics able to rival the plausibility of a postmodern Nietzschean anti-humanism, all grounded in a counter-ontology of peace.

Counter-History

Because a postmodern theology must acknowledge that all subjects and objects are positioned by a particular set of cultural practices and narratives, it must attend both to these narrative practices while not falling into anti-realism nor narrational foundationalism.¹⁶ A postmodern theology needs to articulate itself as a metanarrative which is also embedded in history and therefore open to development. According to Milbank, the Church interprets itself as responding to the original story of Jesus, a story that is nothing less than the founding of a new community. That this story is linked to the Son and Spirit of God, who are fully divine, shows that this story belongs within the “narrative manifestation of God” within history.¹⁷ This story, as a “narrative manifestation of God,” is therefore equally a regulative metanarrative as historical narrative. Because this narrative as metanarrative claims also to be a recounting of actual history, not merely a founding myth, this narrative are best understood not according to a Kantian narrative epistemology but as something more akin to a Hegelian philosophy of history, now based in faith rather than reason.

The historical claim is that a new community has come into being through the ministry of the Son and Spirit, a community that is the truth of all human community.

¹⁵ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 383.

¹⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 386-88.

¹⁷ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 389.

This is a claim which the Church cannot surrender to other ‘social sciences’ because the “*logic* of Christianity involves the claim that the ‘interruption’ of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events.”¹⁸ Christianity, therefore, is not merely different from other social formations, but is *the* difference from all other cultural systems and communal narrative.¹⁹

This difference is historically narrated as the difference between two cities. By re-reading Augustine’s *City of God* Milbank seeks to articulate the historical ground of social critique arising from the Biblical tradition as Augustine understood it. Grounded in history, this narrative protects against a false appeal to universal reason. Likewise, as equally the story of God this historical embedded social critique cannot be reduced to mere historicism. Rather than making power and suspicion fundamental to human history, Augustine challenges the assumptions of universal antagonism by arguing from the standpoint of fundamental peace.²⁰

On the one hand is the earthly city, the city of war, of which Rome is the archetype. Roman society is based on conquest and domination such that even its virtues only find their truth in war. As Milbank states, for Rome there

can only *be* virtue where there is something to be defeated, and virtue therefore consists for them, not only in the attainment and pursuit of a goal desirable in itself, but also in a ‘conquest’ of less desirable forces.²¹

This is true not only of virtue but is true of the foundational myths of Rome and its gods. Roman myths assume a prior order of violence that is only stopped or contained by a leader or a god (Romulus or Jupiter) such that the legal and civil order of Rome is “traced

¹⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 390.

¹⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 383.

²⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 392.

²¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 393 (emphasis in original).

back to the arbitrary limitation of violence by violence, to victory over rivals, and to the usurpation of fathers by sons.”²² This foundational violence is perpetually repeated in the form of foreign conquest, seeking to replace a perceived anarchy with dominion.

On the other hand is the heavenly city, the city of peace. In the city of peace the cycle of violence warring against violence is broken and another beginning is made.

While it is true that finite reality has fallen from its original peace, this means that now

salvation from sin must mean ‘liberation’ from cosmic, political, economic and psychic *dominium*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*, or temporal interval between the Fall and the final return of Christ. This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community. Whereas the *civitas terrena* inherits its power from the conqueror of a fraternal rival, the ‘city of God on pilgrimage through this world’ founds itself not in a succession of power, but upon the memory of the murdered brother Abel slain by Cain.²³

Unlike the founding of a city on the memory of the brother (Romulus) who murdered his brother (Remus), the city of peace is founded on the memory of Abel, a foreshadowing of Christ, the brother to all. This alternate community institutes a political society inhabiting a trajectory of peace rather than a repetition of violence. Augustine’s philosophy (or better, theology) of history is therefore very concerned with the beginnings of political communities, in contrast to the more Hegelian perspective focusing on the aporias and eventual dissolution of political systems.

Counter-Ethics

This counter-history activates a counter-ethic that is neither ancient nor liberal. In Milbank’s mind, Christianity is *the* difference between cultural systems and therefore

²² Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 393-94.

²³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 394.

cannot be reduced to either ancient virtue or liberal detachment. The social practice of Christianity is other than these options. In making this point Milbank desires to protect Augustine (and theology) from a dominant interpretation. Milbank fears that too many have read Augustine's critique of ancient culture as the first steps toward Cartesian inwardness and liberal detachment, a reduction that then under-values Augustine's actual critique and appreciation of ancient culture.

Milbank sees Augustine not as rejecting all aspects of ancient thought, but rather as seeking to overcome its dualisms. The first dualism overcome in the Church is the separation between *oikos* and *polis*. Rather than reducing the household around the needs of the city, the Church unites the *oikos* and *polis* such that each family is itself a little republic where cultivation of character should occur. Likewise, society as a whole is re-imagined as a family bound by the strong bonds of love. In this way household and city stand together rather than the city exercising dominion over all households.²⁴ Similarly, Augustine seeks to overcome the dichotomy between soul and city (and its derivative distinctions of body/soul and passion/reason) such that the city no longer needs to control or dominate its individual members (congruently the soul need not be thought to dominate the body, nor reason the passions). Augustine seeks a deeper integration between these dichotomies by introducing a third element above them. "Souls, households and cities can only be 'internally' right insofar as this apparently 'internal' order is really part of an entirely 'external' sequence within which it must be correctly placed," an external sequence guided by a transcendence of peace.²⁵ It is precisely because this internal sequencing is accomplished through a social and transcendent

²⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 407.

²⁵ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 408.

ordering that Milbank warns against reading Augustine as an incipient liberal. Rather than initiating the inward turn, Augustine emphasizes the turn to transcendence to account for the peace of the city and the soul.

But none of this is a denial of the fall or of sin, the tragic disarray humanity finds itself. Given the persistence of sin in others

there is only one way to respond to them which would not itself be sinful and domineering, and that is to anticipate heaven, and act as if their sin was not there (or rather acting with a 'higher realism' which releases what is positive and so alone real in their actions from negative distortion) by offering reconciliation.²⁶

Forgiveness is the true form of virtue in this life because it short-circuits the absence of virtue in others by "not taking offence, assuming the guilt of others, doing what they should have done, beyond the bounds of any given 'responsibility'."²⁷ But even more than this reversal of sin in forgiveness, love is that which opens up the space for others in their differences. "If forgiveness alone, a gratuitous self-offering beyond the demands of the law, reflects virtue, then this is because virtue itself as charity is originally the gratuitous, creative positing of difference, and the offering to others of a space of freedom, which is existence."²⁸ Christianity in the form of charity, a productive fraternity of liberty and equality, is the practice of harmonious difference, knowing that difference is not ontologically violent even if it is ontologically ultimate.

Counter-Ontology

The positive evaluation of difference is possible because Augustine views God not as one who limits a primordial chaos, but is actually the Unlimited who nonetheless

²⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 416-17.

²⁷ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 417,

²⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 422.

creates the difference of creation. God does this not in contradiction to God's nature or essence but because God is already both infinite being and internal difference in harmony (as Trinity) such that God is simultaneously all being and all difference.²⁹ Because of this difference in harmony

creation is not an appearance, a mixture of truth and untruth, related to God by a minus sign, but is rather the serial occurrence of differential reality in time, and related to God by a mysterious plus sign which construes *methexis* as also *kenosis*: God who is 'all' being nonetheless 'gives' a finite being which he is not.³⁰

Milbank draws on both Augustine and Dionysius to argue for understanding violence as an unnecessary ontological intrusion (rather than the necessary conditions which must then be stayed by a counter-violence) in the form of the privation. Evil is not a *thing* in existence but a failure to properly relate to God (the source of existence) and other created things (the community of existence). This occurs through a bending of desire toward (self-) possession rather than openness to others in their differences. As the desire for self-possession, evil is a violation of charity. This counter-ontology that sees evil as privation and violence as contingent completes Milbank's rebuttal to postmodern nihilism. This theological orientation, based in Augustine, begins from a self-immanenting transcendence (the God who creates and re-creates) rather than the self-transcending immanence of Hegel.

Evaluation

Milbank, then, seeks to give a compelling theological response to modernity and its postmodern variants by internalizing the postmodern critique of foundationalism

²⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 437-38.

³⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 438.

without allowing this critique to become determinative for theology. He does this by accepting the necessity that theology is itself a social theory embedded in narratives and practices, but refuses to import the necessity of an agonistic struggle within society or an ontological violence as difference. Milbank instead reads difference through the peaceful formation of true human community grounded in an ontological vision of peace. Through this ontological orientations Milbank seeks to affirm the place of transcendence within the immanence of secular reason.

The grand scope of Milbank's endeavor, however, often entails a rather impressionistic reading of Augustine. The rhetorical fervor of Milbank's theological project makes one wonder if Augustine is being fitted into a theological project that might not be true to the specific trajectories of Augustine's own thought. In this sense, while Milbank's interpretation might be broadly congruent with Augustine it often glosses over the details of how Christ relates to the Church, of how this metanarrative becomes the narrative of one's life. Milbank often gestures toward the unity of ecclesial practices and individual freedom against modern liberalism and its postmodern variants, but he never concretely explores the interweaving of these objective practices, the subjects engaged in them, and how God is working in and through both. As a movement 'beyond secular reason', Milbank's use of Augustine tends to remain focused on theological reason as a theoretical project, neglecting the practice formation of subjects.

In other words, the theological correction to secular reasons seems to come at the cost of over-emphasizing the ontological aspects of Augustine's theology to the detriment of the more soteriological parts of Augustine's thought. Milbank scarcely discusses the manner in which this counter-narrative becomes the specific narrative of an individual.

He hardly speaks of the manner in which Christ is the way back into this ontological peace, preferring to focus on the interruptive nature of the Christ event. Milbank certainly makes clear *that* Christianity is not merely different from other social formation but is *the* difference between all social formations. Milbank, however, does not make clear *how* Christianity draws people into this difference in and through Christ. The *how* is as fundamental to Augustine's ontology as it is to his soteriology (a point argued in the chapter five). In Milbank's presentation, the soteriological *how* is overwhelmed by the ontological *that* because he emphasizes the 'counter-' aspects of Augustine's theology as it stands in opposition to modern liberalism. This lack of focus on the soteriological *how* leads to a rather thin account of how political subjects are formed. Because of this thin account it is not clear how, on his account, one would move beyond merely offering social critique into practices of constructive change. Milbank seems so focused on the ontological status of Christian practices (theology in particular) that the question of the subjects capable to engage in such practices does not arise.³¹

Because of these concerns, political theologians like Eric Gregory have turned from Milbank's rhetorically charged appropriation of Augustine as an anti-liberal and begun offering an account of Augustine focused on the subjective motivational structure of properly ordered love, all much more amenable to modern liberalism. This, however, is not a turn away from transcendence or ontology, but merely a different way of reading Augustine, turning him toward liberalism rather than away from it.

2. Ordered Love: Transcendence for Liberalism

³¹ Milbank does address some of these issues in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), but Augustine is not there the focus. In this later work the drift is toward Thomas Aquinas and the theological resources he provides Milbank.

Rather than an outright critique and rejection of liberalism, Eric Gregory longs to rejuvenate a civic liberalism by turning to Augustine's understanding of love for God and others. To do this Gregory must clear the air concerning rival versions of an Augustinian liberalism. The first he notes is Augustinian Realism as promoted by Reinhold Niebuhr and Robert Markus.³² Their political use of Augustine focuses on the sinfulness of humanity and the fallibility of politics. Against political optimism and utopianism, Augustinian political realism is constantly aware of human self-aggrandizement and domination. But this realism is also grounded in the virtue of hope as it looks toward the eschatological fulfillment of human society. Gregory fears this hope is often lost as Augustine is read as focusing on the limited aspiration of the earthly city because of sin, a limitation thought to make Augustine a precursor to Hobbesian liberalism. The second political interpretation of Augustine joins him to Rawls by focusing on the epistemic constraints of a liberal society (connected to the likes of Paul Weithman and Edmond Santurri).³³ Wary of the use of political power to coerce belief, this interpretation reduces the realm of politics to the publically rational in order to protect against epistemic hubris. The virtue of justice is put forward as the guiding light in political deliberation. For Gregory, while both of these interpretations have merit they tend to avoid the essentially Augustinian topic of love and its place in human sociality. Gregory's third, and preferred, interpretation sees Augustinian politics as a form of civic liberalism attempting to overcome the thin subjects of modern liberalism according to a thicker account of

³² Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 82-95.

³³ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 94-107.

human sociality and the necessity of virtues within liberal discourse and practice.³⁴

Gregory joins the ranks of Jean Bethke Elshtain and Oliver O'Donovan in linking Augustine's social ontology of moral motivation to a robust liberalism focused on more than just sin. Indeed, this version of Augustinian politics emphasizes the virtue of love within politics as a means toward expressing a more holistic account of human nature.

These interpretations, however, are not the only forms of political Augustinianism with which Gregory must deal. A fourth Augustinian interpretation deploys Augustine against liberalism. Gregory's main target here is the work of John Milbank.³⁵ Gregory agrees with Milbank about placing love at the center of Augustine's political thought, and he agrees with Milbank that Augustine's theological anthropology is essentially a social ontology opening toward transcendence. But he disagrees that this entails a focus on ecclesiology to the exclusion of a broader political theory. Gregory worries that Milbank conflates Christology into ecclesiology rather than highlighting the "interruptive character of the Augustinian Christ."³⁶ Gregory's contention is that an Augustinian defense of civic liberalism does not entail a theological capitulation to secular reason. There is no capitulation because an Augustinian Christology of love bridges the divide between a liberal love of others and a theological love of God. The constructive part of his project is positioned around Hannah Arendt's criticisms of Augustine's political thought. To this criticism we will turn before examining Gregory's interpretation of Augustine.

Augustine's Political Vice: Against Love

³⁴ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 107-125.

³⁵ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 125-48.

³⁶ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 131-32.

Gregory focuses on Arendt because she both questions the appropriateness of love as a political category, and specifically investigates Augustine on this account. For her, love is a political vice best kept away from social deliberations. Arendt “challenges the political implications of both divine love and the goodness of love itself—finding in neither the capacity for action nor mutual respect.”³⁷ In many respects Arendt is carrying forward the project of Kantian disinterestedness in regard to political motivation. Gregory sees Arendt offering a two-pronged criticism of love as a political category in regard to others and God, presenting a major objection to Gregory’s overall project.

In the first place, Arendt worries that solidarity and mutual respect are lost when love enters into the calculus of political deliberation. Love is too intimate, too passionate, and too partial to produce a politics of equality. Love is too often the hidden font of human cruelty.³⁸ She is indebted to a Kantian liberalism that contrasts the dispassionate reason needed for public politics from the private passions of individuals. In this scheme love is pushed into the realm of private ethics while reason can reign in the sphere of public politics. It is Arendt’s contention that this is exactly the problem with Christian love in that it abandons politics of reason for an ethics of love that easily slides into a self-love through others. For Arendt, “love becomes self-consuming of politics, legitimates violence, and therefore cannot ground an ethics of liberal citizenship that respects the separateness of person.”³⁹ Love, therefore, fails to secure solidarity and equality in the political realm.

³⁷ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 198.

³⁸ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 208-209.

³⁹ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 218.

Matters become even worse, however, when love is connected to a divine source. If love was faulty as a political category in general, it becomes downright dangerous when related to God. Arendt sees the Christian pursuit of God as making a desert out of the world generally, and, specifically, reducing neighbor-love to an instrument of God-love. The monolithic love for God overwhelms and devalues all that is not-God.⁴⁰ Arendt worries that rather than grounding neighbor love within divine love as its transcendent source, divine love only makes neighbor-love a form of self-love in one's ascent to God. The ultimate exemplification of this is the Incarnation. Rather than the perfect expression of love for neighbor, the Incarnation is a betrayal of neighbor-love in that God-as-neighbor (Jesus, the Incarnate God-man) evacuates the inherent significance of neighbor *qua* neighbor and makes the neighbor an instrumental step toward God-love.

Gregory contends, however, that Arendt too quickly dismisses love as a political category instead of entering into the hard work of discriminating between well ordered and poorly ordered loves. Rather than abandoning love all together, Gregory turns to Augustine as offering an account of properly ordered love that actually elevates the neighbor and properly motivates civic liberalism. This account turns on the possibility of connecting neighbor-love and God-love. For Gregory, this connection is accomplished in the Christological union of the love commands to love God and love our neighbors.

Augustine's Political Virtue: Ordered Love

Much like Milbank was guided in his confrontation with Nietzsche, Gregory directs his Augustinian inquiry according to Arendt's criticisms hoping to show

⁴⁰ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 222.

specifically that Augustine overcomes such problems en route to a general recommendation of Augustine's account of love as a neglected resource in contemporary approaches to Augustine's politics. Gregory first tackles the problem of love as a source for political theory. He then explores how love relates to God in such a way as to enhance rather than thwart neighbor-love.

Love for Others

For Gregory, civic liberalism needs to reclaim the place of the emotions and passions within moral motivation and political practice. Gregory argues that Augustine's "intersubjective ontology" of creaturely dependence and other-relatedness requires a robust account of love as the affirmation of and openness toward others.⁴¹ For Augustine, "love is not a blind drive but a complex disposition that informs a way of being in the world."⁴² But this focus on love must not slide into a romantic or paternalistic politics that either sentimentalizes or coerces others in the name of love. Humans are apt to sin through wrongly ordered loves directed toward self-love without relation to or in domination over others.⁴³ This need to organize *love* and to form the character of the *lover* is Gregory's primary interest.⁴⁴

This need for an organized love beyond sentimentalism compels Gregory to admit that the best form of an Augustinian liberalism is one where "love and sin constrain each other."⁴⁵ The necessity of love and sin mutually constraining each other gives rise to

⁴¹ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 243.

⁴² Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 251.

⁴³ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 273.

⁴⁴ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 41, 56.

⁴⁵ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 245. See also 15, 30-34, 41-46.

some Augustinian advice for loving one's neighbors. Concern for one's neighbor should be emblazoned by love yet chastened by sin. This chastening should be exhibited as compassion fused with prudence.⁴⁶ Compassion for one's neighbor is a healthy emotional motivation for assisting them in their time of need. But this compassion is only truly expressed if it upholds the dignity of those in need, not reducing the neighbor to the status of a helpless victim. Prudence is vigilant against such sinful reduction of the other into a mere object of compassion rather a subject of respect. Through this combination of compassion and prudence love is properly ordered as a political virtue. Likewise, a properly ordered love is able to love all equally even while expressing this love as non-identical treatment.⁴⁷ While Augustine claims love is universal he is also committed to proximity in the exercise of this love. For Augustine, friends and local community are providential gifts of God through which we express the natural constraints of our embodied existence. Lastly, Gregory's Augustinian advice for loving one's neighbor is a constant counsel against harm. Augustine is ever aware of the social pathologies that can spring up when one's neighbor becomes subject to "the false autonomy of the self's egoism."⁴⁸ It is not because he devalues the neighbor (as Arendt fears), but exactly because he value neighbor love so much that Augustine refuses the neighbor *qua* neighbor as an object before the self. The autonomous self cannot be trust with such an object without good turning into harm, inadvertently or not. It is exactly this reason that requires the coupling of neighbor love to God love in Augustine, not as

⁴⁶ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 292-94

⁴⁷ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 294-96.

⁴⁸ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 297.

an other-worldly escape but as a way to affirm the neighbor within the “conceptual role of love for God.”⁴⁹

Love for God

Gregory desires to show that love of God protects the neighbor from the instrumentalization of sin. This is accomplished by understanding the love of others within a love for God. Against the much maligned distinction between use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*) which seems to place neighbors within the sphere of objects to be used on the way to enjoying God, Gregory seeks to rehabilitate this distinction as the only way to properly respect the neighbor. To love one’s neighbor *for* oneself is a perversion of love. But to love one’s neighbor *in* God is to properly love the neighbor as a created being ordered toward the source of all being. This is essentially a social vision of neighbor love connected to an all-encompassing vision of God.⁵⁰

The connection, for Gregory, between neighbor love and God love (between *uti* and *frui*) is Christological. Through the Incarnation there is an ethical and ontological relation between God and the world opening up the possibility of enjoying God’s gifts in creation. This possibility is only maintained if this enjoyment is properly ordered toward God. For Augustine, “to love God is to love the whole of creation existing in God. The love for God is expressed in an ordered love that loves God *in loving* God’s world.”⁵¹ Though loving God by loving the world we see that love for God is always world affirming through an “immanent teleology” of ordered love based in the Christological

⁴⁹ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 320.

⁵⁰ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 335-43.

⁵¹ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 323.

reality that God has become “the neighbor of humanity.”⁵² Because of the Incarnation “true love of self is now itself taken into the intersubjective triune love of God. It is this participatory love that frees the self from its own needy self-enclosure.”⁵³ Because of this participatory love the “Incarnation issues a challenge to any form of deistic or Neoplatonic ontology that perpetuates a competitive tournament of loves between God and the world.”⁵⁴ Neighbor-love and God-love are Christologically non-competitively.

This Christological non-competitive relation creates the unity of the two love commands. That Christ has become the neighbor of humanity is not the ultimate reduction of the neighbor, as Arendt thought. Rather, Christology is the manner in which the command to love God and to love one’s neighbor are united without reduction of either. Christology, for Gregory, is the theological ground allowing for a politically useful appropriation of love in Augustine. This Christological ground allows for the tension (mutual constraint) between love and sin that affirms creation generally and neighbor love specifically, even while seeking to order this love toward God as a check against sinful domination. Within this tension is a space for “vulnerable encounters with others that is characteristic of liberal politics.”⁵⁵ As Gregory says, “Christology shapes a way of seeing the world that offers insights for political citizenship” because

Christology is both the form and substance of Augustinian theology. To put it bluntly, Book 10 of the *City of God* is the basic text for Augustinian politics: the heart of Augustine’s account of the true worship of the crucified God and the charitable service of neighbor in collective *caritas*.⁵⁶

⁵² Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 327.

⁵³ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 329.

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 330.

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 362.

⁵⁶ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 379.

This “collective *caritas*” issuing beyond ecclesial walls into the world, ordered around love of God, is the basis of an Augustinian civil liberalism that opens onto a fuller account of humanity in the world, with others, and before God. The self-immanent transcendence of God exhibited Christologically is the basis of an Augustinian account of a politics of love offering conceptual resources to civil liberalism.

Evaluation

The depth and breath of Gregory’s engagement with criticisms and misunderstanding of Augustine’s political theory is stunning and appreciated. Drawing widely from the work of others, Gregory rejects the notion that Neoplatonism tilted Augustine toward an other-worldly escape and skillfully shows that Stoicism did not render Augustine’s anthropology void of emotional connection, all without abandoning Augustine’s essentially eudaimonistic vision.⁵⁷ Overcoming these objections Gregory weaves together an anthropology of love through the Christological union of divine and human love. And yet he keeps in mind the deleterious effects of sin as corrupted desire, leading to an understanding of the necessity of mutual constraint of love and sin. In these ways Gregory has offered a compelling interpretation and application of Augustine’s account of love for the rehabilitation of civic liberalism, recovering love as a potent motivational aspect within political theory.

