

# Hegel Political Theologian?

Stefania Achella

**Abstract:** Moving from the judgement of Carl Schmitt that Hegelian philosophy was a political Christology, this paper intends to investigate whether Hegel's political philosophy can be understood as a political theology. This analysis will be divided into two parts: the first part will analyse the theologico-political aspect in Schmitt's sense that characterizes the Hegelian philosophy. The second part, focusing in particular on Hegel's early writings, and also using a reading of Judith Butler, will investigate whether it is possible to use these reflections against the established image of the Hegelian system as an exclusionary-inclusion system. This double movement will be accomplished by first getting close to Hegel, describing the process of secularization of the theological categories that he carries out in his system, and then seeking, in the second part, a chance to move away from his monolithic theologico-political system. The question will be: must all that criticizes the theologico-political be anti-Hegelian?

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In the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, entitled *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault opened his tribute to Jean Hyppolite, recognizing in the old master the ability to have been able to keep the right distance from, but also the necessary proximity to, Hegel:

I know well that his work is placed, in the eyes of many, under the reign of Hegel, and that our whole epoch, either through logic or with epistemology, either with Marx or with Nietzsche, tries to escape Hegel [...]. But to make a real escape from Hegel presupposes an exact appreciation of what it costs to detach ourselves from him. It presupposes a knowledge of how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously. It presupposes a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel; and an ability to gauge how much our resources against him are perhaps still a ruse which he is using against us, and at the end of which he is waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Following Foucault's lesson, returning to Hegel is therefore not a mere exercise in style, but a necessary movement of thought, if the

<sup>1</sup> Foucault 1970/1981, 74.

goal is to escape the wiles of his system. And if Foucault recognized in Hyppolite the merit of having

tirelessly explored, for us and ahead of us, this path by which one gets away from Hegel, establishes a distance, and by which one ends up being drawn back to him, but otherwise, and then constrained to leave him once again<sup>2</sup>

what I shall try to do, with respect to the theme of this essay, will be to follow a reverse path: getting close to Hegel, describing the process of secularization of the theological categories that he carries out through his system, and then seeking, in the second part, a chance to move away from his monolithic theologico-political system. To Foucault's question whether that which is unphilosophical is necessarily anti-Hegelian, I shall therefore substitute the question: must all that which criticizes the theologico-political be anti-Hegelian?<sup>3</sup>

### 1. First movement. Hegel political theologian

In *Political Theology II*, at the end of the 'Guideline for the Reader', Schmitt writes:

The thematic development of my political theology from 1922 takes a general direction which departs from the *ius reformandi* [right of reformation] of the sixteenth century, culminates in Hegel and is evident everywhere today, from political theology to political Christology [*von der Politischen Theologie zur Politischen Christologie*].<sup>4</sup>

Following the reconstructive scheme so effectively summarized by Schmitt, Hegelian philosophy, as the highest peak of a movement of autonomization of the world by the sacred, or rather the demystification and immanentizing of divinity,<sup>5</sup> would mark the transition from a politico-

2 Foucault 1970/1981, 74.

3 In recent decades, particularly in Italy, the debate within political theology has reached very high levels of discussion. Examples are Carlo Galli's reflections on Schmitt, the works of Roberto Esposito, Massimo Cacciari, Giorgio Agamben, Elettra Stimilli, to mention only a few of the protagonists of this discussion. For a reconstruction of the debate, see, among the numerous publications, the monographic issues of *Filosofia politica*, 3, 2013; "Il pensiero", 2, 2011, but also *La teologia politica in discussione* 2012; Scattola 2007.

4 Schmitt 2008, p. 11; Schmitt 2010, p. 32–33.

5 For a shrewd and precise reconstruction of the relationship between Hegel e Schmitt, see the interesting work of Pirozzo 2013, p. 57 ff.

theological system to a Christological one. Hegel would arise, that is, as an expression of that dialectical rationalism which, following the spirit of the Reform, would made the sovereignty of power descend into the community, attributing centrality to the figure of Christ as man and emptying the transcendence of his sacredness.<sup>6</sup> As stated in the famous § 552 of the *Encyclopaedia*:

The precept of religion, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's', is not enough: the question is to settle what is Caesar's [*was des Kaisers ist*], what belongs to the secular authority [...]. The divine spirit must interpenetrate the entire secular life [*das Weltliche immanent durchdringen*]: whereby wisdom is concrete within it, and it carries the terms of its own justification. But that concrete indwelling is only the aforesaid ethical organisations. It is the morality of marriage as against the sanctity of a celibate order; – the morality of economic and industrial action against the sanctity of poverty and indolence; the morality of an obedience dedicated to the law of the state [...].<sup>7</sup>

As we have said, an obvious movement of Hegelian thought is rendered in Schmitt's judgement – a movement that merits further articulation, however, and that is what I shall do in this first part.

Right from his early writings, Hegel addressed explicitly the link between religion and politics. It was a very different relationship from that which he established between theology and politics.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the relationship between religion and politics could contribute to the

6 Catholicism misses the mark by locating God outside man and state: "[...] in [Catholicism] this spirit of all truth is in actuality set in rigid opposition to the self-conscious spirit. First of all, in the host God is presented to religious worship as an *external thing*. [...] From that first and supreme relationship of externality flow all the other external, hence unfree, unspiritual, and superstitious relationships; especially a *laity*, which receives *knowledge* of divine truth, as well as the direction of *will* and *conscience*, from outside and from another class [...]", Hegel 1830/1971, § 552, pp. 284–285.

7 Hegel 1830/1971, pp. 286–287.

8 Paradoxically, the interpretative error that induced the first editor of Hegel's early writings, Hermann Nohl, to define them as theological – a definition rectified in subsequent drafts – adequately describes the nature of these reflections if they are placed within a theologico-political framework. Religion, for Hegel, inspired the political structuring models, and at the same time, through its representative dimension, permeated the sense of community. The relationships at the centre of his analysis are those between the Jewish, Greek and Roman models. In these religions the more or less democratic structure of the religion determines a similar structuring of the political community. The fear and trembling of the Jewish state, the typical distance of the Roman religion, the participation at the basis of Greek religiosity/mythology: as is well known, these are models that would find further clarification in the analysis of certain religions that Hegel introduced into his courses in Berlin on the philosophy of religion. Yet, as mentioned, in these early fragments Hegel also emphasized the functionalization that politics makes of religion.

construction of a good political community, the role that theology tended to assume with respect to public life was instead stigmatized. Owing to theology's supposed lack of any freedom – a substantial element of politics –, the interference of theology in the community could not but introduce elements of positivization and rigidity. Regarding this aspect, the exchange of letters between Hegel and Schelling at the beginning of 1795 is interesting. The two philosophers had recently come out of the Tübinger Stift. Having refused to follow an ecclesiastical career, Hegel was reluctantly forced to accept the role of tutor in a Bernese family. The dialogue with Schelling therefore represented a way, albeit indirect, for the young tutor to keep himself at the centre of the philosophical scene. The subject of the correspondence was the union of theology and Kantianism that had emerged at the Stift. Hegel wrote to Schelling:

What you tell me about the theological-Kantian – if it should please the gods [*si diis placet*] – course taken by philosophy in Tübingen is not surprising. Orthodoxy is not to be shaken as long as the profession of it is bound up with worldly advantage and interwoven with the totality of a state. [...] I believe it would be interesting, however, to disturb as much as possible the theologians who in their antlike zeal procure critical building materials for the strengthening of their Gothic temple, to make everything more difficult for them, to block their every escape until they no longer find any way out and have no choice but to fully display their nakedness in the light of day. [...] Reason and Freedom remain our password, and the Invisible Church our rallying point.<sup>9</sup>

Here there is an obvious criticism of the visible church and of the attempt of theology to establish a temporal power using the new watchwords of Kantian philosophy. The two young friends, who had grown up in the wake of the French Revolution, claimed, instead, the affirmation of the Enlightenment diptych of reason and freedom. Politics should, that is, emancipate itself from religious orthodoxy and think of realizing freedom.

This was the tone that dominated in Hegel's numerous early fragments, composed before his move to Jena in 1801. Beginning with the elaboration of the religious system, religion would in fact assume

9 Hegel to Schelling, end of January 1795, in Hegel 1984, pp. 31–32.

another role, so much more at peace, and perhaps for that reason also more traditional. In these fragments, instead, Hegel's thought, which had not yet assumed a definitive form, was seeking a systematic structure, wandering between different ways and possibilities, as attested, moreover, by the writing of the texts, which did not always shine out for beauty and stylistic elegance. For these texts we may observe that, if it is true, as Schmitt says, that religion undergoes a radical demystification process, and that the God of distances is replaced by Jesus as mediator in the community relationship, it must be added, however, with regard to Schmitt's analysis, that it is not at all clear that we are always faced with a politicization of the theological or, vice versa, a theologization of the political. The scheme present in Hegel's early writings, presumably because of the proximity to the Greek tradition and the sharing of a certain Kantian approach, seem, indeed, to make them lean towards a political vision of theological.<sup>10</sup>

To give a univocal judgement on the role of religion in these fragments is therefore impossible, not only, as mentioned, owing to the influence of Kant and the Greeks, but also because of the role that theological training, Lutheranism and interest in English political philosophy play in the development of these Hegelian pages, full of often contradictory inspirations but linked by a constant element: the rejection of a dogmatic and transcendent religion. Aside from this common element, which would always mark the Hegelian reflection – the criticism of all forms of transcendence, the search for categories and concepts that express the immanent dimension of thought –, the influences to which the young Hegel was subjected make these fragments so complex that it would be overly simplistic to trace them to a precise order – from the celebration of the vitality of Greek religion, marked by presence and life, to the criticism of the representation of death in Christianity, from the criticism of positivity, to the equivalence between Jesus and Socrates as companions of destiny, marked by a practical knowledge, to the deliberate omission, in the narrative of Jesus' life, of reference to any miracles. Private religion, public religion, religion of the people: these writings are traversed by the lay intuitions of Reimarus, by the anti-supernaturalistic interpretations of Flatt, listened to at the *Stift*, by the criticism of some aspects of pietism, yet at the same time opposition to anti-pietism, to the point of adhering to a normative horizon, Kantian in nature, in which anti-historically the commandments become a