⁵⁷ In that they were printed in the same year, Gregory does not engage Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), where Wolterstorff argues that Augustine was not a eudaemonist (see 180-206). Wolterstorff sides with Nygren’s separation of *eros* and *agape* and reads Augustine’s abandonment of the *uti/frui* distinction in *City of God* as proof of Augustine’s movement away from an *eros* based eudaemonism for a rights based ethic.

The of recovering of love as a political category by emphasizing properly ‘ordered love’ leaves one question hanging, which Gregory never answers. How exactly is love properly ordered? Much space is spent arguing that love can and should be a political virtue because when it is properly ordered it creates space for mutual respect and compassion. Much space is devoted to showing how a properly ordered love is conceptually possible given the Christological union of the love commands. But scarcely any time is given to explaining *how* disordered loves can become ordered loves. Gregory makes vague reference to the need for moral and spiritual formation, a “kind of *askesis*” through which “the self must learn to love rightly.”⁵⁸ But the manner in which the self undergoes such formation is left to the side.

Of course Gregory could object that the book he intended to write did not contain such questions within its scope because he was writing to recommend Augustine before a skeptical audience. This could be true. But the centrality that Gregory places on Christology makes this a fair question. For Augustine, it is exactly through Christological mediation that humanity is re-ordered in its loves. In his concern to show how Christology unites divine and human love Gregory downplays the actual mediator of Christ in securing justice and love within the city of God. Gregory is explicit that he wants to move the center of gravity for political Augustinians from book 19 of *City of God* to book 10. His focus on book 10, however, is merely another instance of uniting divine (worship) and human (works of mercy) love. Gregory omits the specifically soteriological work of Christ’s mediation between God and humanity within the sacramental practice of the Eucharist. As we will see in chapter six, it is precisely these

⁵⁸ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 22. See also 48, 263, and 274.

soteriological aspects of Augustine that allow for the proper ordering of love such that works of mercy might be accomplished in the world.

The focus for Gregory is on the ontological guarantee of Christ's two natures as the means by which the political virtue of love can be directed both toward God and humanity. Gregory persistently emphasizes the ontological *order* between love of God and neighbor without adequately investigating the soteriological *ordering* of such love. In other words, Gregory neglects the soteriological *how* of such ordering in his emphasis on the ontological *what* of such an order (the soteriological *how* of a converted will and the *how* of justice and love are the topics of chapters five and six, respectively).

Conclusion

As we have seen, Milbank offers an Augustinian theology that overcomes a secular reason that seeks to subordinate the Church. Milbank shows how true critique and change only come through a counter-ontology of peace. The focus on a counter-ontology and its counter-narrative are applauded as a means of reintroducing God's transcendence with the immanence of secular reason. However, as noted above, arguing *that* Christianity makes possible an alternative social formation is not the same as showing *how* such a formation comes to be. This oversight reduces Augustine to more of a philosophical theologian focused on ontology. This lack of focus on the soteriological *how* leads to a rather thin account of how political subjects actually are formed through the mediation of Christ.

Similarly, Gregory also focuses on the ontological aspects of Augustine, but now not antagonistically related to liberalism. Instead, Gregory focuses on the ontology of

properly ordered love and sees Christology as the key to integrating love for God and love for neighbor. As mentioned above, as laudable as this is, it altogether neglects the process of re-ordering love away from self-love to love of God and love of neighbor. By only focusing on 'ordered love' to the neglect of the process of 'ordering love', Gregory again leads toward a thin account of political subjectivity because he has failed to account for the transformation of subjects from self-love to God- and neighbor-love. The possibility of such a transformation animates so much of Augustine's theology that its neglect is glaring (again these points will be substantiated in the following two chapters).

Moving through Milbank and Gregory's interpretations of Augustine has helped us begin to see the differences in orientation between Augustine and Hegel. Both Milbank and Gregory rely on a fundamental distinction between Creator and creation, a distinction Hegel refuses. For Milbank, God interrupts the immanent realm of secular reason. This Christological interruption within history allows for both critique and change, even if Milbank focuses more on the ontological aspects allowing for critique of ontological violence according to an ontology of peace, rather than focusing on the actual subjects of change (how they are changed and how they effect change). For Gregory, in Christ God unifies neighbor-love and God-love such that transcendence and immanence are non-competitively related without reduction of one into the other. This unification breaks apart a pernicious self-love and its immanent orientation. Milbank and Gregory, each in their own way, begin outlining an Augustinian theological orientation beyond Hegel's self-transcending immanence. The purpose of the next two chapters is to fill out this theological orientation that takes God's self-immanent transcending seriously. Against humanity's self-transcending immanence articulated by Hegel, it will be shown

that God's self-immanenting transcendence offers more coherent resources for conceptualizing a political subject capable of critique and change.

CHAPTER 5: CONVERSION AND FREEDOM: *CONFESSIONS*

*That is the sum of it: not to will what I willed and to will what you willed.*¹

Introduction

The previous chapter revealed an Augustine deployed to either bolster or disrupt certain forms of liberalism, each with its own theological agenda. Milbank and Gregory agree in emphasizing the importance of transcendence for understanding Augustine's political thought, a transcendence offering resources to either overcome the nihilism of modernity or the lack of neighbor-love in liberalism. But in their affirmation of transcendence Milbank and Gregory seemed to emphasize the ontological aspects to the detriment of the soteriological aspects of Augustine's thought.

The next two chapters seek to show that because Augustine integrates ontology and soteriology he is able to provide a basis for both social criticism and substantial change (something Hegel was unable to achieve). Indeed, when looked at with less of a concern to critique or consolidate liberalism, Augustine proves sufficiently capable of resisting the dichotomies of subject and society, offering an integrated moral psychology and social theory. He is capable of doing so because of his openness to a transcendence not assimilated to the self-transcending immanence of human thought. Rather, because of God's self-immanenting transcendence Augustine can conceive of the subject opening (or being opened) beyond itself to others and God, breaking the weight of habits and the

¹ *conf.* 9.1.1.

customs of prideful domination.² The intervention of transcendences within the immanence of subjectivity and the immanence of societal practices is the means by which each is integrated together and while also being drawn out of its own self-absorption.

This chapter, then, will investigate how Augustine integrates the self and the social practices through a reading of his *Confessions*, while the next chapter examines the *City of God* and its concerns with society. As we will see, while there are certain congruencies between Hegel and Augustine regarding the subject and society, Augustine is keen to show not only how a subject expresses its freedom *within* a given society, but rather how a subject *transitions* between societies, one society given over to an enslaved will and an alternative society where the will is free. In the *City of God* these two societies are the earthly and heavenly cities. But within the *Confessions* the primary focus is the division within the will itself.

By emphasizing the process of transition we will see how Augustine complexifies Hegel's account of subject and society by adding the issue of change from one society to another. This raises the questions of how someone moves from a subjective formation established within one set of social practices to an alternative subjective formation and its social practices. Does the subject first change her mind and then enter an alternative society? Or is one introduced into this alternative society before the accompanying subjectivity is formed by it? Can the subject merely decide to change her subjective formation? And, if the alternative society comes first, and if this alternative is so different then how can we account for the subject being drawn to this alternative in the first place?

² As when I introduced 'self-transcending immanence to describe Hegel's philosophy, at this point 'self-immanenting transcendence' is used as a heuristic device receiving justification only at the end of my exposition of Augustine.

These are the types of questions Hegel (via Pippin and Žižek) could not answer, if they even bothered to raise them. Of course all these questions are far from the regular idiom of Augustine and the conceptual constellations by which he navigates. However, in examining his understanding of the bondage and then freedom of the will, the importance of this Augustinian orientation will become clear in offering answers to questions such as these.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the conversion of the will and God's providential intervention. This section will cover this terrain by discussing the nature and causes of the divided will, concluding with the famous garden scene of Augustine's conversion. The second section will deepen this seemingly solitary account of subjective conversion by elucidating how Augustine skillfully reveals the social aspects of his conversion. Here it will be shown that his conversion is better thought as equally Augustine's entrance into an alternative society as it is God's miraculous intervention. It is the coordination between this alternative society and God's providence that converts Augustine's will. The last section will explore the cosmological and Christological foundation from which Augustine builds his account of conversion, making explicit the importance of God's self-immanent transcendence in integrating an account of subjective and social conversion.

Augustine and the Subject

But to finish the introduction of this chapter I have to return to a question raised in the general introduction. Namely, is there really an Augustinian subject comparable to Hegel's subject? Investigating Augustine's theory of the subject often seems like the

most natural thing to do. Did he not create the autobiographical genre? Was he not obsessed with the inner life, retreating from the world? Did he not grant the centrality of subjectivity to Western philosophy? These questions are commonly answered in the affirmative. But as with Hegel, we must problematize the received tradition and ask whether or not Augustine should indeed be thought to have set Western philosophy and theology on its solitary journey inward.

The Inward Turn

Those who see Augustine as a central figure in developing the concept of the self or subjectivity are legion. Charles Taylor, in his influential *Sources of the Self*, suggests “on the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine.”³ For Taylor, Augustine is the turning point between the ancient and modern understanding of the subject. Augustine continues the Platonic oppositions between spirit and matter, higher and lower, eternal and temporal, and immutable and changeable. But these are now re-described “essentially in terms of inner/outer” such that rather than looking up for Plato, Augustine looks in.⁴ This inward turn, according to Taylor, shifts from the objects known to the activity of knowing such that “to look towards this activity is to look at the self, to take up a reflexive stance.”⁵ Inaugurating this reflexive stance vaults Augustine into the milieu of Descartes and modern subjectivity. As Taylor says, “It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical

³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127.

⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.

⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130.

reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought.”⁶ Especially in philosophical contexts, but even in theology, scholars often assume that Augustine is as concerned with the ‘self’ and ‘subjectivity’ as modern philosophy.

From within this reflexive stance Augustine can doubt everything but his own existence on his way to proving the existence of God. This reflexive stance offers a process of seeking the certainty of God within the certainty of self-presence.⁷ Cutting memory from its Platonic roots in a prenatal vision of the Ideas, Augustine lays the groundwork for the development of innate ideas. And severing volition from reason and desire, Augustine is the first to develop the notion of the will.⁸ Because Augustine’s notion of the will cannot be reduced to reason or intellectual vision the will itself becomes the center of moral responsibility.⁹ Both as intellectual self-presence and as the center of moral responsibility, the inward self of the Western tradition springs from Augustine’s genius.¹⁰

⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 131.

⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 140.

⁸ Here Taylor is drawing from Albrecht Dilhe, *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), and Charles H. Kahn, “Discovering the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine,” in *The Question of “Eclecticism”*: *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, eds. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 138-39.

¹⁰ For an extended summary and critique of Taylor’s views on Plato, Augustine, and Descartes see Thomas Harmon’s “Reconsidering Charles Taylor’s Augustine” in *Pro Ecclesia* 20/2 (2011): 185-209, and Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 6-12. This priority of the inward turn connected to Plato and then Neoplatonism is enlarged in the work of Robert O’Connell and Philip Cary, and related to Descartes by Stephen Menn. See Robert J. O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989); Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The Inward Enigma

But is this really the case? Does Augustine talk about the ‘self and ‘subjectivity’ as a proto-modern, or has a modern fixation been projected onto Augustine? For John Cavadini, too often “the claim that Augustine thinks of, talks about, has theories of, or discovers something called ‘the self’ seems so *self*-evident that it recedes from view precisely as a claim in need of argument.”¹¹ He finds fault for this common assumption in the English translations of Augustine that emphasize the “inner self” rather than the more literal “inner man” or “inner human being” when translating Augustine’s *interior homo* or *interiouis hominis mei*.¹² Another translation issue occurs with the overuse of reflexive pronoun “such as ‘myself,’ ‘yourself,’ and ‘oneself’ that sound like possessive pronouns plus the noun ‘self.’”¹³ This overuse of reflexive pronouns creates the illusion that Augustine is examining some stable, interior reality beyond the shifting external world. This purported inner self as a stable interior reality glimpsed by the inward gaze is readily consumed by modern philosophy.

Cavadini also sees these problems compounded by a cursory reading of Augustine’s use of the ‘interior human’ in opposition to the ‘external human’, such that the former is thought to be the stable, immaterial soul which gazes about its inner space and the later is the unstable, material body caught up in the lesser things of the world. But this dichotomy overlooks the intended similarity between the two where the inner human is given full sensuality (it looks, tastes, feels) such that the “‘interior homo’ is just

¹¹ John C. Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine’s Thought.” *Augustinian Studies* 38/1 (2007), 119 (emphasis in original).

¹² Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 120-21.

¹³ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 121.

as incomplete as the ‘exterior homo,’ and just as needy—its senses in need of just as much correction and re-orientation as that of the exterior human.”¹⁴ Cavidini also notes that while Augustine certainly does speak of an inner self-awareness, this self-awareness is not a stable possession, but a constant

struggle, a brokenness, a gift, a process of healing, a resistance to healing, an emptiness, a reference that impels one not to concentrate on oneself, in the end, but on that to which one’s self-awareness propels one, to God.¹⁵

As we will see below, Augustine does not so much offer a stable conscious entity, but a self-awareness constantly in need of re-creation. In this sense, whatever might be called subjectivity for Augustine is more like the impossibility of closure and stability.¹⁶

If there is a self to be found in the writings of Augustine, it would be better identified with the prideful self of the philosophers who seem to know the homeland (of God) without knowing the way (Christ).¹⁷ The reified structure of philosophical pride thinks itself inwardly stable and self-identical even while in reality it is incoherent and *self-contradictory*.¹⁸ But beyond this pride of the philosophers is the plight of everyone possessing a ‘divided self’ and seeking re-integration. This re-integration, however, is precisely not through the power or stability of one’s own ‘self’ but by coming into a proper relation with God the Creator. Through this relation to God Augustine effectively “inverts the subject” by “developing a notion of interiority which is circumscribed by exteriority,” a transcendent exteriority condescending to the human situation.¹⁹

¹⁴ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 124.

¹⁵ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 123.

¹⁶ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 124.

¹⁷ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 127.

¹⁸ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 127.

¹⁹ Jon Mackenzie, “Subjectivity as a Methodology in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 40/2 (2009), 207.

With all this in mind I will use ‘self’ and ‘subject’ in as non-committal a manner as Augustine uses ‘heart,’ ‘soul,’ ‘mind,’ and ‘will’ as he search to find rest in God, not investing in them too much inherent ontological weight, but instead measuring them by their proximity or distance from God. As we will see, just as much as Hegel, Augustine longs to be at-home-with-oneself, but finds this to mean something drastically different than that offered by a self-legislating freedom (be it through social practices or subjective acts). We will trace such a conception of the self through a reading of Augustine’s *Confessions* by looking, first, at the conversion of the will in book 8, a *locus classicus* for discussing Augustine’s moral psychology. Then we will deepen this account of conversion by examining the oft forgotten social elements in Augustine’s account of his conversion. We will conclude by looking at how Augustine integrates the subjective and the social within a cosmological, and thus Christological, orientation. All throughout reference will be made to Augustine’s understanding of God’s self-immanenting transcendence.

1. Conversion of the Will: Conflict and Intervention

We have already encountered paradoxical understandings of freedom. Rousseau declared that people must be “forced to be free” and Hegel claimed that freedom comes through state institutions. Both run counter to the dominant theory of freedom as non-interference. Augustine likewise offers an understanding of freedom that is equally paradoxical for modern readers. For Augustine, as Charles Mathewes says, the “self is

most free when it is determined by God” exactly because “grace is freedom.”²⁰

Contemporary philosophers may think Augustine lacks the basic (modern) intuition that freedom of the will consists in the power of choice between alternatives and that such determination by God is a lack of freedom. But Augustine could just as well counter that contemporary philosophers lack the basic (ancient) intuition that freedom of the will consists in willing the good.²¹ Because Augustine has such a different understanding of freedom the significance of his notion of the will is often lost, being reduced to the dubious status of precursor to or progenitor of the modern conception of the will.

This loss of a true appreciation of Augustine’s moral psychology occurs because, just as with the concept of the ‘self,’ interpreters come to Augustine with a presupposed theory of the will as that which can choose between alternatives. As Albrecht Dihle claims, it is “generally accepted in the study of the history of philosophy that the notion of will...was invented by St. Augustine.”²² According to Dihle Augustine did not derive his theory of the will from any earlier philosophical doctrines, but broke with classical intellectualist understandings by making the human will “prior to and independent of the act of intellectual cognition.”²³ More recent scholarship has toned down the strong claim to originality, finding that Augustine cobbles together his theory of the will from multiple

²⁰ Charles Mathewes, “Augustinian Anthropology: *Interior intimo meo.*” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27/2 (1999): 195, 203.

²¹ James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 221-222.

²² Dihle, *The Theory of Will*, 123.

²³ Dihle, *The Theory of Will*, 127.

sources.²⁴ But for many philosophical engagements with Augustine, Dihle's conclusion still holds:

St. Augustine's essential contribution to the development of the medieval and modern notion of will has to be seen in the wider context of the change from the ontological to a psychological approach to religion and ethics which he initiated.²⁵

And Augustine appears to confirm this in his earlier writings on the will (from his early dialogues up to *De libero arbitrio*) where he seems to pursue a more strictly psychological approach.

But many have begun to question this typical account of Augustine's theory of the will as merely the ability to choose between alternatives against reason or desire.²⁶ The real question for Augustine is not whether one has a will but what it might be to say that the will is *free*. To *have a will* is to possess the ability of free choice between alternatives. But the free choice of the will is not necessarily freedom. To *have a free will* is to love and delight in doing the good. Mary Clark makes this point succinctly:

“Without the distinction that Augustine made between human choice and human freedom

²⁴ See Kahn, “Discovering the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine,” pp. 234-59; Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 153-174; Sarah Byers, “The Meaning of *Voluntas* in Augustine.” *Augustinian Studies* 37/2 (2006): 172-190.

²⁵ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, 132.

²⁶ See James Wetzel, “Will and Interiority in Augustine: Travels in an Unlikely Place,” *Augustinian Studies* 33:2 (2002): ; J.M. Rist, “Augustine: Freedom, Love and Intention”, in *Il Mistero del Male e la Libertà Possibile (IV): Ripensare Agostino*, eds. Luigi Alici, Remo Piccolomini, and Antonio Pieretti (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1997) 7-21; T. D. J. Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action and Akrasia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). Before these are the work of Mary T. Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom, A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New York: Desclée Company, 1958) and Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. By L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960/1943), who similarly problematize the all too quick reduction of the will to free choice.

(*arbitrium voluntatis* and *libertas*), his doctrine of freedom [is] incomprehensible.”²⁷ Free choice is a good faculty of humanity used either for good or evil. But human freedom entails the use of this faculty directed toward and delighting in the good, for true freedom (*libertas*) is merely the good use of free choice (*liberum arbitrium*).²⁸ Anticipating the argument below, it could be said that “the wrong use of free will is only an apparent freedom; it is actually a descent into slavery.”²⁹ While descending into this slavery, free choice is retained even while freedom is lost (the freedom to choose the good). And when grace is applied to the will, it is not the case that free choice is overturned or cancelled. Rather, through grace free choice is retained while true freedom regained.³⁰ For Augustine, then, to talk of a *free* will is not merely to speak about the good human faculty of free choice between alternatives but also the good use of this faculty to choose the good.

Because of this necessary distinction I will generally refrain from speaking of ‘free will’ because it obscures the difference between the *free choice* of the will and *freedom* of the will, the latter of which is Augustine’s true concern even if he generally equates will (*voluntas*) with free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). The difficulty of speaking about the Augustinian will comes from the fact that the will is not as it should be. Every human will is always in process, moving between a bondage to sin and a longing for freedom. It is exactly within this movement that interpreters often lose the thread of

²⁷ Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom*, 91. See also her introductory statement on page 45 and attending list of passages from Augustine in the first note.

²⁸ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 161-63; Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom*, 82.

²⁹ Mary T. Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom, A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New York: Desclée Company, 1958), 87.

³⁰ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 161.

Augustine's argument. The movement from bondage to sin (and its attending society) to the freedom of grace (and its alternative society) is *not* a movement from free choice (having a will) to determination by God (losing one's will). Free choice is assumed on both ends of the movement from slavery to freedom.

But untangling these issues is a difficult and demanding process. As Clark notes, "The only just way of representing Augustine's doctrine on freedom is the simultaneous confrontation of what he said about free choice in the *De Libero Arbitrio* with what he said about freedom in the writings against the Pelagians and with what he experienced of free choice and freedom as related in the *Confessions*."³¹ Along with Mary Clark, James Wetzel and T. D. J Chappell have attempted such a detailed reading.³² But for the purposes of this chapter we will focus on the *Confessions* and its depiction of the movement from the bondage to the freedom of the will through a reading of Augustine's moral struggle as it is depicted in book 8 of his *Confessions*. In our first pass through Augustine's conversion account we will focus on the nature of Augustine's divided will through a close reading of the last sentence of *Confessions* 8.5.10. This reading will give opportunity to see the development of Augustine's conception of the will, the causes of the divided will, and the movement of God in resolving this conflict.

The Two Wills

After hearing the story of Victorinus' conversion, told by Simplicianus, Augustine declares, "Thus did my two wills, the one old, the other new, the first carnal, and the

³¹ Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom*, 83.

³² Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*; Chappell *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom*.

second spiritual, contend with one another, and by their conflict they laid waste my soul” (*conf.* 8.5.10).³³ This cry of despair, setting up the problem of book 8, is only finally resolved as Augustine reads a passage from Romans and at once “it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart” (*conf.* 8.12.30). Between these two exclamations is a wasteland of conflicts, a war of wills within a solitary soul.

Before writing his *Confessions*, when considering the will, Augustine seemed solely concerned with a psychology of ‘free choice.’ In his early polemics against Manichean dualism Augustine advanced an understanding of the will that seem to function *sui generis*. Along with their cosmology, the moral dilemma of *akrasia* prompted the Manicheans to posit two warring souls (one evil/dark, one good/light) within each human being. Whether intended or not, the positing of two warring souls tended to naturalize evil as a part of the world and therefore neutralize moral culpability. Against this dualism Augustine argues for the unity of the soul by granting the will the ability to either pursue evil or do good. In *De duabus animabus* Augustine defines the will as the uncompelled, or uncoerced movement of the mind to either obtain or retain some thing or some action. Within this definition sin is an exercise of the will to obtain or retain what is forbidden.³⁴ The problem is that when Augustine tries “to ‘denaturalize sin’ and virtue in *De duabus animabus*, he adds to our nature the *sui generis* power of volition and threatens to sever our actions from their motivations,” ending with a definition of the will as free choice between alternatives.³⁵

³³ *ita duae voluntates meae, una vetus, alia nova, illa carnalis, illa spiritalis, confligebant inter se atque discordando dissipabant animam meam.* Translation by John K. Ryan, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, (New York: Image Press, 1960).