10 As is known, in sharp contrast to Schmitt's position, Jan Assmann maintains that all the pregnant concepts of theology are theologized political concepts; cf. Assmann 2006, p. 32 ff.

religious revival of the Categorical Imperative.<sup>11</sup> So, whereas Kant wrote, in *Opus Postumum*, “God is not a being outside me, but merely a thought in me. God is the morally practical self-legislative reason”,<sup>12</sup> in one of the Bernese fragments Hegel wrote: “Over against the positivity of the Jews, Jesus set man; over against the laws and their obligatoriness he set the virtues”.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between religious and political levels was therefore deeply interwoven, yet constant was Hegel’s attempt to identify an autonomous way of founding his thought. And this effort was connected, as is evident in some fragments, to the main question that ran through the young Hegel’s reflection: how can the unity of the community be recovered? For Hegel it was not a case of answering the metaphysical question about the existence of God; he did not set out from a metaphysical instance, but rather from the need to restore to man an intact community.

The principle of rationality at work in the Christian religion, which Hegel would later translate into his philosophical system, certainly originated from these reflections on religion, but it was also the consequence of an originally political interest. To be clear: if it is true that from these early years the Christian religion was presented as the position capable of expressing a principle of universalization which, secularized, would soon give birth to the ploy of a secular reason, it is equally true that Hegel showed us how the search for a unifying political principle finds in religion one of its forms of embodiment. In Hegel these two paths intersected. If religion represented one model of thought, Hegel nevertheless did not stop trying to think of an autonomous and creative formulation of reason with which to respond to the issues left open by modernity,<sup>14</sup> in the direction of a self-legitimization of reason which claimed a radical independence from religious theories.

Hegel’s originality lay precisely in the interweaving of these two instances. If, on the one hand, his reflection on religion appeared closely linked to the political, and offered to politics, as to philosophy,

11 For a detailed reconstruction of these influences and these different orientations present in Hegel’s writings, see my Achella 2008.

12 Kant 1993, AA XXI 145.

13 Hegel 1989, p. 249; Hegel 1948, p. 224.

14 “Legitimization is not to be sought, therefore, in the past, in the continuity of an origin, but coincides perfectly with the fact of formulating, by autonomous and creative means, new sensible responses to unresolved questions of the past in the aftermath of a rupture of the historical process”, Perone 2011, pp. 444–445.

some fundamental categories, on the other hand, in the definition of the genealogy of religion, Hegel emphasized on several occasions its initial derivation from political instances, its originally myth-making function of maintaining order in and between communities.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, it is no mere coincidence that in the early writings he attributed the responsibility for the tearing apart of the modern political community to the Christian religion, which had rejected its political function. Religion, in the form consecrated by Augustine, with the distinction between human cities and cities of God, would, from the point of view of Hegel in those early years, have led to a corruption of public sentiments<sup>16</sup> – hence the need for a *new religion* whose purpose would be to bring the level of transcendence, and of the city of God, back to earth. This new religion, which was presented with the characteristics of an immanent religion – what Hegel called *Volksreligion*, but which in reality expressed a political, if not aesthetic, religion – had to return to the centre of public life a respect for civil virtues and a feeling of belonging to the earthly community.

But what religion was it? What was Hegel thinking of when he spoke of a new religion? This new phase began with a short fragment, written between 1796 and 1797, to which Rosenzweig, who published it for the first time in 1917, gave the title *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*.<sup>17</sup> It provided a different view of religion, treating it from the point of view of art, bringing it closer to mythology. The editors of the fragment identified a new religion which, when freed from the prejudices imposed by the church and by the priests, was able to save the language and forms of a national story: a story which, like the Bible, showed itself able to speak to anyone. As we read in this *Systematic Program*,

15 In a very early fragment of 1787, *On the religion of the Greeks and Romans*, we read: “By means of the oracles priests acquired influence on all important matters. In Greece they were also one of the ties that bound together and tied to a common interest cities so jealous and so discordant”, Hegel 1989, p. 44.

16 This Christianity would have induced men to retreat into the private sphere, educating them as “citizens of heaven whose gaze is ever directed thither so that human feelings become alien to them”, in which the worship and public festivities have assumed the heavy tones of mourning and extraneousness, such that “at the festival, which ought to be the feast of universal brotherhood, many a man is afraid he will catch from the common cup the venereal infection of the one who drank before him”, Hegel 1989, pp. 110–111.

17 *Mythologie der Vernunft* 1984. In this volume is published a critical edition of the text, but some of the main contributions on this issue have also been republished, including essays by Rosenzweig, Pöggeler and Henrich. This fragment is in many ways obscure. The dating and attribution are not certain. It may have been written by Hegel, Hölderlin or Schelling. The manuscript appears to have been drafted by Hegel, but it is not known whether this was under dictation.

We must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in service of the ideas; it must become a mythology of *reason*.

Until we make ideas aesthetic, i.e., mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. [...] A higher spirit sent from heaven must establish this new religion among us. It will be the last and greatest work of humanity.<sup>18</sup>

Although the program of secularization is all exposed, here seems to prevail the need, not to translate religion into secular form, but to create a new religion – laical – at the service of politics:<sup>19</sup> a religion that has the function of a foundational narrative.

In the early fragments, religion therefore had a statute that was not at all metaphysical, but marked, rather, by its primarily political objectives, presenting itself, as we have seen, as the location of a narrative capable of allowing the construction of a common memory of the sense of belonging to a people. This need was the reflection in Hegel of the necessity of overcoming the political fragmentation of Germany at the end of the 1700s, the legacy of the *Zerrissenheit*, of the laceration determined by the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

Beginning at the end of Hegel's stay in Frankfurt, this subordination of the theological to the political – this movement of politicization of the theological – radically changed: here political theology showed itself in the guise of theologization of the political. With respect to the still ambivalent developments of the early years, a new turning point was now determined, particularly with regard to Hegel's reconsideration of Christianity. In such a repositioning, that which discriminated was the theoretical weight that Reformed Christianity assumed for Hegel: Christianity had completely changed the interpretative scheme of history, introducing subjectivity, the centrality of the individual. Simultaneously in his writings the values of primitive Christianity were grafted onto a Lutheran structure, placing a spiritualization of the world alongside the gradual de-naturalization of the sacred: the theological

18 *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism (Das älteste Systemprogramm)*, 1797, translated by Diana I. Behler. See more at: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/philosophy-of-german-idealism-fichte-jacobi-and-schelling-9780826403070/#sthash.1jsTqu78.dpuf>.

19 This new religion, no longer connoted by Kantian characteristics but closer to an aesthetic ideal, reflects Hegel's distance from Kantian ethico-theology, unable to transform itself into an authentic popular religion. It does, however, maintain the Kantian-Fichtean vocation of being the motive of ethics – hence the appeal to a mythology of reason which, even without renouncing the rational component, is able to speak to human sensibility.

loses its externality and transcendent authority, incarnated in the Son, “loses its mysterious nature, to reveal itself as self-aware spirit and immanent bond between men – the spirit intended as collective knowing and agent reason”.<sup>20</sup> The scheme is that of Christian political theology – as Kervégan rightly pointed out<sup>21</sup> – and of the recognition of the role of Christianity as the full realization of the religious.

The outcome we know. It is the famous verdict of *Faith and Knowledge*: God is dead: *Gott ist tot*. Here the God of distance is dead. To the Kantian God, still understood as “a God who becomes only marginally the object of reflection, a postulate of practical reason not further definable”,<sup>22</sup> Hegel opposes a God of history, the present, facing the world: a living and dying God. The *kenotic* act of self-emptying of the Divine Logos in the historical world therefore marks the birth of a political community that resorts to religion to consolidate its institutions. It is not built according to a vertical pattern and the criterion of obedience. The cancellation of every principle, every unshakable foundation, refers in fact to a community that works and takes possession of reality, giving it shape and rational structure through language, memory and knowledge.<sup>23</sup> For Hegel, with the death of God dies theology itself, which passes, identical in its demythologized content and stripped of its transcendent otherness, into philosophy. And this end of transcendence implies also the rejection of any eschatological dimension, the *eschata* are brought back to the level of the historical community, as shown by the dynamics of Hegel's dialectic, whose driving force is never the end, but rather the appropriation of his own historical time.<sup>24</sup>

20 Pirozzo 2013, p. 88.

21 Cf. Kervégan 2011, pp. 63–78. In the reconstruction of the transition from the early writings to those of maturity, Kervégan shows the controversial relationship that the systematic Hegel establishes between the State and religion. Although Hegel, unlike Rousseau, does not consider a pure civil faith possible in the context of the modern world, his reflection on the relationship between Churches and State shows how central for him the political dimension of religion is.

22 Küng 1972, p. 115.

23 Cf. Pirozzo 2013, p. 94 ff.

24 For Hegel, theology therefore cannot, as Metz thinks, count as an *eschatological reserve* that would have a critical and dialectical relationship rather than a negative one towards the historical present. In this case, Metz is certainly not thinking of promises in a vacuum of religious expectations. They are not merely a regulatory idea, but a critical and liberating imperative for the present: a goad and task to make these promises operational and thus to “realize them” in the historical present conditions; their truth, indeed, must be “made”. Cf. J.B. Metz, *Sulla teologia del mondo*, Queriniana, Brescia 1969, pp. 113–114.

If Christianity is thus, in Hegel's early writings, accused of having destroyed the proper ethical unity of ancient Greece, in the Jena years, the principle of the North, the Lutheran religion, is seen as the religion which has historically begun the desecralization of the cosmos and of creation, setting man free from the fear of a transcendent *terrible and vengeful* power. With the *Menschwerdung Gottes*, the Incarnation, Christianity has rendered finiteness, and with it the human community, the seat of the infinite and the divine, thus entrusting the fate of the entire cosmos to the hands of humanity. In the Lutheran declination of Christianity, intended, therefore, as the death of absolute transcendence and of separation between God and the world, Hegel sees the beginning of the process of liberation of humanity from every theological claim and every transcendent authority.