³⁴ *duab. an.*, 10.14.

³⁵ James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 93.

Augustine could not quite resolve the problem this *sui generis* conception of the will created within his generally ‘intellectualist’ framework of cognition.³⁶ This problem is seen in his more extended treatment of the will in *De libero arbitrio*.³⁷ In this work Augustine seeks to link a Stoic conception of willing (more spontaneous in nature) to a Platonic order of immaterial objects of delight, producing an uneasy synthesis between the two that seems to crumble later in the text. At the end we see Augustine claiming both that (1) “nothing is so much within our power as the will itself...and since it is in our power, we are free with respect to it” and (2) that “only something that is seen can incite the will to act.”³⁸ Here Augustine is caught between the will as either independent of a motivating framework or the will drawn along by the beatific vision.

These aporias compel Augustine to abandon beginning with a psychology of sin when discussing evil, freedom, and God. Rather than making ‘sheer volition’ the key for unlocking Augustine’s view of the will and then reading it forward into later works like the *Confessions*, we must take the question of the will as problematically posed as only free choice in his early works. By the time we get to the *Confessions* (with hints already in *De duabus animabus* and *De libero arbitrio*) Augustine is not asking about the free choice of the will but the fact of two warring wills within one soul. This is the contrast between free choice and freedom itself. For Augustine, we can not ask about the

³⁶ I agree with Chappell who says, “The tradition has it, apparently that Augustine is a thoroughgoing ‘voluntarist’ who occasionally makes remarks which can be misinterpreted as ‘rationalist’. I am arguing that, on the contrary, Augustine is a thoroughgoing ‘rationalist’ who occasionally makes remarks which can be misinterpreted as ‘voluntarist’” (*Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom*, 201).

³⁷ Wetzel investigates these shifting and overlapping developments in detail in *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 45-98. See also Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom*, 45-81, who perhaps downplays the development too much.

³⁸ *De libero arbitrio* 3.3 and 3.25.

psychology of the will (*voluntas*) without also asking about the two wills (*duae voluntates*) because the will is always divided against itself causing Augustine to cry out in anguish at 8.5.10. But what are these two will and where did they come from?

The Old and New Will

Augustine calls these two wills (*duae voluntates*) the old (*vetus*) and new (*nova*). Here Augustine is alluding to Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10 which speak of putting off the old self with its desires and putting on the new self.³⁹ The old will of which Augustine refers is the will to sin, or more precisely, the will to desire sin. This is exemplified in the pear theft in book 2, alluding to the sin of Adam and Eve. As Augustine says,

I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need...My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong...I became evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself...I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself (*conf.* 2.4.9)

Augustine willed to be evil without purpose and without cause, without intention or aim.

This old will is both unhinged from material desire and reason, desiring only its own privation. Rather than offering an explanation for the willing or the desire for sin, Augustine examines the mystery of it all. Elsewhere he has characterized sin as the pursuit of lesser good (immediately in *Conf.* 2.5.10-11 and earlier in *De libero arbitrio* 1.16), which, although misguided, still seeks a certain good as its reason and motive. But here Augustine narrates a desire without utility or purpose.

³⁹ James O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*. 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3:33.

This mystery of sin, however, is not the end of the story of the old will. The origin of sin may be a mystery but its effects are well known. The old will is *old* precisely because it endures from the past into the present as the accumulation of past decisions. The old will is the accumulation of past evil willing, producing ignorance and difficulty in presently willing the good. Before *Confessions*, Augustine claimed that this accumulation becomes the “resistance of carnal habit, which develops almost naturally because of the unruliness of our mortal inheritance,”⁴⁰ a “habit formed by connection with the flesh and our sins” which “begin to militate against us and to put obstacles in our way.”⁴¹ In these earlier works it seems as though reason and will could cause one to “let go of the deadly charm of destructive habits” through a discipline of virtue.⁴² But in *Confessions* this hope is forsaken because habit is now seen as binding the will in strong chains. As Augustine says in the same paragraph before our text:

I sighed after such freedom, but was bound not by an iron imposed by anyone else but by the iron of my own choice. The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will (*voluntate peruersa*) is passion (*libido*). By servitude to passion, habit (*consuetudo*) is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links as it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint. (*conf.* 8.5.10)⁴³

This bondage comes not from an external source for this would violate the principle that the will cannot be held responsible if it is coerced. Rather, through one’s own freely chosen past actions one is bound to the old will as sinful habit. Because of this self-

⁴⁰ *lib. arb.*, 3.18.

⁴¹ *duab. an.*, 13.19.

⁴² *lib. arb.*, 3.25; *duab. an.*, 13.21.

⁴³ Also, “We are dealing with a morbid condition of mind which, when it is lifted up by the truth, does not unreservedly rise to it but is weighed down by habit (*consuetudine*)” (8.9.21), and “So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. The dissociation came about against my will. Yet this was not a manifestation of the nature of an alien mind but the punishment suffered in my own nature” (8.10.22).

binding of free choice, Augustine held himself responsible for the current condition of being unfree to will the good (*conf.* 8.5.11). The old will then, which is the bondage of the will to sinful habits, is the result of the actions of a single will extended in time. The warring of wills, then, is not between different wills (good and evil), nor between different objects of delight (temporal/sensible or eternal/intelligible), but according to the diverse willing of a single will accumulated through time. As James Wetzel notes, in this situation

our present state of will...includes its past states in the form of habit, and therefore the discrepancy between our past practices of willing and our present willingness for change can be expressed as volitional paralysis.⁴⁴

Sinful habit blocks present action based in knowledge of or desire for the good because “the force of habit seems to spring from desire that has lost its *ratio*.”⁴⁵ This lost reason (lost to the past) is still presently binding the will. By placing the division between the past and the present Augustine is able to keep the link between willing, reason, and desire. The divided will is divided between past reasons and desires in conflict with present reasons and desires.⁴⁶

Now, the new (*nova*) will is the “will which had begun within me, to wish freely to worship you and find joy in you, O God, the sole sure delight” (*conf.* 8.5.10). This new will consists of willing the eternal law rather than the temporal law of one’s members (alluding to Romans 7:22-23) (*conf.* 8.5.12). Augustine makes clear in *Ad Simplicianum* that this will is given to us by God, unlike the earlier works where Augustine seemed to

⁴⁴ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 135.

⁴⁵ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 137.

⁴⁶ See Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom*, 154-175, where he argues for the consistent link between reason and voluntary action in Augustine, i.e. actions have reason for Augustine, even if they are not ordered toward the good.

suggest that one could will the good will.⁴⁷ In expositing Romans 9, Augustine grapples with the claim that “many are called but few are chosen.”⁴⁸ He claims that God must call people to salvation in different ways: those not chosen are called ineffectually and those chosen are called effectually. As he says,

Many, that is to say, are called in one way, but all are not affected in the same way; and those only follow the calling who are found fit to receive it...For God calls in the way that is suited to those who follow his calling. The call comes also to others; but because it is such that they cannot be moved by it and are not fitted to receive it, they can be said to be called but not chosen...Those are chosen who are effectually called...He calls the man on whom he has mercy in the way he knows will suit him, so that he will not refuse the call.⁴⁹

This calling is such that “having suited situation to person, God enables those called to acknowledge their own desire for beatitude.”⁵⁰ Because of this Augustine notes, “there are two different things that God gives us, the power to will and the thing that we actually will.”⁵¹ Therefore, as he makes clear in *Ad Simplicianum*, while he may have earlier given the will the power to choose the new or good will, after answering Simplicianus’ questions (and here expressed in the *Confessions*) the new will is only given to us by God. As we will see shortly, this gifted *nova* will is masterfully recounted in the Garden scene where all talk of Augustine’s will vanishes and we see him transformed in his reading of Romans 13:13-14 (*conf.* 8.12.29). Indeed, at the beginning of book nine Augustine comments that through all his long years his own free will (i.e. free choice) could not turn his neck to bear the light yoke of Christ, but rather this was the work of Christ himself (*conf.* 9.1.1).

⁴⁷ *lib. arb.*, 1.13.

⁴⁸ Linking Romans 9 with Matthew 22:14.

⁴⁹ *Simpl.* 2.13.

⁵⁰ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 190-91.

⁵¹ *Simpl.*, 2.10.

In a farther clarification, Augustine speaks of his old will as carnal. This is the carnal corruption of his soul (*carnales corruptions animae meae*) that he brings to mind and ponders in book two (*conf.* 2.1.1). Instead of staying on the path of the love of the mind he followed his passions and the desires of the flesh (*concupiscentia carnis*) (*conf.* 2.12). The corruption of his will in book 2 and the conflict expressed in book 8 lead him to say, quoting Galatians 5:17: “Thus I understood from my own experience what I had read, how ‘the flesh lusts (*caro consupisceret*) against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh’” (*conf.* 8.5.11). This *concupiscentia carnis*, however, is not a merely moment-by-moment lustfulness, but also the carnal habit (*consuetude carnalis*) that weighs down the will and keeps it from turning to God (*conf.* 7.17.23).

They Laid Waste My Soul

Returning to our passage from 8.5.10, Augustine concludes that the two wills “contend (*confligebant*) with one another, and by their conflict they laid waste (*discordando dissipabant*) my soul.” This contending and conflict alludes to Romans 7:16-17 and 7:22-25 as the conflict between what dwells within Augustine through the past habits of sin, and what he desires in the Law of God. As he declares in 8.5.12,

In vain I ‘delighted in your law in respect of the inward man; but another law in my members fought against the law of my mind and led me captive in the law of sin which was in my members’. The law of sin is the violence of habit (*consuetudinis*) by which even the unwilling mind is dragged down and held, as it deserves to be since by its own choice it slipped into the habit.

This conflict lays waste (*dissipabant*) Augustine’s soul. This *dissipabant* is not due to some outside force bearing upon Augustine’s soul, nor the ontological state of a created being, but is rather the consequences of past sinful willing. For,

I was at war within myself, and I was laid waste (*dissipabar*) by myself. This devastation (*dissipatio*) was made against my will indeed, and yet it revealed not the nature of a different mind within me, but rather the punishment of my own nature. (*conf.* 8.10.22)⁵²

Augustine uses *dissipabant* here not only to describe the withering conflict of wills within himself, but to invoke the image of the Prodigal Son who takes the good gifts of his father and wastes them. In connection to the pear theft, Augustine states he was far from the face of God in the darkness of his own passions. But this ‘far’ from God was not a distance in space but a darkness of affections such that like the Prodigal Son “he could waste (*dissiparet*) the substance that you had given him as he started out” (*conf.* 1.18.28).⁵³ Therefore, by using *dissipabant* here, Augustine understands his own struggle of *voluntas* and the laying waste of his soul as an exemplification of the narrative of the Prodigal Son which itself illustrates the destiny of all people.

Augustine, then, is bound to an evil will through sinful habit and barred from a good will according to his own power of will (free choice). Through the free choice of the will Augustine has become unfree and is no longer free to will the good, which is the true freedom that he desires. His present reason and desire cannot unbind him from an evil will cultivated according to sinful habit, a habit forged through the use of his own free choice. For Augustine, the turning away from God and the good begins an irreversible process of sinful habits becoming immune to the redirection of reason or desire.

In this state of impotence, Augustine recounts his own struggles in a garden, in which he received a divine command through the voice of a child. He hears the voice

⁵² Translation by John K. Ryan.

⁵³ See also bk. 4.16.30 where he speaks of travelling into the far country in regard to the dissipation (*dissiparem*) of his substance.

call out “pick up and read,” leading to a chance reading from Paul’s letter to the Roman. There he is commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.” And “at once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart” (*conf.* 8.12.29). While the mechanics of conversion are not so much explained as expressed, in the putting on of Christ the will of Augustine is relinquished for the will of God, which though thought to be contrary to freedom itself, is for Augustine the only means by which freedom is regained, the freedom to will the good. According to a divine intervention staged through the chance song of a child, the random reading of a text, and the sudden illumination of the heart, Augustine declares that “you [God] have converted me to yourself” (*convertisti emin me ad te*) (*conf.* 8.12.30).⁵⁴ This is the conversion of Augustine’s will.

At this point we must pause and face a possible objection. This account might easily seem the inverse of the radical act posited by Žižek. For Žižek, the radical act of the subject breaks free of all previous subjective and social formations. It is a sovereign act of subjective assertion. With Augustine, is he not merely transferring this radical subjective act to God’s side who not only interrupts the social and subjective formation of Augustine, but altogether overcomes Augustine, the subject? Instead of the radical act of the human subject below, it is the radical act of God above. If this is the case, is it still possible to meaningfully speak of a subject (of the subject’s will)? Does this not exactly suggest a voluntarism on God’s side as a replacement for humanity’s sinful voluntarism?

If this were the whole story, as many investigations of Augustine’s theory of the will claim, then these questions would certainly stand against Augustine. But his

⁵⁴ Translation by John K. Ryan.

narrative is much richer and more expansive than mere divine interventionism, encompassing the communal nature of human willing and, indeed, the conversion of all creation. In this next section, then, we will examine how Augustine's conversion is more properly understood as including a robust social aspect. In the section after this we will see how this subjective conversion within an alternative society moves within an Augustinian metaphysics of creation, which is thoroughly Christological.

2. Conversion of the Will: Community and Intervention

A strictly philosophical or psychological approach to Augustine's texts, especially one like the *Confessions*, threatens to separate the truth of the matter from the beauty of its form, something Augustine was keen not to do. Such an approach also threatens to miss the more pragmatic reasons for Augustine to have written his *Confession*, such as explaining his thorough conversion from Manichaeism to Christianity in the hopes that others might follow his example, concluded by a reading of Scriptures consonant with such a conversion.⁵⁵ Indeed, contrary to modern assumptions, it is entirely possible the autobiographical material is all prelude to the more philosophical and theological treatise that concludes the work. The question of modern readers has been something like "Why is an autobiography concluded by a theoretical discourse?" However, it is conceivable

⁵⁵ The question of Augustine creating the autobiographical genre *sui generis*, just like his supposed invention of the self and the will, have become more nuanced or overturned. Concerning the antecedents in genre see Frances Young, "The *Confessions* of St. Augustine: What is the Genre of this Work?" *Augustinian Studies* 30: 1 (1999): 1-16, and concerning purpose see Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For an overview of approaches to reading and the unity of the *Confessions* see O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, 1:xx-xli. Though older, see also Aimé Solignac, "Introduction" to *Les Confessions*. Biliothèque Augustinienne 13 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 9-55.

that for ancient readers the question would have been “Why is the autobiographical introduction so long?”⁵⁶ The main question here, however, is not strictly the literary antecedents of the *Confessions*, but the construction and components of his conversion narrative and what light these might shed on his thoughts concerning the social aspects of such a conversion.

The Myth of Suddenness

As noted in the previous section, Augustine’s conversion can be read as a divine intervention overriding Augustine’s sinful willing with a willing of the good. This divine intervention can sound like a dreadful determinism erasing all freedom. One way around this criticism is to critique the modern ‘myth of suddenness’ through an investigation of God’s providential ordering of events leading toward conversion.⁵⁷ Rather than a sudden conversion from the prolonged habit of sin, Augustine comes to conclude that the call of grace is equally prolonged and persistent.

James Wetzel has drawn attention to the harmony between God’s suitable calling and human willing known only in retrospect. The efficacy of God’s suitable calling comes through God’s providential ordering of object of delight drawing the will away from carnal habits. Formerly, the will delighted in carnal things. But through God’s calling new object begin to delight the will and raise it to higher things. The will

⁵⁶ See Annemaré Kotzé discussion of the structure and use of biographical material to introduce a philosophical treatise and examples from pagan and Christian sources in “‘The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine’s *Confessions*’: an illegitimate issue,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006): 65-79.

⁵⁷ Gary Wills critiques the “myth of suddenness” by looking at the philosophy of William James and his preference for sudden conversions as opposed to gradual ones, stemming from a cultural imagination rooted in Puritan religious experiences. See Wills’ *Saint Augustine’s Conversion* (New York: Vinking, 2004), 14-25.

consents (through its free choice) to what delights it and therefore is free (for a will without consent is not will at all for Augustine), even if it is not in control of what object actually come before it. Because God both knows what delights us in our innermost being and has control over the outward objects of delight, God is able to perfectly arrange situations that elicit our voluntary consent to this divine calling. As Wetzel says,

The central different between ordinary instances of consent and divinely inspired ones is that in the latter the fit between disposition and environment is so good that no margin remains for hesitation or irresolution. We do not need to make a choice. Our choice is, as it were, built into God's offer.⁵⁸

According to Wetzel, it is for this reason that the garden scene all but eliminates the moments of willing and choosing. Augustine is simply reacting to the divine calling through the voice of a child and the verse of scripture.⁵⁹ In this way God coordinates a suitable calling with human willing that does not violate the structure of free choice.

This account gives us an understanding of divine action in conversion without supplying the inside story of the will's transformation. What we get from Augustine, after pages and pages describing his inner conflict, is not a dramatic telling of God's intervention and transformation, but only a short statement of inner relief. Why? Why so little theological bang for so much autobiographical build up? Wetzel speculates that the moment of Augustine's conversion remains relatively opaque exactly because his conversion "contained his recognition that the divine presence had been with him all along. It did not have to enter from outside to resolve his crisis from within."⁶⁰ In Wetzel's understanding, what seems like the climatic moment is merely the recognition of accumulated past moments in which God had always been present and divinely

⁵⁸ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 158.

⁵⁹ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 154.

⁶⁰ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 160.

coordinating Augustine's life. The 'myth of suddenness' and its interventionist complement is overturned with the recognition that God had always been bringing about a suitable calling in Augustine, not from outside but always within and through Augustine's life.

The Stories of Providence

But is this all that can be said of God's coordinating of objects of desire into a suitable calling and conversion? Does not the replacement of a sudden intervention with gradual conversion merely displace the concern of divine determinism from a synchronic to a diachronic paradigm? Is there not a place for humanity, for human society, within this story of conversion? A closer look reveals just such a place within the story of providence, the place of an emerging alternative society.⁶¹ To see this we will look at the structure of book eight and then relate this to the larger structure at work in books one through nine.

Book eight consists of three episodes, of which the first two are conversions and the third is Augustine's conversion. Each of the first two conversations has embedded within it the story of a conversion. The first conversation is between Augustine and Simplicianus in which Simplicianus tells the story of Marius Victorinus' conversion. Simplicianus takes up this telling of Victorinus' conversion in order to exhort Augustine to "the humility of Christ hidden from the wise and revealed to babes" (*conf.* 8.1.3). As a well-known teacher of rhetoric, Victorinus had attained the level of renown to which

⁶¹ The following section is deeply indebted to Lewis Ayres's helpful essay, "Into the Poem of the Universe: Exempla, Conversion, and Church in Augustine's *Confessiones*," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 13:2 (2009): 263-281.

Augustine aspired. But Victorinus eventually learned the humility of the Word and was baptized publicly to the joy of all who witnessed it. Hearing this story prompts Augustine to wonder why people are “more delighted by the salvation of a soul who is despaired of but is then liberated from great danger than if there has always been hope or if the danger has only been minor?” (*conf.* 8.3.6). Augustine alludes to the Prodigal Son as an example of such a story.

The delight caused by Simplicianus’ story begins drawing Augustine toward conversion. As he notes, when Simplicianus finished his story Augustine “was on fire to imitate [Victorinus]” (*exarsi ad imitandum*) (*conf.* 8.5.10).⁶² This delight is the proximate cause of the inner conflict of wills at the end of *conf.* 8.5.10, examined above. As Lewis Ayres notes, turning to book 9, the *exempla* of the saints is intended to produce such an effect.⁶³ There Augustine says that “the examples given by your servants...set me on fire (*accendebant*)” (*conf.* 9.2.3). Simplicianus’ story, then, prompts the inner turmoil and defines the issues facing Augustine.⁶⁴ But this prompting is not accomplished through some divine intervention beyond history and humanity or within the inner recesses of the self. Rather, it is produced through the telling of the life and conversion of a flesh and blood person (Victorinus) by another person (Simplicianus) to a third (Augustine).

In book 8 this first conversation leads to a second between Augustine and Ponticianus. While the conversation with Simplicianus references the Platonic books, when Ponticianus surprises Augustine with a visit, it is by chance that Ponticianus notices

⁶² Translation by John K. Ryan.

⁶³ Ayres, "Into the Poem of the Universe," 268. Ayres helpfully links the use of *exempla* in Augustine to the larger rhetorical tradition.

⁶⁴ O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, 3:3.

the writings of Paul on a table (*conf.* 8.6.14). The Platonic books enabled Augustine to think through the immaterial nature of the will leading him beyond Manichaeism and its dualism, a reflection prompted by Simplicianus' story. These books, however, had no answer for overcoming such a divided will. It is only through the Scriptures that such a solution presents itself, a solution for which Platonism could never have prepared Augustine.⁶⁵ These subtle movements of providence (a surprise visit and a chance noticing) set up the next story so that it might also act as an example for Augustine. Ponticianus tells of how he and three friends were walking in a garden and separated into pairs. The other couple wandered in a different direction than Ponticianus and they happened upon a house in which lived some of God's servant. In this house they by chance found a copy of the *Life of Antony*. Upon reading it one was "amazed and set on fire" (*et mirari et accendi*) and converted (*conf.* 8.6.15). In this story of Ponticianus Augustine hears again of one 'set on fire'. But in this case Augustine hears of one being converted to God as the proper response to such a story. This time not only is Augustine told a conversion story, but he is also given an example of people responding to a conversion story, the conversion of Antony and the response of those who read it.⁶⁶

After the first story (by Simplicianus) Augustine develops a series of reflections on the divided will and how he was perpetually delaying a decision (*conf.* 8.5.12). The second story produces an entirely different result, forcing the issue of decision for

⁶⁵ Augustine skillfully weaves a progressive reading of Romans throughout book 8. See James O'Donnell's outline of the progression through Romans in *Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, 3:3. It is these types of nuanced contrasts that Robert J. O'Connell usually ignores in his attempt to foreground the Plotinian commitments of Augustine. See O'Connell's *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of the Soul*, 90-104.

⁶⁶ Ayres, "Into the Poem of the Universe," 265.

Augustine. He tells us that at the time Ponticianus was telling his story God was turning Augustine around to be able to see himself as he really was. As Augustine says, “You took me up from behind my own back where I had placed myself because I did not wish to obverse myself, and you set me before my face so that I should see how vile I was” (*conf.* 8.7.16). Ayres warns against reading this as if Augustine were having an inner dialogue with God as Ponticianus prattles on. Rather Ayres notes it is “the on-going telling of the story that Augustine wishes to identify as the means through which God focuses Augustine’s gaze upon himself.”⁶⁷ Augustine is clear that “if I tried to avert my gaze from myself, his [Ponticianus’] story continued relentlessly, and you [God] once again placed me in front of myself.” Through the story itself and through the one telling it, God’s providential action is working to coordinate suitable objects of desire and the desire itself.

Exempla in the Garden

This, however, is not the end. Not only is divine providence noted in bringing together these lives and stories, linking history and humanity as the means of Augustine’s conversion. But also, in returning to the garden scene we find again the *exempla* of a saint as a means of Augustine’s conversion. While Augustine has mentioned Antony and the effect reading about his conversion had on others, Augustine did not speak of the actual conversion of Antony. He holds it back until he is in the throws of agony in the garden and hears the voice of a child chanting. In that moment he searches his memory but could not remember a game or chant that included “Pick up and read.” His memory,

⁶⁷ Ayres, "Into the Poem of the Universe," 265.

the repository of the past, a past now chaining him to sinful habit, fails Augustine. The past has doubly failed him by binding him to past sinful habit and by failing to provide a sufficient memory able to interpret the voice.

Within of this interpretive deadlock Augustine says that he “interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find” (*conf.* 8.12.29). Between a mysterious voice and a chance verse comes divine command. Does this not seem to perfectly fit the model of divine intervention? But this is not where Augustine leaves the narrative. He immediately states that the reason he interpreted this voice as a divine command is because “I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself.” Lodged within Augustine’s memory was the story, the example, of another who had interpreted a voice as a divine command. This memory, from a past which was not properly his, from a story which had delighted him and had enflamed others, was the pivotal piece that allowed Augustine to move forward. Between voice and verse is a providentially ordered memory of the example of person (Antony) given by still another (Ponticianus). These stories and the society out of which they flowed, coupled with the Scriptures, were the means by which Augustine’s will is converted. As Ayres notes, divine providence

must not only present new and desirable objects, it must also enable a synthesis between memory and desire strong enough to overcome habit... Augustine has finally been drawn to conversion because he has been drawn to a point where, with the help of grace, the movement of memory, understanding and will brings to light and moves toward the correct *exempla*. His will is not so much finally forced out of old habit; it has been drawn to a point at which new memories and desires triumph over old.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ayres, "Into the Poem of the Universe," 273-4.

It is in all these ways that Augustine can declare to God, “You have converted me to yourself” (*convertisti emin me ad te*) (*conf.* 8.12.30)⁶⁹ without such a conversion being an alienation of his own humanity. Indeed, Augustine is showing us that all along he was slowly being converted from one society to an alternative one. To these contrasting societies we will now turn, knowing that a full elaboration will have to wait until the next chapter when we turn to *City of God*.

The Society of Providence

The contours of this alternative society is best noticed when we step back and look at the placement of book 8 within the scope and movement of books 1-9. As William A. Stephany has pointed out, books 1-9 of the *Confessions* form a chiasm centering on book 5, with pairs of books on either side: books 4 and 6, book 3 and 7, books 2 and 8, and books 1 and 9. Book five begins with Augustine meeting what could be called a Manichean bishop in Faustus and ends with him meeting a Christian bishop in Ambrose. This decisive shift of allegiances, this subtle movement from one society to another, marks the center of the transition from one society to another. Books 4 and 6 trace the arc of friendships, love, and the material world. In books 3 and 7 we hear of Augustine’s two great discoveries and intellectual conversions. In book 3 he reads Cicero and dedicates himself to the love of wisdom, and in book 7 he reads the Platonists. The pursuit of wisdom beginning with Cicero in book 3, runs afoul in Manicheism, but is overcome with the discovery of Platonism in book 7. Books 2 and 8 are dominated by stories occurring in gardens involving fruit trees. In book 2 Augustine does the evil he

⁶⁹ Translation by John K. Ryan.

does not desire and in book 8 he cannot do the good he desire. The former reveals the way of the divided will and the latter the way out of it. And finally, books 1 and 9 speak of physical birth and spiritual rebirth.⁷⁰ It is these last two pairings that I want to explore more closely.

We have already discussed the manner in which Augustine mines his motives for the pear theft and finds reason and desire lacking. The will to sin, the falling for its own sake, is mysterious. But later in book 2 he backs from the utter mystery of it all and confesses multiple times that had he been alone he would not have stolen the pears (*conf.* 2.8.16-9.17). Therefore, he concludes, “my love (*amavi*) in that act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it” (*conf.* 2.8.16). Augustine claims that if he had been alone his cupidity (*cupiditatis*) would not have been inflamed (*accenderem*). But because of the example of the group he was moved toward sin. Augustine notes “friendship can be a dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind lying beyond the reach of investigation” (*conf.* 2.9.17).

This danger of friendship, however, is overturned in the fellowship Augustine finds in book 8. Through the physical presence of Simplicianus, Ponticianus, and especially Alypius in the garden, and through the presence of others in the stories shared, Augustine was surrounded by friendships that were enflaming him toward the love of God rather than love of self. This alternative society was shaping Augustine’s desires toward good and away from evil. The examples of the saints in book 8 were overcoming the examples set by Augustine’s fellow sinners in book 2.

⁷⁰ William A. Stephany, “Thematic Structure in Augustine’s Confessions,” *Augustinian Studies* 20 (1989): 129-142.

The parallels between books 1 and 9 further strength this contrast between two societies, moving beyond the agonies of a particular will to the destinies of all people. In book 1 Augustine speaks of his birth, his infancy, and his introduction into human society through the learning of language, an introduction that brought Augustine “more deeply into the stormy society of human life” (*conf.* 1.8.13). The acquisition of language quickly outstrips its menial use in gaining the necessities of life and begins deforming his desires as Augustine commences his education. It is here, in his education, that Augustine claims that he learned to love what is vile and despise what is good. The “stormy society of human life” has now becomes a tumultuous ocean, to which Augustine cries:

Woe to you, torrent of human custom! “Who can stand against you?” When will you run dry? How long will your flowing current carry the sons of Eve into the great and fearful ocean which can be crossed, with difficulty, only by those who have embarked on the Wood of the cross? (*conf.* 1.16.25)

This watery torrent symbolizing fallen human society is briefly interrupted by the story of a baptism deferred when, as a child, Augustine fell deathly ill (*conf.* 1.11.17-18). At the offer of baptism Augustine is given a chance to bathe in the cleansing waters of the Church instead of drowning in the waters of human confusion. This baptism, hinted at in book 1, is only final accomplished in book 9, marking the entry of Augustine into an alternative human society of those not tossed by the waves of desire but instead are those who thirst for God and are quenched by the fountain of life (*conf.* 13.17.20-21). Book 1, then, speaks of a physical birth that is really an entry into social and spiritual death, and book 9 speaks of a sacramental death (and the physical deaths of multiple saints, most prominently Augustine’s mother) as the entry into spiritual life.⁷¹

⁷¹ Stephany, “Thematic Structure in Augustine’s Confessions,” 132.

Subject and Society

Throughout books 1-9 of his *Confessions* Augustine has been showing us the contrasting influences of human society and its alternative. Through these contrasts Augustine has lead us into an understanding of how the will becomes enslaved to sinful habit through its own free choice under the direction of external examples. The subject is converted when it first begins to understand that the root of its division is not beyond itself but is the accumulation of its own past actions, actions given over to lesser loves. Although the bondage of the will is not imposed from beyond itself, the solution (or freedom) must come from beyond its own free choice and the sinful society that has shaped its exercise of free choice. The will can will its own fall from freedom, but not its return to freedom. It is for this reason that divine providence must orchestrate a return of the will through the provision of alternative objects of delight and examples of the proper response to such objects. This process occurs not through a divine intervention from beyond history and humanity, but through a suitable calling that properly exposes the subject to examples which delight and enflame.

The establishment and nature of such a society of examples, or city as Augustine will call it, will be the focus of the next chapter. But for now I would like to briefly note the similarities of the above to Hegel's understanding of the unity of the subject and society discussed in chapter 3. Both Hegel and Augustine give priority to a non-material figure guiding the chance ordering of events in the formation of the subject, divine providence for Augustine and *Geist* for Hegel. Both view this guiding figure as working through a society configured around institutions and practices out of which the subject is formed. And both see freedom as more than the negative freedom of choice between

alternatives (*liberum arbitrium* for Augustine and *willkür* for Hegel). Rather freedom is being positively ordered toward the good.

But as noted in chapter 3, when it comes to the questions of establishing or transitioning into a more free society Hegel was not able to hold together subject and society within his framework of self-transcending immanence. On the one hand, some Hegelians emphasize the institutional role of society to such a degree that it is impossible to promote the formation of a radical subjectivity capable of criticizing injustice and initiating change. This is the position of those like Robert Pippin who focus on normative social practices. On the other hand, other Hegelians promote a radical subjectivity in such contrast to all social formations that while critical of one social formation it makes little sense to speak of a new, more just or free social formation because this would exactly limit and circumscribe the subject again. This is the position of those like Slavoj Žižek who focus on radical subjective acts. Does Augustine do any better in both integrating subject and society while also holding open the means for a subjectivity capable of both criticism and change?⁷²

It must be remembered that the main difference between the two is that Augustine explicitly presents his moral psychology in the *Confessions* as a transition between two societies, from the deformation of his will by sinful habit to the reformation of will by grace within an alternative society. It is this change that is central, not the unity between subject and society. While Augustine's moral and social theory is guided by the

⁷² Of course, asking if Augustine thinks the subject itself is 'capable' of criticism and change seems exactly to miss the Augustinian point about conversion, i.e. that the subject is exactly incapable of initiating such change. I only frame it this way to highlight the contrast with Hegel and then, in the next section, show that it is God and not the subject which constitutes this capacity.

necessity of change through a slow process of breaking open the stable subject, Hegel's faith in modernity does not have and does not need such a change. These differences are based in a more fundamental difference between Augustine and Hegel concerning the nature of creation itself, to which we turn in the next section. Augustine is fundamentally committed to the difference between Creator and creation, a difference that Hegel was at pains to abolish. The difference between affirming or denying a distinction between Creator and creation is exactly the difference between a self-transcending immanence (Hegel) and a self-immanenting transcendence (Augustine). It is because Augustine affirms that subject and society are created by a self-immanenting transcendence that he can hold the two together (subject and society) as a means for change rather than a perpetuation of the status quo (the previous sinful subject and society). What Augustine's self-immanenting transcendence might mean will now be examined by looking at the explicitly Christological aspects of conversion as they are linked to creation.

3. Conversion of Creation: Christ as Intervention

In outlining Augustine's commitment to think God as self-immanenting transcendence we finally arrive where many begin, Augustine's great confession of the restless soul journeying toward God: "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*conf.* 1.1.1).⁷³ That humanity is restless apart from God, somehow far from the One to

⁷³ *Tu excites ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti no ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.*

whom all things are near (*conf.* 1.18.28), certainly speaks to the odyssey of the soul narrated in books 1-9. Certainly these themes are justly emphasized and explored.

Equally for Augustine, however, especially when we pass beyond book 10, is that humanity is *made* by God, “a little piece of your creation (*creaturae tuae*)” (*conf.* 1.1.1). The issue of creation is an essential key for understanding the unity of the work. As Jon Mackenzie notes regarding the overall structure of the work,

The first section [books 1-10] can be read as an attempt to conceive the human subject without recourse to the form of the subject imparted at creation, an attempt which will finally fail. By comparison, the second portion [books 11-13] of the *Confessions* could be interpreted as a re-reading of the first section *in light of* the understanding of the impartation of form to the subject through creation.⁷⁴

This impartation of form to the subject, as Mackenzie notes, is not something peculiar to humanity but is a characteristic of all creation. For Augustine, creation is a two-step process in which formless matter is first created and then latter given form.⁷⁵ This is Augustine’s synthesis of a Neoplatonic ontology and the claim in Genesis 1:2 that the earth was formless and void.⁷⁶ All created things begin in and move toward this formlessness, “toward the chaos where there is no control, and to a far off dissimilarity (*longinquam dissimilitudinem*)” to God (*conf.* 13.2.2). Concerning the sheer contingency of creation in relation to the God who does not need such a creation, Augustine asks,

⁷⁴ Mackenzie, “Subjectivity as a Methodology in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 209 (italics in original). This emphasis is inline with attempts to read Christ as the unity of other major works of Augustine. See Lewis Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” *Augustinian Studies* 29/1 (1998): 111-139.

⁷⁵ See Emilie Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, trans by Ruth Namad (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 74-77; For the Plotinian background for Augustitne’s use see Aimé Solignac, *Les Confessions*. Biliothèque Augustinienne 14 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 613-17.

⁷⁶ Augustine spends much of book 12 discussing the creation and nature of this formless matter, esp. 12.2.2-13.16

“What merit had these things before you even to receive a formless existence when, but for you, they would not exist at all?” (*conf.* 13.2.2). But just as the formless creation depended on the Word of God for its creation, so too it is by that Word that they receive their form (*conf.* 13.2.2). Or closer to the point, created things are “converted” (*converteretur*) from formless to formed by the Word who made them (*conf.* 13.2.3).

Augustine wants us to understand that the “‘converting’ that is at the heart of the original creative act is now mirrored and brought to fulfillment in the redemptive act,” unifying the orders of creation and redemption.⁷⁷ Therefore, when Augustine claims that God had converted him (*conf.* 8.12.30) he was not speaking of some anomalous event within the history of the cosmos. Rather, he is speaking of how he is now again properly aligned with the cosmos, converted to his proper form and directed toward his proper end.

Augustine’s autobiographical conversion served as an illustration, or typology, of the conversion of the cosmos. This theme, announced in book 1 as the problem confronting humanity, is proclaimed to be the process of all creation. All things must be converted to God.⁷⁸

Absorbing all Immanence?

⁷⁷ Lewis Ayres, “Into the Poem of the Universe,” 278. See also Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109-114.

⁷⁸ On the Trinitarian processes of creaturely conversion, see Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2008), 72-80.

The question to be asked, however, given this “metaphysics of conversion”⁷⁹ is whether a reliance on a Neoplatonic ontology conflates creation and the fall as the prerequisite for the following conversion? If the first stage of creation is formless matter that seems necessarily to be falling away from God, and if humanity is caught in such a downward fall, is not this fall synonymous with creation? As Emilie Brunn comments, “Augustine insists on the close, if not fatal, connection that ties the first stage of spiritual creation...to the fact of the fall.”⁸⁰ O’Connell worries this connection inevitably compromises the integrity of humanity, leading to the eventual absorption of human particularity when God becomes ‘all in all’ after the completion of redemption.⁸¹

And if this is true, then the contrast between Hegel and Augustine argued for throughout is revealed as an utter failure. If Augustine is overly dependent on Neoplatonism such that he conflates creation and fall then he is guilty of perpetuating a theology repulsive to bodily reality, tending toward an other-worldly escapism, all terminating in the re-absorption of humanity in God. Augustine would not, then, present a clear alternative to the Hegelian problematic that explicitly conflates creation and the fall as the ‘sinfulness of existence’. He would merely be offering its reverse. Instead of a self-transcending immanence that excludes any true transcendence we would now have a self-immanentizing transcendence that eventually re-absorbs all immanence back into itself.

Does, then, Augustine conflate creation and fall? Does he end up basically reducing humanity to a moment of divinity? We will answer the former questions next,

⁷⁹ Brunn borrows this phrase from Gilson, but uses it more expansively (*St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, 86, n.60).

⁸⁰ Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, 75.

⁸¹ O’Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*, 178-185.

waiting to answer the second after discussing the mediation of Christ between God and humanity.

Dissimilarity and Dissipation

Certainly Augustine draws a close connection between ontology and morality, closer than many interpreters recognize when they read Augustine as a precursor to the modern subject, claiming that he has replaced ontology with psychology. But within this deep connection between ontology and psychology Augustine carefully distinguishes between the ontological and moral orders. Augustine notes that the first moment of creation institutes beings that dwell in a “far off dissimilarity” (*longinquam dissimilitudinem*) from God (*conf.* 13.2.2). This naturally suggests a comparison to the far country (*longinqua regione*) to which the Prodigal Son travelled (*conf.* 1.18.25). And because of this parallel it is tempting to read Augustine’s entrance into a “the region of dissimilarity” (*regione dissimilitudinis*) and his fall from the vision of God in book 7 as corroborating the link between sinfulness and material existence. The “region of dissimilarity” of book 7 and the “far off dissimilarity” of book 13, when read through the far country of humanity’s wandering, all seem to add up to a conflation between creation and fall.

This however blurs the lines between the ontological region of dissimilarity (*dissimilitudinis*) from God (in which all created entities share) and the prodigal dissipation (*dissiparet*) of God’s gifts (in which only humanity shares). As we noted in the first section, the war waged between Augustine’s two will “laid waste” (*dissiparet*) his soul (*conf.* 8.5.10; 8.10.22). And it is exactly this moral situation to which Augustine

refers when speaking of the Prodigal Son, that in the far country (*longinqua regione*) “he could waste (*dissiparet*) the substance that [God] had given him” (*conf.* 1.18.28), a situation Augustine directly applies to himself in *conf* 4.16.30.⁸² Creaturely dissimilarity from God does not necessarily entail a prodigal dissipation. Augustine is careful not to conflate these two regions of dissimilarity and dissipation, even if it is the Word who remedies both through a process of conversion. The ontological creation of the world does not necessitate its moral fall.⁸³

Downward Participation and Mediation

How is humanity, then, to be re-formed once it has fallen away from its first conversion, entering not only an ontological dissimilarity but also a prodigal dissipation? In explaining this re-formation Augustine outlines his difference from the Platonists who glimpse the homeland but do not know the way to it.⁸⁴ Platonists and Christians could agree on the ontological doctrine that creation participates in God. But what Augustine began to realize is that for humanity to be re-formed it was necessary that God participate in the human plight. God’s entrance within humanity would entail a ‘downward

⁸² *Sed profectus sum abs te in longinquam regionem, ut eam dissiparem in meretrices cupiditates.*

⁸³ For expression of the difference between creation and fall in the early works up to *Confessions* see Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology*, 91-95, 104-106. For a thorough discussion of O’Connell and his conflation of creation and fall in early and late Augustine see Ronnie Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O’Connell and His Critics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press).

⁸⁴ Cavidini, “The Darkest Enigma,” 127. See *Conf.* 7.20.26; *trin.* 4.15.20.

participation' through which humanity would be re-formed. And this 'downward participation' marks Augustine's distance from Neoplatonism.⁸⁵

Within the much-commented intellectual conversion to Platonism recounted in book 7 is an oft-overlooked conversion of Platonism for an explicitly Christian purpose. Within the *Confessions* the term *participatio* occurs only three times, each in book 7, although the idea is prevalent throughout (especially in book 11-13). In book 7 Augustine recounts what the "books of the Platonists" taught him concerning the Word of God, although he does so by quoting Scripture (specifically John 1), rather than referring to the Platonists directly. Augustine, however, notes that he did not find the humility of the Incarnation in those books. The Platonic books could only affirm an upward participation of created realities in God. The first and third use of *participatio* confirms this, each referencing the Word, the Son of God. Augustine readily admits to the eternal and immutable nature of the Son in which all temporal and mutable natures participate. This is his meaning of his first use in *conf.* 7.9.14 where he says that all are wise "by participation (*participatione*) in wisdom abiding in them." Wise humans are wise because they participate in Wisdom itself, the Son. As David Meconi comments,

This participation is always 'upward,' in the sense that it is always the lower, less perfect existent's taking part in the superior and more perfect reality. Hence central to the platonic understanding of participation is the fact that the underived, immutable Form is always partaken of and participated in, never vice versa.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ This 'downward participation' is noted by O'Donnell concerning *conf.* 7.18.24 (*Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, 2:463), and commented on extensively by David Vincent Meconi in "The Incarnation and the Role of Participation in St. Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 29/2 (1998): 61-75. I rely on Meconi here.

⁸⁶ Meconi, "The Incarnation and the Role of Participation," 67.

The third use of participation affirms this philosophical doctrine, but now as a proof for the superiority of Christ above all other humans. Augustine comments that while he was still grappling with how to understand the Incarnation he nevertheless counted Christ as superior to all others “because of the great excellence of his human character and the more perfect participation (*participantione*) in wisdom” (*conf.* 7.19.25). Christ, the human, is thought to be the perfect exemplification of one participating in uncreated Wisdom, showing again the upward movement of participation. Just like the rest of creation, Christ the contingent and mutable human, upwardly participates in Wisdom, and it is to this perfection that Augustine is drawn.

But it is the second use of *participatio* that transforms the entire Platonic ontology. Between the immutable Word in which all participate (*conf.* 7.9.14) and the superiority of Christ in his participating in Wisdom (*conf.* 7.19.25) stands the Word that “by his sharing (*participatione*) in our ‘coat of skin’” comes to down to humanity in order to raise humanity up (*conf.* 7.18.24). The Word, who is superior, comes down to that which is inferior and builds for himself a dwelling even though everything already dwells him. The ‘coat of skin’, alluding to the garments God make for Adam and Eve, is the mortality in which humanity finds itself when expelled from the Garden. It is through this Word that takes on human flesh that humanity is raised up and healed. As Meconi notes, “through the humbled flesh of the Word God’s downward participation in imperfection is now thought possible” such that “Plato is thus supplemented.”⁸⁷ Book 7, therefore, certainly recounts Augustine’s conversion to Platonism. But it also subtly

⁸⁷ Meconi, “The Incarnation and the Role of Participation,” 70.

indicates the conversion of Platonist participation through the downward movement of the Incarnation.

The possibility of downward participation opens space for Christ to be the mediator between God and humanity in book 10. It should be remember that in book 8, just as Augustine was realizing the depths of his bondage to sin, he cried out with the words of Romans 7:24-25, “Wretched man that I was who would deliver me from this body of death other than your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord?” (*conf.* 8.5.12). Likewise, in book 10, after having examined his conscience according to the three sins of 1 John 2:16, he calls out again to God, “Who could be found to reconcile me to you?” (*conf.* 10.42.67). The answer is the Son of God, the mediator between God and humanity. Because Augustine (and humanity in general) does not have the power to convert himself back to God, a mediator was necessary who has “something in common with God and something in common with humanity” (*conf.* 10.42.67). This “mediator between God and men” is the “man Christ Jesus” (*conf.* 10.43.68), who participates downwardly with humanity so that humanity might again participate upwardly in God. Through the mediation of the Incarnation, the Word who was already in the form of God takes on the form of a servant so that humanity might be re-formed toward God. In this way, that which was fallen from its original creation (a creation made through the Word as God) is converted back to God (through the Word as human). The formless subject is, therefore, converted back to its original form through this downward participation of God in humanity, creating the possibility of a mediator between God and humanity.