Christianity can establish itself as a religion of freedom because it is the only religion in which God, guarantor of the sense of the natural and human world, dies, allowing mankind to discover himself divine in his radical freedom, without any guarantee or transcendent authority to which submit himself.<sup>25</sup>

Schmitt defines political Christology as Promethean self-deification of modern humanity, which is placed at the centre of the project of emancipation of humanity itself. This political Christology is constructed, as we have seen, on the radical rejection of eschatology, on the peculiar anthropologization of Christology, on biblical hermeneutics based on the demystification process.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Second movement. Protrusions

Thus far we have seen the Hegel of political theology in all his complexity. In this second part I shall try to understand whether there are protrusions in this monolithic system of the Hegelian dialectic. I shall try, then, to understand whether we can make this Christological system play in reverse – whether, that is, it is conceivable to bend Hegelian Christology in an anti-theologico-political direction. It is not necessary here to take a position with regard to the need to get away

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25 Pirozzo 2013, p. 94.

26 The double process present in Hegel is, according to the interpretation given by Vitiello of political theology, a duality inscribed right within the statute of political theology that consists “in the difference between the Platonic version, which moves, so to speak from below, from intersubjective utility (*synphéron*) to reach its condition of possibility (of the *idéa tou ágathou*), and that of Paul, which follows the opposite path, proceeding directly from the Truth of God”, Vitiello 2011, p. 84.

from political theology. Here we shall try to understand whether one of the characteristics identified to describe political theology – to be, that is, an exclusionary inclusion mechanism (and here Hegel, with his dialectic, would certainly represent one of the most radical models) – could find a possible internal criticism in Hegel's writing itself. To express it in a slogan: with Hegel, against Hegel, in any event, beyond Hegel.

To this end, therefore, I shall return precisely to those early fragments of which I have shown the ambiguity, the complexity, and in some places also the distance from the finished and closed form of the mature system.

The Hegelian pitfall – as recalled by Foucault, always on guard on our behalf – is the game of wits that Hegel ascribes to his reason and which well describes the process of his system. It can be said, in fact, as Roberto Esposito also maintained in *Due*, that the Hegelian dialectic narrative penetrating “in all its contradictions, the theologico-political mechanism”, at some point becomes an integral part of it, “concealing the very dynamic that it uncovers”<sup>27</sup> – namely, that the game of disenchantment staged by Hegel has a double bottom, in which is hidden, in turn, a further masking, more difficult to uncover because it is inside the dialectical movement.

The Hegelian trap consists, therefore, in its being based on contradiction, which is also continuous inversion, making it almost impossible to get out of his scheme once having entered it.<sup>28</sup>

The possibility, then, of using Hegel *contra* Hegel, exactly according to the scheme announced earlier, means appealing to the Hegel who is not yet completely within the dialectical mechanism and to the “pacified” acknowledgement of the fundamental function of religion with respect to the political categories.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Esposito 2013, p. 31.

28 If we want to attempt a constructive approach towards a current analysis of the problem, we can consult two sources: on the one hand, the *Logic*, and on the other, once again the early writings. A careful reading of the *Logic*, and in particular the logic of essence, wherein Hegel deals with the problem of otherness, can help us to demonstrate how otherness is an integrating and constitutive part, indeed the very premise, of identity itself, reproducing within the unity that conflict which in part seems to recall the theme of God against God discussed by Schmitt in his *Politische Theologie II*.

29 If we then dwell only briefly on the sense of the Eucharist, the re-reading of the theme of the cult returned by Hegel in these years is interesting. “I no longer call you disciples or students: they follow the will of their master often without knowing why they should do so; you have grown up in the autonomy of man to the liberty of our own will [...] When you are persecuted and maltreated, remember my example, remember that no better fate has touched me and thousands of others”, Hegel 2014, Text 31. In the re-narration of the Last Supper in *The Life of Jesus*, when the transcendent

We return, then, to that series of fragments written in the years of his stay in Frankfurt, which are dedicated to the themes of love, destiny and life. In particular, we shall focus on the theme of love, from where it is possible to seize upon a crack in the relational model to be consecrated by the subsequent dialectic. Through love, Hegel seems to stage a “deactivating decision”, to resume a Agambenian suggestion, although he does not take it to its conclusion, abandoning this route for that of the system. Let us try to understand what it is.