Willing the Divine (and Human) Will

Here we must return to the objection raised above concerning whether or not Augustine ends up absorbing all humanity particularity within God. It could be asked, Even if God's work is not strictly interventionist but a work of providence in history, and even if the subject is introduced into an alternative human society within history, is not the ultimate price of this re-formation, this 'freedom', the replacement of human will with divine will? This kind of objection concerns whether freedom for Augustine is the preservation or loss of one's own humanity. And if this is a loss of human will within God's, then Augustine is not a resource for thinking a truly radical political subjectivity because human subjectivity is ultimately overcome by God's sovereignty. And these fears seem to be confirmed, when, after his conversion Augustine declares to Christ, "This was the sum of it: not to will what I willed and to will what you willed." (*conf.* 9.1.1).⁸⁸

But this willing the will of Christ is not an alien intervention precisely because Christ is the *mediator* between God and humanity. We must first remember the downward participation in which the Word takes on the human 'coat of skin'. This reference to taking on human mutability and morality is intimately connected to Augustine's conversion. In reading Romans he hears that he should no longer make provision for the sinful flesh, but should put on Christ (*conf.* 8.12.29). Given the decisiveness of God's own 'putting on' of human flesh in Christ, and the evident stumbling block that this was for Augustine initially, it would be incorrect to think that putting on Christ would mean for Augustine a denial of or escape from the human

⁸⁸ *Et hoc erat totum, nolle quod volebam et velle quod volebas.* Translation by John K. Ryan. O'Donnell notes the prayer from which the phrase is taken is the only time in the *Confessions* that Augustine addresses Christ directly (*Augustine: Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, 3:74).

condition, a fleeing from material flesh to some immaterial life. Why would the humanity of Christ be of such significance if it were then used as the means to escape the human condition itself? Instead, putting on Christ must refer to the humanity of Christ, the Word's own 'coat of skin' unblemished by sin, through which Augustine learns how, in Wetzel's words, "to live in the flesh as God would and did."⁸⁹ The redemption of Augustine's own humanity is through the humanity of God, a downward participation that reconnects humanity to the flow of upward participation in God, a conversion to its true form.

With this affirmation of humanity before us we can return to the above objection that divine will seems to overcome human will. If willing God's will comes only from the side of the fully divine then Augustine would be flirting with the loss of his human individuality within divine being. Those protesting such a situation would be correct in criticizing the loss of human subjectivity within divine sovereignty. But Augustine, in his conversion, learns to put on Christ in Christ's humanity. This humanity of Christ is not in opposition to Augustine's humanity but the fulfillment of it. Only in putting on Christ can Augustine's humanity be reformed or converted to its true purpose. And through this conversion true freedom of the will is regained. On the other hand, if this willing of Christ's will came solely from the human side of the Incarnation then Augustine would certainly be surrendering his will to an exterior source, substituting the will of one material being for the will of another material being. But again, because of the Incarnation, Christ's humanity ought not be conceived in a strictly materialist fashion as a competition between two material beings. Rather, the materiality of humanity is

⁸⁹ James Wetzel, "Will and Interiority in Augustine," 159.

affirmed even while its sinful willing is denied. The conflict of will (between human beings) or the loss of will (within divine being) only makes sense within a strictly materialist ontology or a strictly immaterialist Platonic ontology.⁹⁰ But within the downward participation of the Word, of which all things upwardly participate, Augustine finds his will freed. This *free* will remains a human will even while regaining its freedom. The divine Word, therefore, converts humanity back to its true form by entering into the fallen form of humanity and its history.

Conclusion

The previous section focused on the subject and its re-formation through conversion and Christ's role in this recreation. Admittedly, this constituted a more theoretical discussion leaving to the side questions of society and the subject's place within it. More will be said in the next chapter regarding the mediation of the Son and the type of society he institutes. But for now it will be useful to gather together the threads concerning the Incarnation and God's self-immanenting transcendence.

The downward participation of God in the Incarnation lends credence to designating Augustine's articulation of God as self-immanenting transcendence in contrast to Hegel's self-transcending immanence. All throughout Augustine emphasizes the impossibility of (self-) transcending the milieu of fallen humanity, presently bound by its past choices, forged as sinful habits. Attempts to think the subject according to its own immanence, its own psychological resources, fails. Even the lofty heights of

⁹⁰ The difference between a material and immaterial ontology (or paradigm) is suggested within the last section ("Will Incarnate") of Wetzel's "Will and Interiority in Augustine," 156-160.

Platonism only glimpse the homeland for which humanity longs, ultimately failing to understand the way there. For Augustine, Platonism marks the very limits of human self-transcendence, and therefore fully expresses the failure of such self-transcendence to overcome the limitations of sinful habit and sinful humanity. Only when God condescends to the human situation does a way open for change.

It is exactly this possibility for creating change that separates Augustine from Hegel. Hegel could only acknowledge change in history but no longer thought it necessary for true change to occur in modern society. Hegel's self-transcending immanence was meant to be the self-surpassing of human limitations through conflating creation and fall, such that existence is 'sinful' in its ontological alienation from itself, all without reference to any actual transcendence. Because there is no distinction between creation and fall (i.e. there was no change for the worse) Hegel is unable to think change (for the better) once he has articulated his own philosophical system. But Augustine, in holding apart creation and fall, conceptualizes both the change to worse (bondage of the will) and its consequent change for the better (true freedom). While the former (the fall) was an act of sinful self-immanenting through free choice, the latter (redemption) is not an act of self-transcending through an alternative free choice. Rather, the self-immanenting act of humanity is only reversed through the self-immanenting act of God in the Incarnation. Only because of God's self-immanenting transcendence it is possible for humanity to transcend its own sinful limitations, opening the possibility for an alternative kind of human society.

The exact contours of this alternative society, and that to which it is a contrast, still need to be examined. The workings of this society were alluded to above while

discussing alternative *exemplum* through which Augustine's conversion came. These examples helped integrate the subjective and social within the process of conversion. But as will be shown in the next chapter, it is really Christ who founds and established this alternative society, and therefore it is Christ who is the true example of freedom. And yet Christ is not merely an example of freedom and justice, but is also the one who gives to humanity the ability to follow this example. The next chapter, then, will examine more closely how God's self-immanent transcendence establishes an alternative society through the mediation of Christ.

CHAPTER 6: SOCIETY AND FREEDOM: *CITY OF GOD*

*The just live by faith, which works by love: by that love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and his neighbor as himself.*¹

Introduction

Chapter five focused on the conversion of the subject as a transition from one society to another society, held together through the self-immanent transcending of the Incarnation. The Incarnation of the Word provided the means through which God reforms humanity toward freedom. Beyond the bondage of the will within fallen human society, the converted will is a uniting of graced subject and society through the mediation of Christ, who is both God and human. This chapter will broaden the discussion of human society only briefly touch upon in the previous chapter. For this we will focus on Augustine *City of God*.

On a superficial level the argument of *City of God* can be laid out rather quickly. The antithetical relationship between the heavenly and the earthly cities stem from either an orderly love directed toward God or a disordered love directed toward self. And yet, within this present age (*saeculum*), these two cities are entangled such that one cannot clearly distinguish the two until the final judgment. Within this entanglement each city makes use of temporal goods creating a shared common peace. This common peace, within this present age, secures a semi-autonomous realm for political deliberation regarding the common good among those who hold different comprehensive doctrines. The Rawlsian idiom ending the previous sentence signals the purpose and direction of

¹ *ciu.* 19.23.

such an interpretation. This type of interpretation is meant to make Augustine palatable for contemporary political theory, allowing it to interact with modern concepts.

Although the above description is useful and concise, this chapter argues that such a view offers an incomplete understanding of Augustine's political thought. But more importantly, this type of reading mutes the more pertinent aspects of Augustine's political theology relating to political criticism and change. By moving beyond individual subjectivity and its conversion examined in the previous chapter, this chapter will look at Augustine's understanding of human society as a whole. The overall goal of this chapter is to deepen the previous account of God's self-immanent transcending, but now focusing on society rather than subjectivity. This attention on society will focus on the mediating activity of Christ, now centered on the factors of justice and love rather than issues of the freedom of the will. As we will see, justice and love can only come through the mediation of Christ who both founds and exemplifies a truly just and loving society. Through this mediation a critical distance is created out of which a constructive social change is possible. This chapter, then, shows the significance of God's self-immanent transcending in producing an alternative society capable of both social criticism and constructive change, a criticism and change working toward justice and love. Through this chapter Augustine's understanding of God's self-immanent transcending will be shown to offer better resources for understanding social critique and change than Hegel's self-transcending immanence.

Reading City of God through book 19

As with previous Augustinian themes (as with Hegel earlier), we must clear the ground a bit concerning dominant interpretations. To this end I will fill out the above sketch with reference to R. A. Markus's understanding of the *saeculum* and Oliver O'Donovan's emphasis on love as the linchpin of Augustine's political thought.

Markus sees Augustine's mature political thought as striking a balance between a Eusebian celebration and a Hippolytan judgment of Rome. For Eusebius, a Christian Emperor sitting in Rome represents the unification of what was held separate during the life of Christ and the rule of Augustus. With Constantine comes a "single harmonious order, one Empire devoted to the worship of the one true God."² But to this messianic rendering of Constantine is a Hippolytan alternative of judgment and condemnation, fueled by past persecutions. Hippolytus poured out apocalyptic pronouncements against Rome in the tradition of the writers of Daniel and Revelation, denouncing it as a "satanic imitation of the kingdom of Christ."³ Augustine, however, was wary of either total acceptance or total rejection of these traditions. For Augustine, according to Markus, "the Empire is not to be seen in terms either of the messianic image of the Eusebian tradition or of the apocalyptic image of the Antichrist of the Hippolytan tradition...[Rome] is theologically neutral."⁴ For Markus, Augustine suspends Rome between the earthly and heavenly cities, radically indeterminate in this present age (the *saeculum*).⁵

² R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 50.

³ Markus, *Saeculum*, 49.

⁴ Markus, *Saeculum*, 55.

⁵ Markus, *Saeculum*, 58.

This is, of course, not to collapse the distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities. They are radially dichotomous in terms of justice and love. But the polarity of ‘formal’ definition is always mixed within the ‘empirical’ situation of temporal existence. As Augustine says, “In this world (*saeculo*), the two cities are indeed entangled and mingled with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment shall separate them” (*ciu.* 1.35).⁶ This temporal mixture ultimately renders invisible both the earthly and heavenly cities until the final judgment separates them, rendering indeterminate any current identification of either the earthly city with Rome and the heavenly city with the church.⁷

This dual invisibility allows for an overlapping use of temporal goods even if each ultimately orders them differently (i.e. only the heavenly city properly orders the love of temporal things toward the eternal).⁸ For Augustine, the earthly city has wrongfully restricted its concern only to “temporal peace,” the sphere of material needs and their satisfaction through orderly social interactions. The heavenly city, on the other hand, properly uses temporal goods as ordered toward the eternal. Regardless of their differences, as Markus notes, “the earthly peace is of common concern to all, whether citizens of the heavenly or the earthly cities; it is valued and ‘loved’ by both.” Markus continues,

Augustine’s ‘positivistic’ definition of the *res publica* appears to have been very carefully devised to make room for this overlap. The people constituting a *res publica* are agreed in valuing certain things; they need not be agreed in valuing them on identical scales of value, still less do they need to be agreed on the objects upon which they set supreme value.⁹

⁶ See also *ciu.* 11.1

⁷ Markus, *Saeculum*, 60-62.

⁸ See *ciu.* 15.4, 19.17, 19.26.

⁹ Markus, *Saeculum*, 69.

The bulk of Markus' argument centers on book 19 of *City of God* and its replacement of justice by love as the definition of a commonwealth, an argument introduced but not extensively pursued in book 2. He argues that this redefinition of a *res public* according to love allows for different ultimate allegiances to engage each other within a restricted sphere of temporal goods and its earthly peace. This restricted sphere allows for the autonomy of an inherently pluralistic state in which different motivating structures can form coincident decisions.¹⁰ For Markus, these conceptualization all flows from Augustine's "understanding of the *saeculum*, not as a no-man's land between the two cities, but as their temporal life in their interwoven, perplexed, and only eschatologically separable realities."¹¹ This, *in nuce*, is Markus' reading of Augustine.

Oliver O'Donovan criticizes Markus for his agnosticism concerning historical identifications of the either the earthly city (with Babylon and Rome) and the heavenly city (Israel and the church), he questions Markus' supposed neutrality of actual historical communities, and complains of Markus' over-hasty assimilation of Augustine to modern liberalism.¹² Nonetheless, O'Donovan also sees book 19 as the center of Augustine's political theology, with 19.24 constituting a critical turning point in Augustine's

¹⁰ Markus, *Saeculum*, 69-70.

¹¹ Markus, *Saeculum*, 71.

¹² See Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (eds), *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 48-72, substantially revised from "Augustine's *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought," *Dionysius*, 11 (1987): 98-110 (reprinted in Dorothy F. Donnelly, *The City of God: A Collection of Critical Essays* [New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1995], 135-150).

thought.¹³ In O'Donovan's mind, Augustine's redefinition of a *res publica* around love rather than justice allows for the possibility of understanding earthly peace without Augustine compromising his principle that a *res publica* is only just when God is given his due through right worship.¹⁴ While offering a corrective to Markus, O'Donovan likewise perpetuates the practice of centering Augustine's political thought on book 19 and its concerns with temporal peace and love. Both Markus and O'Donovan continue the modern interpretation of Augustine that emphasizes eschatological ends over a supposed natural order.¹⁵

And certainly, in agreement with Markus and O'Donovan, it is right to make love central to Augustine's political thought. Certainly Augustine uses love as an essential definition of the two cities: "Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly city by love of God extending to contempt of self" (*ciu.* 14.28). And earlier, "In the one city, love of God has been given pride of place, and, in the other, love of self" (*ciu.* 14.13). Echoing his claim from *Confessions* (*conf.* 13.9.10), love is central to human existence because as "the body is carried by its weight" so too "the soul is carried by its love" (*ciu.* 11.28), directing the will appropriately or perversely. This emphasis on love allows Augustine to place evil within the will rather than the objects perversely used by the will such that, for

¹³ Gregory W. Lee draws attention to this overlapping emphasis between Markus and O'Donovan in his "Republics and Their Loves: Rereading *City of God* 19," *Modern Theology* 27/4 (2011): 553-558.

¹⁴ O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," 55.

¹⁵ By emphasizing eschatological ends rather than natural order Markus and O'Donovan, exemplifying typical modern interpretations, overturn medieval interpretations that emphasize natural order on the way to establishing Augustine as a natural law theorist. Concerning these modern and traditional schools of Augustinian interpretation, see Miikka Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's City of God* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 9-18.

example, avarice is the effect of a disordered will rather than caused by a golden object itself, which remains good though loved poorly (*ciu.* 12.8). A properly ordered love, therefore, is ordered according to the order of being found in all created things (*ciu.* 15.22). With these distinctions in mind Augustine can claim that the earthly city loves lower things (the self and the goods secured by an earthly peace) while the heavenly city loves the higher goods (God and eternal security) (*ciu.* 15.4). Augustine grafts the absolute dichotomy of loves between the two cities onto a common order of being and its hierarchy of goods and concludes that the heavenly city *uses* earthly and temporal goods as pilgrims on a journey while the earthly city *uses* temporal good as if they were permanent residents (*ciu.* 19.17).¹⁶

These texts can be gathered and directed in such a way as to explain Augustine's replacement of love for justice in his definition of a *res publica*, with the added result of justifying the centrality of an overlapping concern for earthly peace (temporal goods) amid wildly divergent loves (love of self and love of God). This emphasis softens the dichotomy between the two loves by finding a realm of overlapping interests within an earthly peace. Marcus and O'Donovan play up the trajectory of such a reading, and as we have seen, Eric Gregory follows by emphasizing the political virtue of properly ordered love of God and love of neighbor.

¹⁶ It is for this reason that Augustine's *uti/frui* distinction becomes so important. See Oliver O'Donovan, "Usus and Fructio in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I." *Journal of Theological Studies* 33/2 (1982): 361-97; William Riordan O'Connor, "The Uti/Frui Distinction in Augustine's Ethics." *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 45-62; Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993), 79-115; Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethics of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 335-343.

But these types of readings have begun to be contested as self-serving and selective. If offering a redefinition of a *res publica* were the center of Augustine's political thought, why introduce the concept in book 2 (the definition of a *res publica*) only to wait until book 19 to resolve it? And if there is a good reason for the delay, what is missed in jumping from book 2 to 19 with hardly a comment on what lay between (besides touching on the texts mentioned above)? And why, when Augustine is so persistent in his critique of the earthly city, is this, one of the only concessions made between the earthly and heavenly city (a shared earthly peace), developed into the center of Augustine's political thought?¹⁷ These questions raise the possibility that something is amiss in the above approaches. In order to correct these partial readings of *City of God* it is necessary not only to search Augustine's texts for themes and topics interesting and accessible to modern political theorists, but also to follow the threads of Augustine's own argument.

With the goal in mind of following Augustine's own argument this chapter will open with book 1 of *City of God* and its depiction of Rome and its lust for domination (*libido dominandi*). This lust for domination expresses the essence of the earthly city and is therefore the baseline against which the heavenly city is a contrast. With this emphasis on the lust for domination in mind we will then turn to Augustine's discussion of justice in book 2. Following this will be the linking of justice and love in book 10 and

¹⁷ Representative of these criticisms are Gregory W. Lee, "Republics and Their Loves"; Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's City of God in a 'Postmodern' World." *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 77-138; Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 55-72.

17, and its mediation through Christ, the just founder of the heavenly city. Only then will we turn to book 19 and examine how it weaves together justice and love. Throughout I will show that Augustine has an overwhelming concern with justice, such that any supposed forsaking of justice for love misunderstands Augustine's intention, rendering his political theology incomplete.

Standing on its own this chapter will attempt to correct incomplete interpretations of Augustine's political theology by holding together justice and love as 1) the means of critiquing the lust for domination of the earthly city and 2) as that which directs the change offered by the heavenly city through its earthly pilgrimage. Within part two of this study the interpretation offered here will deepen the previous chapter's account of God's self-immanent transcending transcendence, but now adding the factor of justice and love to the previous transformation of will. The mediation between God and humanity in the Son will be shown to be the key through which Augustine articulates an alternative society capable of criticism (against the lust for domination) and change (around true justice and love). This alternative society is the correlate of the previous chapter's emphasis on subjectivity, both of which are connected to the mediation of Christ. Within the general evaluation between Augustine and Hegel, this chapter reveals the superiority of Augustine's understanding of God's self-immanent transcending transcendence in supplying a framework for social criticism and change when compared to Hegel's understanding of humanity's self-transcending immanence.

1. The Earthly City and the Lust for Domination

In the preface to book 1 Augustine lays out the essential themes of *City of God*, even if he did not know at the time how long the work would grow.¹⁸ Augustine first introduces the glorious city of God, referring to both its pilgrim (*peregrinator*) status and as it will be in its eternal home. Augustine seeks to “defend her against those who favour their own gods above her Founder.” Augustine then introduces his first antithesis through the pairing of pride and humility. He says that the King and Founder of the city of God has proclaimed a divine law that “God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble.” This is contrasted with the words of Virgil in reference to Rome, that the proud love to hear themselves praised with the motto: “To spare the [conquered] and subdue the proud.”¹⁹ While God gives grace to the humble (*humilibus*), Rome is praised for sparing the conquered (*subiectis*). And while God resists the proud (*superbi*), Rome takes it upon itself to subdue the proud. In these subtle contrasts Augustine is showing how human pride is always a perverse imitation of God (*ciu.* 19.12), supplanting the grace given to the humble by God for a mere sparing of the conquered by Rome, and

¹⁸ *City of God* is a polemic work structured in two major parts in which Augustine defends the city of God against those who claim the sack of Rome happened because the people had forsaken the traditional gods (Johannes van Oort, in *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 164-198, argues also for the dogmatic and catechetical aspects of the *City of God*). The first part consists of 10 books disputing the claims of the earthly city against the heavenly city. The second part consists of 12 books explaining the origins, progress, and ends of the two cities (*CD* 1.35; 10.32, 11.1; 18.1). The first part separates into two sections: books 1-5 dispute the claim that the gods be worshipped for benefit in the present life, and books 6-10 dispute that the gods be worshipped for the benefit of the life to come (*CD* 1.36; 5.26; 6.1). The second part includes two sections containing 4 books each concerning the origins (books 11-14), progress (books 15-18), and end (books 19-22) of the two cities (11.1; 15.1; 18.1). See Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67-73; Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 75-77; John O’Meara, *Charter of Christendom: The Significance of the City of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 31-34; Jean Claude Guy, *Unité et structure logique de la ‘Cité de dieu’ de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1961).

¹⁹ All words in brackets within Dyson’s translation are my own, usually with the purpose of drawing out an emphasis or contrast that his word choice overlooks.

Rome sees itself as doing God's work in subduing the proud.²⁰ Only after the initial pairing of pride and humility does Augustine finally complete his most famous antithesis by raising the figure of the earthly city. The defining attribute of this city is that "when it seeks [domination]" over others it "is itself [dominated] by the lust for [domination] (*ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur*)."²¹ As we will see, this *libido dominandi* is the principle means by which Augustine critiques Roman virtue, showing that its civic virtues always served a will to dominate others. But, as he states here and throughout, one is always dominated by this lust for domination, always leading away from freedom and justice toward slavery and domination.

Temporal Goods, Virtue, and Death

In book 1, instead of tracing any of these themes directly Augustine first notes that critics of the heavenly city should praise rather than blame God because only in the Christian churches did these critics find safety from the attacking hordes. Through a quick survey of Greek and Roman history Augustine finds that never before have the vanquished been spared in the halls of their own temples, but in Rome the pagans found shelter in the churches (*ciu.* 1.1-7). Augustine further steals the wind from the critics' sails when he reminds them of what every true philosopher knows, that loss of temporal goods is no true loss for the virtuous (*ciu.* 1.8-14). By this Augustine places these critics on the horns of a dilemma. Either these critics are virtuous and therefore ought not to fear death. Or they are not virtuous because they worship false gods, but were saved by

²⁰ O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 75.

²¹ Throughout I will be exchanging Dyson's "lust for mastery" for "lust for domination" in translating *libido dominandi* and its cognates, indicated by brackets.

the true God anyway. Augustine wants to force them to choose between the failure of their own virtue or the failure of their gods.

Augustine deepens this dilemma in 1.15 by raising before their eyes the noble example (*nobilissimum exemplum*) of Marcus Regulus. Regulus, captured by the Carthaginians, is sent back to Rome in hope of exchanging prisoners. Regulus is bound by oath to return to Carthage if he fails in releasing the captive Carthaginians from Rome. Regulus, however, advises the Senate not to release the prisoners, and, because of his oath, returns to Carthage to face a miserable death. Augustine praises Regulus for his virtue (both in advising Rome on the wisest course of action and in keeping his oath), but draws a dual conclusion from this example. On the one hand, if Regulus thought worship of the gods brought temporal benefit then he was sorely mistaken. The gods neither protected him from defeat or death. On the other hand, if Regulus thought worship of the gods brought benefit only in the next life, then Regulus would not find any fault in the gods for his death. In either case the critics bewailing the present woes of Rome have no argument to make. If Regulus, such a revered hero of Rome could come to such a death, then these critics ought not complain if Rome itself dies. And if Regulus can die with his virtue while worshipping the gods, then the same ought to be true for Rome itself.

These opening chapters, then, raise the issues of worshipping the gods for either temporal or eternal benefit, themes that will dominate the first part of *City of God*, books 1-5 and 6-10 respectively. But Augustine has also introduced the issue of virtue and the place of *exemplum* in moral discourse. Deepening these themes Augustine next turns to the issue of volitional death as a mark of Roman virtue, exemplified by Lucretia and Cato.

Lucretia and Cato as Exempla

Augustine initially takes up the issue of honorable suicide because during the sack of Rome women—especially certain Christian virgins—were sexually violated. Critics mocked that God was not able to save those most dedicate to him, and added that these women were not even virtuous enough to kill themselves in order to prove their honor, as the great Lucretia had.²² Augustine first argues that chastity is maintained even if the body is violated by the lust of another. Therefore a woman “has done nothing for which she ought to punish herself with voluntary death” (*ciu.* 1.18) because she is innocent of any crime. Indeed, if one of these women were to commit suicide she would be guilty of killing an innocent person (*ciu.* 1.17). Augustine, seeking to put to rest the concerns of Christian women who felt for the sake of honor they should kill themselves, sets justice as the criteria by which he will discuss Lucretia’s death.

In 1.19 Augustine turns to Lucretia, “that noble woman of Rome,” and seeks to draw out the inconsistencies of Roman conceptions of virtue. By the time of Augustine the rape and suicide of Lucretia was an ancient tale told by Livy as an example of Rome virtue. Because the story was so well known to his readers, Augustine glosses the details. After being raped by king Tarquin, Lucretia reveals to her husband and father what happened to her. Then, “sick with the shame of what had been done to her, and unable to bear it, she slew herself.” Why did she kill herself? Augustine asks. It was not because of personal guilt or sadness. Rather she killed herself as a public witness in light

²² For a discussion of Roman views on chastity and suicide, and how they had crept into Christian thought and practice, see Dennis Trout, “Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the City of God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2/1 (1994): 53-70.

of her public shame. In Rome, suicide is a means of public honor and glory, or rather, it is a practice of civic virtue. For example, old men, rather than becoming a burden on society, would choose to die by closing their mouths to food as a way of maintaining their virtue.²³ Suicide was also a public act used to prove a point.²⁴ This occurs in the case of Lucretia. Augustine asks the question that Lucretia knew everyone would ask, “Should she be judged an adulteress or a chaste woman?” Lucretia killed herself in order to prove beyond all doubt her innocence and chastity, and therefore maintain her virtue. These were the traditional terms by which Lucretia’s suicide was understood. But Augustine shifts the question from the issue of adultery and chastity, to that of guilt and punishment. Why, if innocent, is Lucretia punished with death? “If it was not through any impurity on her part that she was taken against her will, then it was no justice by which, being innocent, she was punished.” Augustine raises the issue of justice in light of the violence suffered. If Lucretia had suffered violence, how is it an act of justice that she would now be punished when she is innocent? If she punishes the innocent (herself) unjustly then she is a murderer. But if she is not unjustly punished then she must have been an adulteress. The situation reduces to a simple dilemma:

If she is acquitted of murder, she is convicted of adultery; and if she is acquitted of adultery, then she is convicted of murder. It is not possible to find a way out of this dilemma. One can only ask: If she was an adulteress, why is she praised? If she was pure, why was she slain.

Augustine, moving from a classical understanding of Lucretia death based in issues of chastity and honor, redefines the issue according to justice. In setting up this dilemma

²³ See Brian Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 93-95.

²⁴ Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 94.

Augustine seeks to show the inconsistencies of Roman virtue in which the pursuit of honor is at odds with the practice of justice.

Augustine, however, does not end by noting inconsistencies. He instead seeks to move below the symptoms to the underlying disease. Below the issues of adultery or chastity, of guilt or innocence, Augustine suggests that Lucretia's true motivation was not based in the strength of purity but the weakness of shame, a weakness springing from the love of praise.

Being a Roman lady excessively eager for praise, she feared that if she remained alive, she would be thought to have enjoyed suffering the violence that she had suffered when she lived. Hence, she judged that she must use self-punishment to exhibit the state of her mind to the eyes of men to whom she could not show her conscience. She blushed, indeed, to think that, if she were to bear patiently the infamy that another had inflicted upon her, she would be believed to have been an accomplice to it. (*ciu.* 1.19)

Rather than seek approval from the eyes of God who sees the purity of conscience and chastity (as Christian women are commended to do), Lucretia loved the praise of others and force them to see the contents of her mind through the corpse of her body. Augustine claims this is a weakness based in shame rather than a principled commitment to purity, a weakness that cannot bear the foolish opinions of others but would rather dominate their praise (*ciu.* 1.22).

For Augustine this weakness of shame growing from the love of praise is rooted in a more sinister soil. In book 5 he examines this more closely. There Augustine claims that Rome expanded because they loved praise and glory and died for it, deeming it best to either die in glorious battle or live in freedom. He explains that

they suppressed all other desires in their boundless desire for this one thing. In short, because they deemed it ignoble for their fatherland to serve and glorious for it to rule and command (*dominari*), the first object of all their desire was freedom (*liberam*), and the second mastery (*dominam*). (*ciu.* 5.12)

Rome thought it inglorious to serve and desired freedom instead. Overcoming its more base desires because of its thirst for praise and glory, Rome became a great empire. But Augustine contends that this desire for glory and freedom merely masked Rome's deepest desire. For "once they had achieved freedom (*libertas*), however, so great a desire for glory then arose that liberty (*libertas*) seemed to them too little by itself, unless they also sought domination (*dominatio*) over others" (*ciu.* 5.12). Roman moralists like Livy claim that this desire for glory overcomes a lust for mastery and represents the moral progress of the Romans. But Augustine shows that desire for glory only masks the dark soil of domination.²⁵ As Brian Harding says, the difference between the love of glory and the lust for domination "is not one of goals, but of methods and appearances."²⁶ According to the lights of the earthly city, love of praise and glory produce a certain level of virtue, keeping in check outright wickedness. But for Augustine both are vices rooted in and expressing the will to dominate inaugurated by Romulus' murder of Remus (*ciu.* 3.6). For Augustine, a truly virtuous person would not need love of praise to curb a lust for domination. Indeed, a virtuous person despises the glory of others and instead rests in the judgment of God (*ciu.* 5.14, 19).

With this critique in mind we can return to the example of Lucretia, of which the Romans held as a matron of virtue and Augustine handed over as a mistress of vice. Rather than exhibiting the virtue of chastity and honor, by explaining her suicide as an act of weakness compelled by love of praise, Augustine is insinuating that rather than be a

²⁵ For a detailed survey on the perceived moral development from *libido dominandi* to love of glory, and Augustine's critique of such a development, see Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 35-102.

²⁶ Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 89.

slave to the opinions of others Lucretia desired to master their opinions by dominating her own body. As Harding suggests, “This desire turns the blade against Lucretia, her *libido dominandi* dominates her causing her for the sake of honour to slay herself.”²⁷ By exchanging interpretive frameworks, Augustine has transformed Lucretia from an example of Roman virtue into an example of what Augustine had noted in the preface of book 1, that those given over to the lust for domination are in turn dominated by it.

To similar effect, in 1.23, Augustine raises the death of Cato as an example not of the virtue of conscience but the vice of domination. Cato kills himself at Utica after Caesar effectively ends the Republic. Cato’s suicide is held up as a valiant example of individual liberty and patriotic commitment to the Republic against Caesar’ domination. But Augustine finds in Cato another example of the contradictions of Roman virtue masking its *libido dominandi*. Augustine wonders why, if death is preferable to life under Caesar’s rule, Cato would not also compel his son to die with him. Would not a father’s sword have redeemed his son from such a disgrace? Instead of being rooted in the love of liberty or the glory of Rome, Augustine suggests that “although Cato greatly loved his son, who he hoped and wished would be spared by Caesar, still more greatly did he hate...to give Caesar the glory of pardoning himself.” As with all of Rome before him, Cato hated the idea of serving another rather than ruling, and could not live under the mercy of Caesar. Again concurring with Harding, Cato

dominates himself because he can no longer dominate anything else; in this suicide the repressed brutality of Romulus again returns to the surface pushing aside its mask of glory...[Cato] makes himself into a Roman hero like Romulus by treating his body as Remus.”²⁸

²⁷ Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 96.

²⁸ Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 101.

Cato, in his pride, is dominated by the lust for domination, leading toward death rather than life.

In typical rhetorical fashion, Augustine has mined ancient *exempla* for a contemporary purpose. Augustine has twisted these examples to make a polemical point against his critics and their own perceived virtue. As Augustine noted in the preface, it is the nature of the earthly city to attempt to subdue the proud and in the process end by being dominated by this very lust for domination. Lucretia and Cato perfectly exemplify the perverse virtue of Rome causing it to celebrate those people whose pride compels them to subdue themselves. The suicides of Lucretia and Cato reveal the self-subjection of the proud, motivated by a love of praise and glory, of which Augustine reveals to be merely a mask for a *libido dominandi*. It is for these reasons that Augustine claims that Rome has developed the *libido dominandi* in its purest form (*ciu.* 1.30), cleverly veiled as a desire for glory.²⁹ Lucretia and Cato, therefore, are not examples mobilizing a commitment to virtue, offering resources for positive change from a less virtuous to a more virtuous society. Rather they capitulate to and therefore continue the oppressive Roman practice of dominating the subjected.

Depths Of Domination

This purest form of domination, praise of glory ending in self-destruction, is the result of sin and its bondage. God “did not intend that His rational creature, made in His own image, should have lordship (*dominari*) over any but the irrational creatures: not

²⁹ Here Augustine effectively anticipates and reverses Nietzsche’s critique of Christian humility as a mask for power by claiming that pagan virtue is a mask for unrestricted domination.

man over man, but man over the beasts... The first cause of servitude, therefore, is sin” (*ciu.* 19.15). Seeking dominion over others, for Augustine, is the result and punishment of sin. And in the process of seeking to rule over others each is ruled by sin. For this reason Augustine argues that the harshest form of domination is not experiences from the hands of others but comes from the lust for domination itself (*libido ipsa dominandi*) (*ciu.* 19.15). By this Augustine repeats the preface to book 1, that when the earthly city seeks to dominate over others it is itself dominated by this lust.

This lust for domination seeks not only the servitude of fellow humans but also the gods as well. This is Cain’s sin, the founder of the first earthly city and the first example (*primo exemplo*) or archetype of Rome (*ciu.* 15.5). Cain sought not to serve God in his sacrifice but that through his sacrifice God would serve him. For “this is the way of the earthly city: to worship a god or gods so that, with their aid, that city may reign in victory and earthly peace, not by the counsel of charity, but with lust for [domination] (*dominandi cupiditate*)” (*ciu.* 15.7). Here we should note that Augustine connects “earthly peace” with “lust for domination” in a manner that should give pause to over hasty celebrations of earthly peace and its common use by the earthly and heavenly cities. After the irenic statements in 15.4 concerning the earthly city and its loving lesser goods comes these darker consequences in 15.5 and 15.7. Earthly peace is still compelled by domination, a domination not exhausted by the cessation of war (for it must be remembered that Cain and Abel were not at war when Cain murdered his brother).

Indeed, even peace is not enough for the *libido dominandi* because it cannot bare sharing the glory of such a peace. It is for this reason that Romulus killed Remus, because as co-founders of Rome the glory of the accomplishment was shared between

them. But “in order that one of them should wield entire mastery (*totam dominationem*), his colleague was removed” (*ciu.* 15.5). As Augustine notes, unlike goodness that can be shared without diminishment, glory is always lessened when divided among equals. It is for this reason the earthly city is always divided against itself. While goodness is non-competitive, glory always divides in seeking total dominion. In these ways, therefore, the *libido dominandi* seeks dominion over humanity and the gods and it will suffer no rivals. Lucretia and Cato are examples of such domination in turning against themselves in order to master others. Rather than being virtuous examples meant to spur on just deeds they are examples of vice perpetuating injustice. Throughout book 1, then, Augustine weaves a polemic against a Roman pride that end in the death of the innocent.

2. Justice and *Res Publica*

Now, at first glance it might seem that the above analysis of book one only strengthens those approaches that would place love at the center of Augustine’s political theology. The *libido dominandi* of the earthly city is merely the negative correlate of the properly ordered love of the heavenly city. And certainly this is true. But to move from *libido dominandi* to properly ordered love moves too quickly and ignores the issues of virtue and justice that Augustine weaves into his critique of Rome. In book 1 Augustine does not directly connect love of self with the formation of the *libido dominandi*, but rather connects it with the false virtues exemplified by Lucretia and Cato. Here Augustine is practicing a theological critique located in concerns of justice rather than that of love. When moving from the first to the second book of *City of God* we see this

concerned for justice explicitly raised. And seeing this will help reveal the intimate link between justice and love that Augustine forges throughout *City of God*.

The Justice of Gods and Romans

It is interesting to note that while Augustine's stated purpose for book 2 is to show that Rome suffered many calamities under their gods before Christ was born (2.3). He begins by pointing out that the gods never provided Rome with just laws for upright living (2.4, 2.6, 2.16). Rather than giving Rome laws directed toward justice the gods are instead examples of indecency and perversion. Their public rites are more obscene than what anyone would permit to be done in private. And the Romans tacitly knew it was better not to emulate their gods because they passed laws forbidding performers of such indecent rites from holding public office, and they forbid that the slanderous remarks directed toward the gods should ever be made of fellow countrymen. In these ways they showed more concern for themselves than their gods, an inconsistency Augustine is careful to exploit (*ciu.* 2.8-16).

But, Augustine wonders, "perhaps the divine beings saw no need to appoint laws for the Roman people because, as Sallust says, 'justice and goodness prevailed among them as much by nature as by law'" (*ciu.* 2.17). Against such a boastful claim, Augustine mercilessly recites all the 'just and good' deeds of the Romans, beginning with the rape of the Sabine women and the slaughter of their fathers and ending with the exile of the celebrated Roman general Marcus Camillus, disparaged and disgraced because of the envy of others. Between these Augustine gives faint praise to the Romans who, although making Romulus a god, at least passed laws forbidding the emulation of his deeds.

Augustine shows that Rome had fallen from the heights of such “justice and goodness” well before the time of Christ (*ciu.* 2.18-20). If Rome has become corrupt, Augustine shows that it had become so before Christianity began to have influence within the empire. Throughout these chapters Augustine shows that the Roman gods neither promoted nor exemplified justice, and the Romans themselves neither loved nor practiced justice. Only after Augustine had dismissed the justice of the gods and the nature of the people does he then turn to Cicero’s much discussed definition of a *res publica*.

A Res Publica of Justice

If justice is not secured through the gods by example or decree, or by the natural propensity of the Romans, then perhaps it is constructed through common agreement. In 2.21 Augustine shifts from historical description to philosophical definition, drawing on Cicero. Augustine cites the lines of Scipio through whom Cicero declares that like the harmony established by musicians, common agreement within a city must be established by justice, allowing for the ‘property of the people’, or commonwealth, to be secured. If the common property of the people is violated by unjust rule (either by king, council, or all the people itself), then the *res publica* is not merely flawed, but ceases to exist.

Within Cicero’s dialogue it is shown that this definition of a *res publica* is superior to others because it applies to all modes of governance: monarchy, republic, and democracy.

From here commentators often skip to Augustine’s claim that not only had Rome ceased to be a commonwealth because it had strayed from justice, but that it had never

been a commonwealth because it never practiced true justice.³⁰ But before we ask about the nature of this ‘true justice’ mentioned at the end of 2.21 we must examine more closely the long quote added from book 5 of *De republica* in which Cicero laments the present state of Rome. More than just using Cicero to indict Rome’s moral degradation in general, Augustine utilizes Cicero in accusing the ‘great men’ who were supposed to uphold the traditions and mores of Rome. “And what shall I say of our men?” declares Cicero,

For morals have perished from the want of great men; and we must not only be held accountable for so great an evil; we must indeed, plead our cause as though charged with a capital offense. For it is because of our vices, and not through any mischance, that we now retain only the name of the commonwealth that we long ago lost in fact.³¹

As Robert Dodaro has argued, this passage and the previous passage from Cicero comparing the harmony of musicians to the common agreement of a *res publica* refer to the function of the statesmen in promoting justice within the commonwealth.³² Cicero laments not the failure of justice in general, but the specific failure of just statesmen to promote justice within the *res publica*. It is against this failure that Augustine claims that true justice only exists in the commonwealth founded and ruled by Christ (*ciu.* 2.21). In book 2, then, neither the gods, nor the innate justice and goodness of the Romans, nor the justice of the statesmen have secured Rome in its virtue or justice. Rome could not secure this justice because true justice only comes through Christ as the founder of the just society. This appeal to Christ is not one step on the way toward abandoning justice for a broader conception of love as the definition of a *res publica* found in book 19. Rather

³⁰ Representative are Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine’s City of God*, 122-24, and O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 81-4.

³¹ Quoted from Cicero’s *De rep.* 5.1 by Augustine.

³² Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 10-26.

Augustine is slowly laying the foundation for understanding the essential differences between the heavenly and the earthly cities based in justice.

3. Justice, Love, and Sacrifice

Throughout the previous two sections we have first traced how Rome is dominated by the *libido dominandi*, using the desire for praise and glory to mask its more base desire to rule over others. Then we examined the question of justice and the Roman *res publica*, seeing how Augustine claimed that only true justice resides in the city of God founded and ruled by Christ. The persistence of the *libido dominandi* and its consequent injustice is caused both by the worship of false gods and the sinfulness of humanity, exemplified by Rome but applicable to all societies.³³ And while we examined how Augustine uses Cicero's definition of a *res publica* according to justice, we have not defined justice as Augustine sees it.

To understand the centrality of justice, and by way of introducing the related themes of love and sacrifice, let us refer to a statement in 19.23. Here Augustine says,

Justice is found where the one supreme God rules an obedient City according to His grace, so that it sacrifices to none but Him...In that City, both the individual just man and the community and people of the just live by faith, which works by love: by that love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and his neighbor as himself.

It is essential to understand this constellation of concepts here in 19.23 before moving on to the more famous 19.24 and its "objects of love" definition of a *res publica*. The proper questions to be asked are not, *What* is justice and *what* is this ordered love? Rather the

³³ See van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 129-131.

proper questions is, *How* does justice come about and *how* is love properly ordered?³⁴

To do this we must inquire into the close connection between justice, love, and sacrifice. We will first do this by examining love and sacrifice in book 10, followed by observing how Christ is both “just and justifying” in book 17. Both will deepen the previous chapter’s account of God’s self-immanent transcendence as a means toward conversion, but now adding the factor of justice and love to the previous transformation of will, all mediated through Christ.

From Justice to Love

Augustine subscribes to the classical notion that justice is giving each his due (*ciu.* 19.4).³⁵ Connected to God this means to worship and serve God alone, for

justice is that virtue which gives to each his due. What kind of justice is it, then, that takes a man away from the true God and subjects him to impure demons? Is this giving to each his due?...What justice can we suppose there to be in a man who does not serve God?” (*ciu.* 19.21)

But what does it mean to serve God and thereby give God God’s due? Book 10 gives us an answer to this question in reference to worship, but in a way we might not expect.

Worship is how we give to God what is God’s due through service (*latreia*) (*ciu.* 10.1), a service “expressed through certain sacraments or performed within our own selves” (*ciu.* 10.3).³⁶ But in performing this service we learn to cling to God who is our highest good, a clinging accomplished through love expressed as the fulfillment of the

³⁴ The neglect of these ‘how’ questions result in Gregory neglecting Augustine’s soteriology and ecclesiology.

³⁵ See also *De lib. arb.* 1.13.

³⁶ Earlier in the preface to book 6 Augustine speaks of the *latreia* due only to God as a way of setting up the discussion of books 6-10 regarding the benefit of worshipping the gods in view of the life to come.

dual love commands: love God and love your neighbor. This practice of love “is worship of God” for “this is true religion; this is right piety; this is the service which is due to God alone” (*ciu.* 10.3). Through the service of love for God and others, Augustine transforms the classical notions of justice by linking it to love, a transformation informed by Roman 13:8 in which we are commanded to fulfill the debt of love to each other.³⁷

Augustine, however, does not leave the connection between love and worship unexplored, instead asking more specifically about the service due to God. Augustine centers on the practice of offering sacrifices because “it is certain, and no man would venture to deny it, that sacrifice is due only to God,” a practice Augustine sees established by Cain and Abel (*ciu.* 10.4). But it is around the concept of sacrifice that Augustine’s doctrine of God begins to transform the categories of religious devotion. For “who would be so foolish as to suppose that the things offered to God in sacrifice are necessary to Him for some purposes of His own?” asks Augustine (*ciu.* 10.5). Instead of being for God, sacrifices are required for our own benefit. God desires not our sacrifice per se, but that in and through them we might draw near to God. For “we are to understand these things simply as symbols of what we are to do now for the purpose of drawing near to God and helping our neighbor to do the same” (*ciu.* 10.5). Illustrating from the psalms and prophets, Augustine concludes that the true, invisible sacrifice God requires is a contrite heart leading to acts of mercy. Because mercy borne from contrition is the true sacrifice owed to God Augustine concludes that “all commandments, therefore, which we read concerning the many kinds of sacrifice offered in the ministry of the

³⁷ See also *trin.* 8.

tabernacle or the temple, are to be interpreted symbolically, as referring to love of God and neighbour.”