Love is the crucial point, next to that of the law, on which is played the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between Judaism and Christianity: Paul *in* Paul, we might say. This theme clearly shows Hegel’s transition from theology to Christology. The heteronomous power of the law loses its potential as external law insofar as it passes for love and is endorsed. This mechanism which is present in the idea of love as the *pleroma* of the law, in the idea of *agape* as the overcoming of fragmented communities, later passes into the dialectical logic. But in a short succession of fragments Hegel introduces two different ideas of love. The first, within Christian theology, is the love of the Gospels; the second is an idea of love that finds its reference in *Romeo and Juliet* or the story of Antigone: a love, in short, that deals with sensuality, ownership, death. This second idea of love has, I believe one could say, a potential of rupture that allows a different orientation within the dialectical thought that Hegel is structuring in these years. What is interesting here is that the experiment pursued in these years, to use love as a scheme for communal relationships, is considered by Hegel to be a failure. This love therefore does not have the force – yet, in a way, nor does it have the limits – of the logic that will guide the dialectical thinking. This allows us to look at it as a critical potential with respect to the dialectic composition, like an antibody within the system; and perhaps for that very reason Hegel considered it as a route to abandon. Before returning

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dimension of the spirit becomes an immanent element, the shared experience of a historical community, there prevails, becoming even stronger in subsequent fragments, the conception that the community is based on *imitation Christi* – namely, “the ethics of unconditional love and of forgiveness and abandonment of the particularist and ethnicist logic of the election and of the violence of identity and self-defence between human communities” (Pirozzo 2013, pp. 62–63). Here the criticism of Kant becomes strong: also the founder of the criticism would ultimately reproduce the same transcendence that inspired the ancient Jewish religion. Whether it be the higher law of the God of Abraham or that which we internalize, it reflects for Hegel, in any case, a split between a being and a having to be, restarting that mechanism of separation and hence of transcendence, with respect to which man is required only to be obedient. If God is conceived “as a power that is beyond the consciousness”, then that also involves a conditional provision of the thinking subject with regard to the absolute object. The result is “a relationship of the individual towards this object as a bond based on authority, heteronomy”. Cf. Cortella 2011, pp. 517–532.

to this “failure”, I shall set out the discussion of “Christian” love and try to construct a way out from the dialectic system that would instead follow it.

Let us begin, then, with those fragments that, in the last critical editing of the early writings, are numbered 52, 53 and 54. To understand the semantic horizon in which Hegel moves, we must remember that whereas the starting point is the interpretation of the Gospels, the point around which the Hegelian reflection revolves is that of life, with respect to which the law represents the moment of fracture, and love the moment of re-composition.

Law and love, then: here returns the recently resumed question in the re-reading of Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*<sup>30</sup> – namely: is Pauline love inside the law or it is a love that goes beyond the law? Is it the opposite of the law? Or, following the reading of Agamben, is it neither cancellation nor denial of the law, but its fulfilment, in the sense precisely of the Hegelian overcoming? And, going still further, can one think of love as a suspension of the law, as a moment subordinate to the achievement of a higher unity (*à la* Schmitt as a state of exception, and thus as its own founding act)?<sup>31</sup>

The law and punishment offend life, writes Hegel. Compared to the integrity wounded by the extraneousness of the law, by its abstractness which is also a lack of life, love represents, for Hegel, the force that reacts to the offence, not through another law, a punishment, but as a power that allows one to “live and return to live”.<sup>32</sup> The idea of violence as power is rejected on the basis of life. In violating the other I violate myself, because “life as life is no different from life” and the violated life “goes against me as destiny”.<sup>33</sup> Life reacts to the “terrible majesty”<sup>34</sup> of the law which dominates the particular and holds man in his obedience, and which, for that very reason, cannot undo the guilt, because, as

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30 Cf. Agamben 2000.

31 On a different position, Žižek cites the Lacanian interpretation: “Lacan’s extensive discussion of love in *Encore* is thus to be read in the Pauline sense, as opposed to the dialectic of the Law and its transgression: this second dialectic is clearly ‘masculine’/phallic, it involves the tension between the All (the universal Law) and its constitutive exception, while love is ‘feminine,’ it involves the paradoxes of the non-All”, Žižek 2003, p. 116.

32 Hegel 2014, Fragment 52, p. 511. Here the reference is to the passage on the prodigal son in Luke 15, 32.

33 Hegel 2014, p. 505.

34 Hegel 2014, p. 505.

extraneous law, it has no power to act before the action. And here it is no accident that Hegel introduces the concept of *destiny* in opposition to that of *the law*. If criminal law is presented as being opposed to life, destiny remains internal to it. Destiny, therefore, is not an eschatological slip, but a reaction within the offended life. It is generated when life is wounded, lacerated. If the guilt linked to the transgression of the law appears as a fragment, that which comes from life is a whole, inasmuch as the element that opposes it is also life.<sup>35</sup> The immanent law replaces the transcendent law. The community must seek to reconstruct the laceration without recourse to external laws or punishments.

To the activity of reflection, which every time it arises actually opposes, is therefore substituted the life that has capacity to contain in itself, simultaneously, the union and non-union, the conflict between self and other, between self and self. In this way, Hegel “expunges from the theological horizon of the apostles (and, ultimately, in his reading of the Gospels, also from the message of Christ himself) any reference to eschatology and divine transcendence, focusing attention, indeed, on the death of the separation between man and the divine, between individual and community, between life and law.