Moving from here to Romans 12:1-6, Augustine discusses Paul’s exhortation that everyone offer themselves as living sacrifices in true humility. But how is such a true sacrifice possible for those dominated by self-love, unable to will the good will of God? In an elegant passage bringing together several themes Augustine relates our sacrifice to the true sacrifice of Christ:

Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy shown to ourselves and to our neighbours, and done with reference to God; and since works of mercy have no object other than to set us free from misery and thereby make us blessed; and since this cannot be done other than through that good of which it is said, ‘It is good for me to be very near to God’: it surely follows that the whole of the redeemed City—that is, the congregation and fellowship of the saints—is offered to God as a universal sacrifice for us through the great High Priest Who, in His Passion, offered even Himself for us in the form of a servant, so that we might be the body of so great a Head. For it was this form that He offered, and in it that He was offered, because it is according to it that He is our Mediator. (*ciu.* 10.6)

Central to this passage is the fact that Christ is the mediator because of his being in the form of a servant (recalling Philippians 2:6-11). In his human weakness, participating in our “coat of skin” (*conf.* 7.18.24), Christ is our mediator. Augustine elaborates in 10.20, saying,

The man Jesus Christ, became the Mediator between God and man by taking the form of a servant. In the form of God, He receives sacrifice together with the Father, with Whom He is one God. In the form of a servant, however, He chose to be a sacrifice Himself... Thus, He is both priest who offers and the sacrifice which is offered.

Here Augustine appeals to the dual nature of Christ, that in the form of God he receives sacrifices while in the form of a servant, of humanity, he offers sacrifice to God. In his humanity, in the proper humility expected of humanity but lost in the pride of the fall, Christ offers the only true sacrifice due to God.

Augustine is giving content to what he only alluded to in book 10 of his *Confessions*. It is not just that God took on the form of humanity that humanity might be re-formed, but Christ took on the form of a servant in order to render to God what is due to God in true sacrifice. As he says in 10.6, in the Passion of Christ this true sacrifice is offered and through this offering the redeemed city is also offered to God. The sacrifice that the faithful make to God is in reality the sacrifice that Christ made to God on behalf of humanity. The redeemed city participates in this sacrifice through the continual celebration of the Eucharist “by which she demonstrates that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God” (*ciu.* 10.6). Because it is Christ who offers the true sacrifice to God Christians know that their ability for such an act (which is really the act of love) does not come from themselves but from God. As Dodaro indicates, in celebrating the Eucharist Christians “should recognize that the source of their virtue is found not in themselves, but in Christ. By adopting this perspective, they too assume the ‘form of a servant’, and in imitation of Christ, do not grasp at equality with God.”³⁸ The Incarnation, then, is not merely an expression of the unity of God and humanity making possible the unity of love of God and love of neighbor, a position Gregory stakes out. Rather the Incarnation effects the mediation of Christ through who comes the ability to properly love at all.

In taking up this form, Christ gives to God what is God’s due through love for God and neighbor. This is possible because the “Son of God, remaining immutable in himself, put on humanity and bestowed upon mankind the spirit of His love through the mediation of a Man” (*ciu.* 10.29). This bestowing of the spirit of love through the

³⁸ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 104.

incarnation, perfectly expressed in his sacrifice, is that grace by which one can love God and love neighbor as one's self. Ultimately this is a Trinitarian process of love in which humanity is caught up, reordering our loves of self toward love of God and neighbor.³⁹

But we need to note how in the mediation of Christ we again see God's self-immanenting transcendence. God in Christ enters the human situation to do for humanity what it could not do for itself. Through the Incarnation, here specifically in death, Christ fulfills the dual love commands thereby rendering to God what is due to God. God in Christ does this because humanity on its own could not give God God's due because of the bondage of its own will to its *libido dominandi*. Of this self-immanenting transcendence Augustine says that God

established and founded this faith, that man might find a way to man's God through God made man. For this is 'the Mediator between God and man: the man Christ Jesus'. For it is as man that He is the Mediator and the Way. (*ciu.* 11.2)⁴⁰

Christ, as mediator between God and humanity because he is both God and human, offers on behalf of humanity the perfect sacrifice due to God. According to this sacrifice justice and love come to humanity and are returned to God, a justice and love not possible for

³⁹ Certainly, at this point, much more could be said about love, both concerning the relation of self-love, neighbor-love, and God-love, and also regarding the Trinitarian nature of the love *of* God and love *as* God. This, however, would greatly expand the scope this inquiry that seeks to focus on the nature of the political subject in Augustine. The argument here assumes the work of Raymond Canning and Oliver O'Donovan, and in qualified fashion that of Eric Gregory. On the Trinitarian nature of love see Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour*, 301-314, and Lewis Ayres, "Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies of 1 John," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* ed. by Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 67-93.

⁴⁰ Augustine continues: "If there is a way between one who strives and that towards which he strives, there is hope of his reaching his goal; but if there is no way, or if he is ignorant of it, how does it help him to know what the goal is? The only way that is wholly defended against all error is when one and the same person is at once God and man: God our goal, man our way" (*ciu.* 11.2).

humanity according to its own will or effort. Augustine, however, has more to say concerning the salvific effects of Christ's life and death. And for this we will turn to 17.4 and its account concerning Christ's mediation of justice.

The Just and Justifier

The connection between love and sacrifice united in Christ is strengthened when we return to the theme of justice. Why is Christ's sacrifice effective for humanity? Christ's death is effective because Christ is the only truly just person who also justifies, overcoming the ignorance and weakness of sin.

Augustine argues for the mediation of justice through Jesus by considering Hannah's song in 17.4. This song is not merely "the words of a little woman giving thanks for the birth of her son," but is rather "the Christian religion itself, the City of God itself, whose King and Founder is Christ." Referring to the city of God and Christ as its founder and king (*conditor et rex*) echoes the expression from 2.21 that true justice is only found in the city whose founder and rule (*conditor rectorque*) is Christ.⁴¹ It must be remembered that in 2.21 the issue was not justice in general, but the example of justice given by the statesmen. Continuing in 17.4 Augustine says, "Through her, indeed, there speaks, by the spirit of prophecy, the grace of God itself, from which the proud are estranged so that they fall, and by which the humble are filled so that they rise." This falling of the proud and rising of the humble echoes the essential dichotomy between the two cities introduced in the preface to book 1. Fundamentally, the adversaries of the city of God, here named as Babylon, "presume upon their own strength and glory in

⁴¹ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 108.

themselves and not in the Lord. . . In their pride, they believe that they can please God by their own strength, and that they do not need the help of God.” They are ““ignorant of God’s righteousness’ (*Dei iustitiam*) (that is, of that which God, Who alone is just and justifies us (*iustus atque iustificans*), gives to men).”⁴² Against pagan and Pelagian accounts of virtue in which moral strength is found within ourselves, Augustine claims that true virtue leading to true justice only comes from Christ who is just and also justifies. Christ, the just one, is the true *exemplum* of justice lacking in a world dominated by examples of pride and injustice (especially those masked as virtue like Lucretia and Cato). Christ acts as the true example of justice because when he took on human nature he remained righteous, not becoming sinful (*sed iusta, non peccatrix erat*), so that by this Christ might show “that it is sin which is evil, and not the substance or nature of flesh” (*ciu.* 10.24).

In addition to being an example of justice, Christ also justifies the sinner in his death such that the weakness and penalty of sin is overcome (*ciu.* 20.6). Justifying the sinner liberates the will from bondage caused by sin, overcoming not only ignorance but also moral weakness (the weakness seen in Lucretia bound to her *libido dominandi*). In Christ’s death humanity is able to see that death—as the penalty for sin, a penalty paid by Christ—should not be avoided nor sought out sinfully. The penalty of sin is paid and the weakness of will caused by bondage to sin is broken in Christ’s death. By breaking the bondage of sin Christ is able to establish a truly just community: he enables its citizens to act justly, free from the fear of death and the bonds of sinful habit. Dodaro states this

⁴² Parentheses are in Dylon’s translation. Here Augustine is citing Roman 10:3, although the phrase “just and justifies” echoes Romans 3:26, that God alone is both the just and justifier of those who believe in Christ.

concisely: “As a truly just man, Christ offers the only perfect example of justice that can cure ignorance, while as the God-man he offers the grace by which the soul is enabled to understand and imitate his example.”⁴³ Augustine frames Christ as the true statesmen who establishes and promotes justice by means of providing an adequate example (as just) and by providing the ability for following such an example (as justifier).

Whereas in book 10 Augustine spoke of Christ’s mediation through his sacrifice, connecting worship and love, here in book 17 we see that “Christ alone mediates justice because he alone is truly just, while he also justifies human beings, thereby uniting them with himself to form the only just society.”⁴⁴ The creation of this just society is the goal of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who mediates the true sacrifice to God as the just and justifying one. In offering himself as a sacrifice Christ gives to God what is God’s due, the true act of justice. Only in acting justly toward God can one secure a just society, for if one acts unjustly toward God then all else will fall into injustice and disorder. It is for this reason that the true worship of God, secured only in the city of God, is the basis for justice (*ciu.* 19.24). This justice, it should be remembered, is reversible with love for God and others, such that giving God justice through Christ is the only means by which love is secured for others.

Justice as giving to each person their due; worship as sacrificing to God what is due to God; love as the truth of which sacrifices are the symbol: these are all wrapped together and made possible by the priestly mediation of Christ who is the perfect statesmen as both just and justifier. It is only within this configuration of concepts that

⁴³ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 78. See also 109. In additions to this, see *trin.* 4.4-6, 4.15-19 elaboration on this theme of the unjust death of the just Christ overcoming humanity’s just punishment of death.

⁴⁴ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 108.

we can understand Augustine's summary statement in 19.23, noted at the opening of this section:

Justice is found where the one supreme God rules an obedient City according to His grace, so that it sacrifices to none but Him...In that City, both the individual just man and the community and people of the just live by faith, which works by love: by that love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and his neighbour as himself.⁴⁵

In the city of God, the just person and the just community live by faith expressing itself as love for God and neighbor. This love is a fulfillment of justice in giving God God's due, a giving that humanity is unable to give except as given through Christ, the mediator between God and humanity. Christ, then, is the mediator of both love and justice in that true justice is love and true love is just. This mediation springs from God's self-immanent transcendence in the Incarnation in which the immutable partakes of the mutable, the immortal the mortal, so as to exemplify and offer love and justice to humanity (*ciu.* 9.17). This mediation of justice and love overcomes the *libido dominandi* enslaving humanity, coming from beyond in humility to reverse the immanence of self-loving pride.

4. Love and the World

Having now outlined Augustine's political theology according to the destructive *libido dominandi* in general, and Rome's perfection of masking it with glory, and by

⁴⁵ Of course we have yet to say anything of how "God rules" the obedient city, noting the part excluded from the quote above: "...where, in consequence, the soul rules the body in all men who belong to that City and obey God, and the reason faithfully rules the vices in lawful order." This rule of God over the city (just as the soul rules the body and as reason rules the emotions) follows from Augustine's hierarchy of being as a benevolent rule. I will not explicitly deal with this issue of God's rule here as its implicit answer lies within the discussion of love below and the non-competitive nature of God's will and ours explored in the previous chapter.

understanding Augustine's continuing commitment to justice as love for God and neighbor mediated through the Incarnation, we must answer an objection, or rather, *the* fundamental objection, raised against adopting this exposition of God's self-immanent transcendence.

This objection asks, does not such a strong linking of justice and love to the worship of God exactly promote the problem of otherworldly detachment for which Hegel offers an alternative? Does not anchoring justice and love in God precisely divert adherents from the needs and concerns of justice and love in this world while passively travelling beyond? If justice is not so easily separated from love, if Augustine's replacement of a love for justice as a definition of a *res public* in 19.24 is as much ironic concession as positive proposal,⁴⁶ then is not earthly peace lost as a possible platform on which to build a Christian concern for the world? Without such a foundation is not Augustinian political theory apt to drift into otherworldly escapism? And if so, then does not the critical apparatus constructed by contrasting the *libido dominandi* with true justice and love fail to change the world even if it can critique it? It is these types of objections that prompt people like Markus and O'Donovan to read Augustine as replacing justice for love so as to ensure a minimal discourse around worldly peace. And lastly, if these types of objections are true then at best Augustine fails to promote freedom here and now, and at the worst he positively inhibits freedom under the guise of a freedom to come in a

⁴⁶ Note especially that in 19.24 this definition places the supposed heights of Athens and Rome on equal footing with the tyrannical depths of Babylon.

world beyond. As Hegel would ask, is not such other-determined freedom exactly not freedom?⁴⁷

The lineaments of a response to such objections should already be well within view. But answering such an objection will farther clarify the need for adopting the theological orientation of God's self-immanent transcendence as the basis not only for political criticism, but also constructive change. To answer this objection we will look at the *pilgrim distance* and the *pilgrim love* of the city of God.

Pilgrim Distance

To answer the otherworldly objection we must return to a concept that will at first seem only to exacerbate the problem. This is the idea that the city of God is a pilgrim city, a city journeying through this world. This aspect of the city of God was announced in the preface to book 1: The city of God both dwells “by faith as a pilgrim” and “in the security of that eternal home which she now patiently awaits.” This is the eschatological tension within the city of God in which a part of humanity sojourns toward the eternal security already experienced by the unfallen angels.⁴⁸ Citizens of the city of God are those “awaiting a heavenly fatherland (*supernam patriam*) with true faith” and “know that they are pilgrims (*peregrinos*) even in their own habitations” (*ciu.* 1.15).⁴⁹ This

⁴⁷ While part one of this study hoped to show that Hegel's answer to the question of otherworldliness is deeply flawed, the question itself still stands as a reflection of our modern milieu. This second part focusing on Augustine attempts exactly to give an alternative basis from which to ask and answer this question of freedom.

⁴⁸ Book 11 of the *City of God* speaks of the fallen and unfallen angels.

⁴⁹ For a full examination of all the uses and meanings of *peregrinatio* and its cognates in *City of God*, and its use in other works see van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 131-142.

world is not home for the citizens of the city of God. They travel toward their true homeland beyond this mortal life.

Turning back to Cain and Able, the archetypes of the struggle between the two cities, we can begin to see the political edge of such a distinction. In 15.1 Augustine reminds us that the history of the two cities “extends throughout the whole of this time or age (*saeculum*)” of mortal living and dying. It is within this time that “Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, a pilgrim (*peregrinus*), did not found one.” The earthly city, “which is not a pilgrim (*non peregrinatem*) in this world, but which finds its rest in its own temporal peace and felicity (*temporali pace ac felicitate*)” (*ciu.* 15.17), makes its home in this world and puts its trusts in it rather than hoping in God (*ciu.* 15.21). More specifically, the city of God learns, as a pilgrim on earth (*peregrinator in terris*), that

it should not trust the freedom of its own will (*libertate arbitrii*), but should ‘hope to call upon the name of the Lord God.’ For the will which is present in man’s nature can fall away from good to do evil; and it does this through its own free choice (*libero arbitrio*)...It can also turn away from evil to do good; but it cannot do this without divine aid. (*ciu.* 15.21)

This passage links the distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities to the previous discussion of the divided will that fell into bondage by its own free choice and is unable to liberate itself by the same free choice. The earthly city, through its own free choice, is bound in the unfreedom of the *libido dominandi*. These comments on the will return to the argument from the previous chapter.

But Augustine’s main concern here lies not with the ability of the will to enslave itself, but the nature of this enslavement and its effects on earthly societies. Earlier we looked at book 15 concerning the depths of the *libido dominandi*. In 15.5 Augustine reminds us that not only is Cain the founder of the first earthly city, but this city was

founded on a fratricide in the slaying of Abel. This fratricide is repeated by Romulus in the slaying of Remus because the glory of Rome could not be shared. This founding event (inaugurated by Cain and repeated by Romulus) exemplifies the *libido dominandi* seeking domination over others. The founding of the earthly city and its competition of goods (the praise of others as a means toward self-love) destines the earthly city to be always “divided against itself,” while the citizens of the heavenly city “cannot strive among themselves” (*ciu.* 15.5) in seeking the good. The earthly city is always divided against itself, even in times of peace, because the glory sought is always unsharable and therefore competitive. The goodness that is loved among the citizens of the heavenly city, however, “is a possession which is enjoyed more fully in proportion to the concord that exists between partners united in charity” (*ciu.* 15.5).

That the heavenly city is based in non-competitive goodness and love should not, however, lead to a triumphant perfectionism. Augustine stipulates later in 15.5 that while on their pilgrim way towards perfection, mortal citizens of the heavenly city have not yet attained this perfection of goodness and love. This lack of attainment causes strife within each citizen and between citizens of the heavenly city (*ciu.* 15.5). For this reason Augustine claims that righteousness or justice “is in this life such that it consists only in the remission of sin rather than the perfection of virtue,” such that pilgrims on the way to their homeland are always begging for forgiveness rather than demanding perfection (*ciu.* 19.27). This “contrite heart, humble in penitence” (*ciu.* 10.5) leads us precisely back to book 10 and its discussion of sacrifice, love, and justice. The way of justice in this world always begins with a penitent heart for its lack of love, and always ends with love of God and love of neighbor. In a sense, each makes up the two-step process of walking forward

on the pilgrim journey, first repenting and then loving. But neither step is possible, the penance for self-love and the action of God- and neighbor-love, outside the mediation of Christ who founds the true city in justice and love.

This love creates the distance necessary to criticize the *libido dominandi* dominating the earthly city. It is exactly because of this pilgrim status that Augustine is able to deftly analyze the false virtues of the earthly city and unmask its *libido dominandi*. And as we have seen, while this pilgrim distance from the earthly city springs from Augustine's ontology (the natural order of being and desire), it is fundamentally practiced through his soteriology (the re-ordering of desire).⁵⁰ This soteriology focuses on the mediation of justice and love in Christ as the self-immanent transcendence of God. The otherworldly God creates the possibility of critique within this world through the mediation of Christ. This is a critique offered against the dominating practices of the earthly city.

In offering this critical distance Augustine gives us something that Hegel could not provide. As we saw in chapter 3 above, Hegel's self-transcending immanence could not provide a critical distance from which to move from a worse to better society (or for Hegel, a more free society). A lack of critical distance is caused by uniting subject and society in such a strong manner that fundamental change was no longer necessary within Hegel's system. This denial of change could not hold leading to the current

⁵⁰ Of course I am not trying to pit Augustine's ontology against his soteriology. As I showed in the last chapter, they are intimately connected as creation and re-creation. But when considering Augustine's political theology and the ordering of desire the emphasis must lay in the soteriological re-ordering of desire through the mediation of Christ. This emphasis is lacking in Eric Gregory in his persistent emphasis on the ontological ordering between love of God and neighbor without adequately investigating the soteriological moments of mediation and change. Here I am emphasizing the soteriological *how* rather than the ontological *what*.

interpretations between Pippin and Žižk. Pippin represents the Hegelianism of communal practices and social normativity. Because there is no space outside of this social normativity Pippin ends up foreclosing a subjectivity capable of true social change.

Pippin does this for the same reasons as Hegel: namely, that modernity no longer needs a fundamental transformation, only continual piece-meal evolutions within a progressive social normativity. Indeed, Pippin excludes the very possibility of an alternative society into which one might transform.

Augustine, however, has made this transformation fundamental to his thought on the will in particular and society in general. It is never the case that there is only one will or one society that is under consideration. There are always two: either the fallen will and its bondage to sin or the graced will and its regained freedom; either the earthly city and its *libido dominandi* or the heavenly city and its love of God and neighbor. A movement between two *real* alternatives is excluded by Hegel's self-transcending immanence where there is no real transition or change beyond the circle of immanence where creation is coterminous with fall. Augustine, in affirming the necessity of creation and the contingency of fall is able to hold the two in tension and, through God's self-immanent transcending, show how a transition between the two is possible. This movement between two (two wills and two societies) is that through which a critical distance is opened.

Pilgrim Love

But this critical distance is hardly the only benefit of the pilgrim status of the heavenly city. It certainly is not Augustine's emphasis. Rather, this pilgrim status

enables citizens of the heavenly city to live in charity with one another in a non-competitive and therefore non-dominating manner. We already noted this non-competitiveness in book 15, but we can also see it in turning to book 19. In 19.14 Augustine gives an example of how a pilgrim citizen lives in charity rather than domination. After discussing how irrational animals and rational souls desire peace, Augustine turns to the dual love commands to show in what way peace is achieved within human community. Each individual, in loving God and ones neighbor as oneself, will then

be at peace with all men as far as in him lies: there will be that peace among men which consists in well-ordered concord. And the order of this concord is, first that a man should harm no one, and second, that he should do good to all, so far as he can.

Here Augustine intertwines love and peace, and specifies that loving one's neighbor means not harming anyone and doing them good as far as possible.⁵¹ Passages like this lend credence to interpreters like Gregory who emphasize the centrality of ordered love for Augustine's political theology. I affirm with Gregory that "the self that is ordered toward God is released to love rather than grasp or possess the neighbor" because

'for Augustine, it is not as if God and the neighbor are in competition for the subject's affections.' Rather, Augustinian love aims to release the creative generosity and receptivity that allows for genuine community.⁵²

And I can certainly agree with how Gregory outlines this Augustinian love of neighbor as a compassion fused with prudence, an equality expressed non-identically, all with an eye

⁵¹ Augustine describes the details of this "ordered concord" on different ontological and social levels at the beginning of 19.13: the order between body and soul, cognition and action, God and humanity, and within humanity (as an ordered household and an ordered city).

⁵² Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 329. Gregory is quoting Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour*, 12-13.

to doing no harm.⁵³ The non-competitive aspect of love of God and love of neighbor makes all this possible and desirable. Only within the earthly city are God, neighbor, and oneself in competition leading to division and domination.

By following Augustine farther in 19.14, however, we can see in which way Gregory's interpretation needs completing. After explaining how peace is accomplished through the dual love commands Augustine offers an example introducing the concepts of justice and mercy, the pilgrim city, and the *libido dominandi*. Augustine begins saying, "In the household of the just man, however, who 'lives by faith' and now is still a pilgrim on his way to that Heavenly City, even those who command are the servants of those whom they seem to command." Note that Augustine is speaking of the just man who is a pilgrim. We know that a just person is one who has received the mediation of justice and love through Christ, now living as a pilgrim in this life. And as one participating in the justice and love of Christ, this just person now commands as a servant, taking on the form of Christ's humble service. Continuing in 19.14 Augustine offers a contrast: "For it is not out of any desire for mastery (*dominandi*) that they command; rather they do so from a dutiful concern for others; not out of pride in ruling, but because they love mercy." Here, in dual contrasts, Augustine alludes to the fundamental difference between the earthly and heavenly cities. Those within the earthly city command from a *libido dominandi*. But pilgrims of the heavenly city lead from an express concern for others. The earthly city takes pride in ruling while the heavenly city practices mercy. As we have seen in book 10, this practice of mercy through loving others functions as the true sacrifice and is therefore a practice of justice. This practice is

⁵³ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 292-98.

only possible through the mediation of justice and love in Christ. Only in Christ is the dominating pride of the earthly city overcome allowing for the founding of true community in justice and love. Only in the founding sacrifice of Christ, an act of love and mercy for others rather than an act of domination over others, is a truly just and loving community formed.⁵⁴

The pilgrim status of the city of God, founded by Christ, does not deny or flee from this world on its passage to the next. Rather, its pilgrim status allows for a critical distance through which to judge the earthly city's *libido dominandi*. But in addition to this critical distance a constructive change is made possible through the mediation of Christ. As a people entering the non-competitive practice of love, the pilgrim city re-orders the structures of human society, from the household to the city and beyond.