But we now take a step back to analyse the other meaning of love that appears in these Hegelian writings. It occurs in fragment 49, which Nohl in fact gave the title *Love* when publishing it. The horizon is that of the Old Testament, and Hegel analyses the *Zerrissenheit*, the condition of laceration in which Abraham lived, fought between himself and his people. Here Hegel explains it clearly: to cling to one's own particularity, to one's own things, determines slavery:

the wider this whole [i.e., either the Jewish people or Christendom] extends, the more an equality of rights is transposed into an equality of dependence (as happens when the believer in cosmopolitanism comprises in his whole the entire human race), the less is dominion over objects granted to any one individual, and the less of the ruling Being's favor does he enjoy. Hence each individual loses more and more of his worth, his pretensions, and his independence.<sup>36</sup>

.....  
<sup>35</sup> The position in which Hegel's reflection is placed, as we said, is life, and life is recomposed through love and through fate, while the law and punishment represent the principle of tearing. That is why fate is more ruthless than the law. Because it passes through and permeates life, it *is* life. There is no possibility of escaping fate. This force makes it more daunting than the law. If the fear of the law's punishment is seen as fear of something alien, in the case of fate the fear is directed inwards.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 303.

The more the individual frees himself from things, the more he loses that value which the “dominant” device exercised over him giving him a place. Love is instead what frees one from this submission. It provides a relationship “between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view”.<sup>37</sup> Here the acknowledged function of love has a different speculative force from that found in later fragments. In defining the qualities of love, Hegel first resorts to speculative categories: singularity, multiplicity, the finite, the infinite. And the capacity to love is to overcome these distinctions posed by reflective reason. Hegel writes: “love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without any further defect”.<sup>38</sup> In love, as Judith Butler evocatively points out, “one feels that which is living in the other”, or, as Hegel writes, love is when “the living feels the living”.<sup>39</sup> In this passage, Hegel seems to foreshadow a form of relationship which, in recognition of the difference between individuals, represented by their bodies, by the matter which as such does not allow being crossed over, appeals, not to the material or intellectual qualities in the constitution of the bond, but to being alive. Here Hegel is thinking about the realization of love in the form of spiritual fusion, otherwise the problem would not arise; what he is trying to find here is a form of relationship with one's own body and the body of the other, which, without denying it, it is not a relationship of ownership.<sup>40</sup>

In love the difference as opposition is cancelled. There is no immunization or exclusion. “This wealth of life love acquires in the exchange of every thought, every variety of inner experience, for it

.....  
<sup>37</sup> Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 304.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Agamben writes: “Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover's particular fetishism. Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility. The movement Plato describes as erotic anamnesis is the movement that transports the object not toward another thing or another place, but toward its own taking-place – toward the Idea” (p. 9).

<sup>39</sup> Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 304.

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seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life."<sup>41</sup> In love the difference is removed through the loss of consciousness that is the principle of the distinction. Love has, therefore, a deactivating power, producing a "displacement" of the subjective point of view, towards a prospect that could be called impersonal. The subject is in fact life. Love, the passion of love, is the only way we have to go out of ourselves, from our ego, to really meet the other. This does not happen in ethics, nor religion, Hegel seems to want to tell us in these pages. Love is therefore the life force that recovers its unity, producing "a sort of dispossession of the Self".<sup>42</sup> If it is true that the full realization, the conciliation, of the couple is the son, it is also true that in the relationship between the couple there is not conciliation but an on-going reversal of forces, the outcome of which is uncertain. There exists, that is, a *logic of love* that goes against the *logic of reason*, because it never reaches a definitive form, but is unlimited openness. This outline of the relationship opens up a distance from the dialectical mechanism which, if read in its reconciled guise, does not seem to give right to the singularity, to the difference as such.<sup>43</sup> In this scheme Hegel seems to prefigure a relationship in which love precedes/exceeds subjectivities, expropriating them of their obstinacy, of their original closure, but also removing their submission to the indistinct community.

Moreover, in *Phenomenology* love finds its exemplary representation in the figure of Antigone, who expresses the alternative to the rule of law. Or rather, Antigone responds to a request that the unconscious mind makes to the law, thus marking the limits of the generality or generalization of the law. Antigone's law is an anti-normative, anti-nomothetic one. It expresses the force of life and recognizes a deep bond of union, in which exactly that which is outside the law, which is opposed to the established laws, is welcomed, loved, respected in its otherness, without the desire to normalize it.

Surprising in these lines is the vehemence with which Hegel inveighs against property and religion. Religion "makes the individual dead to himself or plunges him into the practices of self-hatred that could only be escaped through his own nullification as a living being,

41 Hegel 2014, Text 49; 1948, p. 307.

42 Butler 2012, p. 9.

43 In a different direction go the interpretations that have instead recently tried to retrieve the vital dimension of the dialectic. For a reconstruction of the discussion, see also: Sell 2013.

a condition that proves to be unbearable".<sup>44</sup> But love, instead, means "not being dead for the other, and the other not being dead for the one".<sup>45</sup> In love there is always a process of mortification in place, linked to the establishment of a relationship of ownership, which is why it seeks the renunciation of property, beginning with its own body, the conserving of which cancels out the very possibility of a radical love. This is the Hegelian worry: the lover warns that the beloved "has willed this possession"<sup>46</sup> and cannot take it away because this would create an opposition against the power of the other. Hegel is thus forced to acknowledge defeat:

He cannot himself annul the exclusive dominion of the other, for this once again would be an opposition to the other's power, since no relation to an object is possible except mastery over it [...]. But if the possessor gives the other the same right of possession as he has himself, community of goods is still only the right of one or other of the two to the thing.<sup>47</sup>

That is: "internal to the singular and living feeling of love is an operation of life that exceeds and disorients the perspectives of the individual",<sup>48</sup> which, however, always tends to establish again a relationship of dependency.