The possibilities of critique and the practices of change flow from the pilgrim status of the city of God. In fundamental agreement with Gregory, but attempting to push him farther, this analysis argues that the charge of otherworldliness causing a disregard for worldly politics should be turned on its head. Profound resources are found within a pilgrim people for a worldly political praxis able both to protest the dominant social

⁵⁴ It might be objected that since I have been arguing for the convertibility of justice and love through worship, does not my criticism of those like Gregory (and also of O'Donovan) fall short in that while emphasizing love they were also, necessarily, speaking of justice. If this is true, then am I not merely faulting them on matters of emphasis rather than of substance? But the truth is that they are the ones denying the convertibility of justice and love by driving a wedge between them in speaking explicitly of the change from justice to love in Augustine's definition of the commonwealth in 19.24 (for O'Donovan), or by failing to speak of justice and worship in relation to love (for Gregory). They have done this to secure a more neutral region through which to discuss Augustine's political theology, but have done so at the cost of the intricate coherence of his thought, specifically soteriology and ecclesiology.

structures as well as the ability to practice concrete change.⁵⁵ But in disagreement with Gregory, these resources for critique and change cannot be gathered through a sustained reflection on Augustine's ontology of *ordered* love but only through his soteriology of properly *re-ordered* love. This soteriology emphasizes an alternative society founded and formed by Christ, of which Gregory all but ignores.

In offering this pilgrim love Augustine again gives us something that Hegel could not provide. In Žižek's hands Hegel is not bound to the perpetuation of social normativity (i.e. Pippin's interpretation). Rather, Žižek's Hegel places subjectivity beyond such social normativity as a persistent 'tarrying with the negative.' For Žižek, the subject is nothing but the perpetual failure to become a subject. This perpetual failure creates a critical distance from which one can condemn dominating social practices. Žižek, however, has no positive account about the re-formation of human subjectivity toward love leading his radical political subjectivity into a deadlocked space of criticism without any orientation toward the good, love, or freedom (except the freedom of subjective negativity). This deadlock comes from making the subject absolute, even in its persistent failure. Žižek can only articulate the 'subject' beyond the status quo but cannot articulate a 'converted subject' seeking the positive good of love of neighbor as love for God.

The Žižekian form of Hegel's self-transcending immanence focuses on the more-than-merely-immanent structure of the subject, but because this is only a 'self-transcending' he can never offer a theoretical or practical subject capable of constructive social change. Žižek cannot because his fundamental contrast is between radical

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 319-20.

subjectivity and social normativity rather than the Augustinian contrast between two societies and their respective subjectivities. Because Žižek opposes subject and society he can never affirm a positive construal of subject and society ordered around love, even a pilgrim love marked by confession and mercy. Augustine, however, does not fundamentally oppose subject and society. Rather, as we have shown in *Confessions* and *City of God*, subject and society are mutually reinforcing within the earthly and heavenly cities, even while being open to a transcendence beyond both.

The most important difference between Žižek and Augustine concerns *how* one transitions between the two societies. For Žižek, within a paradigm of self-transcending immanence, it is the subject's own heroic effort by which she separates herself from the dominant social normativity even though this never really leads to an alternative social construction. This heroic effort is experienced as a dying to oneself, a dying to the process of knowing oneself through society's norms. This is Žižek's 'subjective destitution' explored at the end of chapter one. Augustine, on the other hand, shows that this self-transcendence never escapes the bonds of sin. Rather, God's self-immanent transcendence is that by which humanity transcends its own captivity to its *libido dominandi*. God's self-immanent transcendence breaks the social normativity of sin's *libido dominandi* and all in various guises, allowing for the reformation of the will toward love of God and love of neighbor. For Augustine, the radical break from dominating social structures does not come from humanity by itself, but only through the mediator between God and humanity, who is both divine and human, who founds an alternative society of freedom and justice. Only through the mediation of the Son is a transition, a

conversion, possible. The pilgrim status of the city of God centers on this very mediation.

Conclusion

Reordering Love

Certainly more could be said about the political significance and practice of such a pilgrim distance and pilgrim love. We must, however, tend to the goals of this chapter to show the centrality of not only love, but also of justice in Augustine's political thought. This was exhibited by seeing the reversibility of justice and love for Augustine, as well as their unity through sacrifice. It was further shown that the true practice of justice, love, and sacrifice is not possible for humanity because it is dominated by its *libido dominandi*. Only in Christ's sacrifice, the mediator between God and humanity, can justice and love be properly ordered and implemented within humanity society. This truly just human society, of which Christ is the founder, is really a pilgrim city sojourning through this land on its way to its own native country. This interlocking complex of ideas allows Augustine both the critical distance by which to condemn the *libido dominandi* of the earthy city even while promoting an alternative practice of love issuing in changed social practices.

Throughout it has been emphasized that Augustine's political thought must center on the soteriological issues of *how* love is properly ordered and true justice practiced. This approach has been contrasted with those focusing on the ontological *what* of an ordered love that balances love of self with love of God and love of neighbor, based in an ordered hierarchy of goods allowing for the possibility of an overlapping earthly peace.

The approach taken here has been to show that Augustine is just as, if not more, concerned with *how* love is re-ordered through the mediating work of Christ. It is through this work that Christ, as the true statesman, acts to promote justice by giving an adequate example and by creating the conditions by which others can follow this example. As both the example (truth) and the means (way) Christ both unites subject and society *and* promotes the transition from one society to its alternative. The mediation of Christ, by uniting both subject and society *and* by promoting the change between societies, offers a possibility of change closed off by Hegel and his various interpreters.

Self-Immanenting Transcendence

The mediation of Christ as God's self-immanenting transcendence offers this possibility for change by integrating transcendence and immanence rather than excluding transcendence as inimical to the human freedom. In the Incarnation, God the immutable becomes mutable; the eternal enters time. The One raised up above all takes on the humility of a servant in order to raise up a humanity debased through pride. In the Incarnation Christ mediates true justice and love to a humanity otherwise incapable of justice and love. The self-immanenting transcendence of God allows for the breaking of the mere immanence of self-love issuing forth as a *libido dominandi*.

If it has not been clear to this point, the self-immanenting transcendence of God means that God remains transcendent. This is axiomatic for Augustine. The persistence of this transcendence, however, is no threat to humanity for it is exactly in being transcendent that God in Christ can do for humanity what humanity could not do for itself. In considering the *Confessions* we noted how the Incarnation allowed for the

congruence between God's will and Augustine's will such that true freedom is to will God's will as the human will of the Son. This is possible because the Incarnation affirms the goodness of a material (embodied) will while converting it from the will subject to carnal habit. In *City of God* the persistence of transcendence interrupts the *libido dominandi* of sin governing human society, allowing for an alternative society of non-competitive love and justice. Only in this community does true freedom flourish as it opens to a transcendence beyond itself. If this transcendence did not remain transcendent to humanity (and to creation itself) then Augustine's position would collapse into the Hegelian problematic offering no resources for true change.

Christ accomplishes the founding of an alternative society because he transcends the human condition of sin (but not the human condition of embodied existence), allowing him to act as true humanity ought to act, freely giving to God what is due to God and therefore also able to freely love one's neighbor. If God were merely transcendent then humanity would be able grasp God's nature and the nature of justice. Humanity, however, would not be able to practice this justice because of sin. The goal would be known but the way would be blocked (this is the problem of Platonism for Augustine). But if God were only immanent (which would make God not God but merely a god), then humanity could never truly break free of bondage to sin because sin is exactly to will its own irrational immanence (*Confessions*), mistaking the masks of its own *libido dominandi* for virtue (*City of God*). Holding these two positions in tension requires affirming God's self-immanenting transcendence rather than merely God's transcendence or God's immanence.

The self-immanenting transcendence of God through the Incarnation creates a critical distance from dominating social practices *and* promotes constructive change within and beyond these practices. This is possible because the Incarnation simultaneously supplies a subjectivity free (or better, becoming free) of sinful habit along with coordinated social practices that promote and sustain such a subjectivity. Hegel's self-transcending immanence only posits a duality between social practices and subject positions (this is the opposition between Pippin and Žižek). As was shown in chapter three, this supposed duality is united by emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other, a situation that ultimately forecloses the possibility of true change. Hegel's self-transcending immanence always collapses the two (subject and society) into one (either normative society or radical subjectivity). Augustine's understanding of God's self-immanenting transcendence holds together three terms: two societies and the transition between them. This third term, or process of conversion, is linked to God's own transcendence. The two societies and the transition between them are sustained through God's transcendence. The transcendence of God disallows the conflation between creation and fall while God's self-immanenting provides for the conversion from sinful society to its alternative. Hegel, in conflating creation and fall, ultimately destroys the possibility of true change from fallen will and dominating society. For Hegel, self-transcendence is always still immanence and therefore disallows for true change from one society to another. It is for these reasons that those concerned with true social change should adopt a more Augustinian than Hegelian orientation regarding transcendence and immanence.

CONCLUSION

It is not God's fault if we do not feel at home in our creatureliness and in this creaturely world.¹

Summary

This study began by asking about the fundamental relationships between transcendence, immanence, and subjectivity. These relationships were filtered through the issue of producing and sustaining a radical political subjectivity capable of both criticism and change. Hegel and Augustine were examined according to the possibilities of each in supplying such a radical political subjectivity. The issue between them concerned whether transcendence is inimical or essential to freedom. Chapter 1 introduced us to two competing interpretations of Hegel in the forms of Robert Pippin and Slavoj Žižek. Each connected Hegel to a post-Kantian framework in opposition to the more metaphysical interpretations of Hegel. And each regarded modern freedom as the sole premise of Hegel's system. But their non-metaphysical reading produced divergent results. We saw Pippin representing a 'normative Hegel' focused on evolutionary social practices, and Žižek represented a 'radical Hegel' focused on revolutionary subjective acts. But it was found that each displayed problems in supplying a radical subjectivity capable of criticism and change. Pippin's 'normative Hegel' only suggested incremental changes as immanent criticism, but could not account for those would stand against the status quo in its entirety. Žižek's 'radical Hegel' is articulated exactly to explode the status quo, but only in the form of permanent critique, never allowing for the existence of new social formation. Each of

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (London: T&T Clark, 1960) 48.

these interpretations began showing the aporias of Hegel's self-transcending immanence, unable to fully integrate the subject and society in a process of social transformation.

Chapter 2 dove headlong into Hegel's philosophy by showing that Hegel's system is both properly described as the self-transcending immanence of thought, and that his philosophy failed to prove itself in a non-circular manner. We first examined the opening movements of Hegel's *Logic*, from the being-nothing to the finite-infinite dialects, showing how the movements to becoming and the true infinite, respectively, were both based in a pervious exclusion of 'nothing' as the non-thought of thought, which was then later re-included as negation. It was shown that this encounter with nothing as non-thought was the last attempt of Kantian *Verstand* in proving its independence from *Vernunft*. But this failure of thought before nothing revealed the necessary presupposition from which the *Logic* begins, the presupposition of the pure knowing of *Vernunft's* beyond all divisions between subject and object, form and content. It was the *Phenomenology's* job to prepare thought for such a presupposition, undoing the divide between subject and object to which *Verstand* ceaselessly clings. The second section of chapter 2 took three soundings from the *Phenomenology* to see in what manner it engaged the divide between subject and object. These three soundings focused on the encounter of consciousness with the 'beyond' as its extreme other, finding that each followed the logic of nothing and the infinite encountered in the *Logic*, preemptively configuring the beyond as the non-thought of thought. This circular relationship between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* means that Hegel may have given a persuasive interpretation of subjectivity and its operations without reference to transcendence, but he has not necessarily proven this argument against other equally plausible interpretations that include transcendence. This failure to truly discount

transcendence (because Hegel never really encounters a transcendence that is not already pre-configured by the self-transcending immanence of thought) means that choosing between Hegel's systems and one like Augustine's must be made only grounds other than the purely logical.

Moving from the purely logical to the practical led us to consider Hegel's political philosophy as it is outlined in his *Philosophy of Right*. In chapter 3 we saw Hegel offering an interpretation of modern freedom that attempted to unify subject and society as the cultivated system of rational habituation. The subjective will as drives and desires needed to be rationally self-determining through an objective system of cultivated habits, allowing for the seamless unity of subject and society within the institutions of modern ethical life (family, civil society, and state). This chapter ended by claiming that Hegel supposed synthesis between subject and society, based in the unity of substance and subject, fell apart between of its own internal tensions. It was argued that Hegel could either be read as too idealistically removed from political realities that he could not offer concrete directive for forming a more free society, or he was too closely identified with existing socio-political realities that he did not feel a substantial change necessary. This conclusion means that one must either agree with Hegel that modern institutions are basically good, only requiring minimal changes (Pippin), or one must revise Hegel by emphasizing subjectivity to the detriment of society (Žižek). But these options either lead to social conformity without change or a subjectivity that can never truly be part of a society. In either case, the resources for a radical political subjectivity capable of criticism and change are lacking within the Hegelian framework, putting into question the plausibility of the

Hegelian project as one through which a more free society might be established, a desire emanating from modernity itself.

The failure of the Hegelian system of self-transcending immanence prompted a turn toward Augustine. Chapter 4 introduced Augustine's political theology through the interpretations of John Milbank and Eric Gregory. Both examine Augustine through the backdrop of modern liberalism, the former as standing against and the latter as standing with it. Both focused on Augustine's ontological vision. Milbank read Augustine's ontology of peace against the ontologies of violence offered by postmodern Nietzscheans, seeking to offer an apology for theology amid secular reason. Gregory focused on Augustine's ontology of properly ordered love as a means toward offering the political virtue of love to civic liberalism. In this way each affirms Augustine's essential orientation toward God's transcendence. But it was noted that both focuses so heavily on the ontological aspects of Augustine that they minimize the transformative processes in which subjects are re-formed away from evil and toward the good.

Correcting this imbalance was the goal of chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 focused on the bondage and freedom of the will. Through a reading of Augustine's *Confessions* it was shown how Augustine understood the process by which the will became bound to sinful habit and the manner in which it was reformed again. The self-transcending immanence of human will could not free Augustine from the bondage to habitual sin. Augustine's analysis of sinful habit offered a contrast to Hegel's account of rationalized habit, showing the pernicious problems of understanding subject and society only from within their own immanence. The process of Augustine's conversion was exhibited as the transition from one society and its (sinful) subjective formation into another society and its (graced)

subjective formation, all united through the mediation of the Incarnate Word through whom comes creation and re-creation. The mediation offered through the Incarnation, as a significant augmentation of Platonic participation, began to outline Augustine's understanding of God's self-immanenting transcendence. This self-immanenting transcendence united subject and society because it also united ontological creation and soteriological re-creation.

Chapter 6 investigated the consequences of these transitions between societies on a more general level. By looking at Augustine's *City of God* we noted that, in opposition to Hegel's account that could only note change after the fact, Augustine's affirmation of the goodness of creation coupled with the perversion of sinful desire gives Augustine the critical tools by which to talk about two different societies within humanity, the earthly city and the city of God. The first is oriented around the immanence of self-love while the second is oriented toward the transcendence of God- and neighbor-love. This critical position, however, is only available to Augustine because of the mediation of justice and love through Christ who established the just and loving city of God. Christ not only ontologically unites God- and neighbor-love because he is both human and divine, but he actively exemplifies this love and justice, and creates the possibility of following this example. As the one who exemplified and enables love and justice, Christ is the founder of a loving and just society. In these ways God's self-immanenting transcendence moves human society beyond its own self-immanenting abdication of freedom in its bondage to sin.

Rather than posit a duality between subject and society as Hegel does, Augustine posits a duality of societies and focuses on the transition (conversion) between the two.

This transition between two societies, effected through God's self-immanent transcendence, means that Augustine's understanding of the subject is that it only transcends its previous social formation and enters a new one because God is already transcendent to both. The fundamental orientation for Augustine calls for "transcending subjects" as the point of view from which unity between subject and society can be accomplished and through which change can be prompted. In other words, the subject as the primary category of thought (even the subject expanded into intersubjective sociality as *Geist*) must be transcended. Hegel, on the other hand, has been shown to emphasize "transcending subjects" as the basis of his thought, i.e. that subjects are self-transcending in nature. In the specific arena of producing a radical political subjectivity, this fundamental orientation of Hegel has been shown to be lacking.

Situating Results: Terrain

If this account between Hegel and Augustine is correct, then we can give a more precise answer to the question posed in the Introduction between Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas. There we noted an essential difference between Coles and Hauerwas in regard to transcendence. While both are devoted to the establishment of justice and freedom, Coles sees a positive commitment to transcendence as inimical to radical democratic practice, and Hauerwas sees such a commitment as indispensable for such a project. The question asked by Hauerwas was, "What do radical democrats do if they do not confess sin?"² After our passage through Hegel we can begin to see an answer to this question. Indeed, Hegel provides Coles an answer because Hegel does have an account of

² Hauerwas and Cole, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 326.

confessing sin and asking for forgiveness. As we saw in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel sees the practice of the mutual confession and forgiveness as the apex and resolution of an extended process of mutual recognition. In this mutual confession and forgiveness humanity accomplishes its goal of mutual recognition as self-certainty, a self-certainty existing above natural life but without recourse to a supernatural beyond.

But what, exactly, is being confessed and forgiven for Hegel. It is the ‘sin of existence’, the ‘sin of finitude’. Confessing one’s own limited and one-sided perspective, confessing that each individual cannot truly know anything, not least itself, by itself, is to confess one’s finitude. Finite being, as we saw logically in the *Logic* and experientially in the *Phenomenology*, is always contradictory and incomplete. Only by passing into the true infinite can consciousness enter the truth of itself and others. On the socio-political level, only by entering the infinite process of mutual confession and forgiveness of the sins of existence can human society be reconciled. This is Hegel’s answer to the question of confessing one’s sin. But we saw that this confession of the sins of existence, separated into the perspectives represented by Pippin and Žižek (who do not speak of confession or forgiveness), forego any true transformation.

Augustine, on the other hand, does not confess the sin of existence, but the sins of a disordered desire seeking domination over others. This confession does not fault the finitude of existence even while does not denying the finitude of existence. Rather this confession is based on properly ordering of desire beyond the self toward God and others, and the self-immanent transcendence of God who actively re-orders this desire. While Hegel began with the unity of sin and finitude and ends with the inability to unify subject and society *nor* conceptualize change, Augustine begins with the separation of sin and

finitude (creation for Augustine) and ends with the unity of subject and society *and* the ability to conceptualize the transition between societies (sinful and graced). These represent the fundamental differences in orientation between those who affirm God's self-immanentizing transcendence and those who affirms humanity's self-transcending immanence.

It could be objected of course that to position this discussion around the determination of 'sin' already prejudices the study toward theology and transcendence. Indeed, the criteria used throughout concerning criticism and change could be thought to unfairly lead toward the Augustinian orientation of self-immanentizing transcendence. It must be remembered, however, that it is Hegel who poses freedom as the fundamental project for his philosophy, attempting to secure the self-determining freedom of thought and action. In examining Pippin and Žižek we saw that each attempted to continue this modern project through their interpretations of Hegel. For Pippin this meant focusing on the normative social practices of a society as it develops its own expression of freedom. For Žižek this meant focusing on the revolutionary subjective act of freedom against the constraints of society. The former notes the place of incremental criticism as a continual fine-tuning of social freedom, but rejects wholesale change of the system. The latter promotes wholesale change through 'subjective destitution' from the dominant and dominating social structures, but rejects a reconsolidation into a new social formation. It is Pippin and Žižek, therefore, who set the criteria of social criticism and substantive change by which we have judged both Hegel and Augustine. Essentially this study has drawn its criteria from the proponents of Hegel and showed that Hegel cannot fulfill his own promises within his system of self-transcending immanence. In regard to these criteria,

Augustine was examined and found more successful in offering a subjectivity capable of criticism and change, also uniting subject and society in a more integral manner.

Moving Forward: Trajectories

It could be argued there are more options than Hegel's in understanding a political subjectivity oriented around immanence rather than transcendence. This is certainly true. This study cannot be too quickly extended beyond the scope of those who explicitly affirm Hegel as a philosophical or theological resource. To show that other philosophies or theologies of immanence are similarly faulty it would first have to be shown that these other philosophies and theologies unknowingly repeat essential Hegelian perspectives and arguments. This study has not attempted to do this and, therefore, future study could take this analysis of Hegel and see if he represents a more general pattern or template within contemporary philosophies or theologies concerned with politics and social change. If significant similarities were found between Hegel's conception of human self-transcending immanence and others, then these criticisms could be applied.

Of course, philosophies and theologies of immanence need not begin with human subjectivity at all. Here we return to issues set aside in the Introduction. We initially discussed transcendence and immanence by conflating into two the three categories of transcendence offered by William Desmond. He spoke of the transcendence (T1) of external objects in the world, the transcendence (T2) of self-transcending subjectivity, and the transcendence (T3) beyond, but in relation to, both nature/being (T1) and subjectivity

(T2).³ We conflated T1 and T2 as immanence and regarded T3 as transcendence. We later saw that Hegel further conflated T3 within T2 as self-transcending immanence. Those desiring to explore a philosophy or theology of immanence, however, could easily ground this in a philosophy or theology of nature that does not directly address T2 or T3 for its basis. If plausibly accomplished, this philosophy or theology would escape the Hegelian aporias explored in this study.

This question of nature returns us to the two issues bracketed in the Introduction. While Hegel effectively reduces matter to the processes of self-transcending immanence, Augustine relies heavily on his ontology for understanding the process of subjective conversion. This study, for the most part, avoided exploring Augustine's ontology except as it related to subjectivity. Future study would need to press into this region, possibly as a way of assessing proposals offering a philosophy or theology of immanence based in nature. Augustine also utilizes a developed sense of time, history, and memory, all of which were also bracketed from this study except as they helped elucidate issues pertaining to subjectivity. Future study could also explore these themes with an eye toward outlining their significance for God's self-immanent transcendence, either in relation to Hegel's own philosophy of history (unexplored here) or other philosophies or theologies of immanence. These two studies (regarding matter and time) could just as easily follow the same pattern here, pressing into the ambiguities of "transcending matter" and "transcending events." To these investigations I hope to turn soon.

³ William Desmond, *Hegel's God: Counterfeit Double?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 2-7.

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