Looking for a communal relationship in which the other is integrated into one's life, yet without negating the particularity, love seems to represent that never-pacified bond that is based, not on the intellectual or physical reduction of the other to himself, but on the continuous effort in the search for a relationship – a relationship that has the specific quality of opposing the law.

Here there is a deviation from the bond of love that in the later

44 Butler 2012, p. 10. As Butler points out, "In those few decades before Marx's analysis of the commodity is the wish to separate what is animated and animating from the World of property. He does not oppose the world of objects, but wants only to keep that world animated – forever. When objects become property, and property law comes to prevail, the effect is to break down those relations among humans and objects that we might call loving. And this seems to be a different modality from any religious effort to lift the finite into the infinite and have it vanquished there." Butler 2012, p. 18.

45 Butler 2012, p. 9.

46 Hegel 1948, 308.

47 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 308.

48 Butler 2012, p. 10.

fragments, as we have seen, can be more clearly traced to a form of religious relationship. This love is continuous unresolved tension between the parties. Here Hegel is not thinking of *agape*, but of the love of the couple, the love between lovers, hence the importance and the theming of the resistance of the bodies and of the *aporia* linked to them.

And indeed it is the resistance of the bodies that is connected to anger and shame. The first, anger, is a force that kills; it is the reaction to the resistance of the body of the beloved. The second, shame, is a force that immunizes; it is a response to the desire to retain ownership of oneself or to possess the other, so as to render oneself or the other something dead.

At this point Hegel disarmingly comments: “then we would have to say that shame is most of all characteristic of tyrants, or of girls who will not yield their charms except for money, or of vain women who want to fascinate. None of these love.”<sup>49</sup> Here the shame recalls the reaction to the gaze of the other, or, as Butler again emphasizes,

for Hegel shame is what is associated with such institutions in which bodies are instrumentalized for the will of another, perhaps as well that when love takes on the form of inequality and subordination, shame follows [...] This seems to apply equally to the use of the sexual body for purposes of making money, and the use of others’ bodies as personal property or slave labor. The shame seems to be part of the practice, but it also seems to follow an aggressive, subordinating, and/or instrumentalizing dimension of love itself.<sup>50</sup>

If, then, the relationship of property is mortiferous, and love tirelessly and consciously fights against this tragic incapacity, does there exist a form to create a relationship in which this separation is suspended? Hegel is certainly not thinking of Platonic love, but is suggesting, rather, that the only way to overcome this separation and become equal and stay alive is to suspend the ownership – beginning with that of one’s own body. This attempt to keep the love relationship alive as “neither conceptual nor spectatorial”<sup>51</sup> refers to the place where there is no death: life. Love, that is, cannot and must not arrive at a static

49 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 306.

50 Butler 2012, pp. 14–15.

51 Butler 2012, p. 16.

relationship. Indeed, any attempt to reflect on this love and on life is the introduction of death into it. “Infinite life cannot become ‘object’ for thought without becoming finite and thus losing its very character.”<sup>52</sup>

In this fragment, Hegel makes clear that truth remains beyond reason, because philosophy crystallizing life introduces something dead into it. It is perhaps here that matures his idea of philosophy as a bat, a philosophy that can and must limit itself to speaking of that which is dead, because to speak of that which is alive would amount to normalizing it, making it prescriptive, mortifying it.<sup>53</sup>

In this direction, I believe there is a Hegel who acts against the Hegel that much of the tradition has given us – a Hegel who faces the notion of the living, singular body, irreducible to the classic dichotomies of metaphysics and politics and the division of the device of the person; a Hegel who opposes the consolidation of orthodoxies and conceptualizations; a Hegel who seeks not to prescribe life, but only to describe it.

And if, then, thought fails to remove of bodies from the mortiferous process of ownership, what may be another way? Perhaps it could be art, dance, songs, which have the ability to render the law alive, to animate the form. There is an element which acts with force in this fragment, and which sometimes reappears in later works: the Bacchic inebriation of the *Phenomenology*, the beating pulse of *The Science of Logic*. In this form, “animated and animating is not one that overcomes negativity. It only works against the ‘deadening’ effects of possession”.<sup>54</sup> Here it is certainly not possible to find a form of relationship entirely outside the theologico-political, but perhaps a crack may be opened in the monolithic dialectical system, from which to weaken the force of a seemingly impregnable mechanism.

52 Butler 2012, p. 17.

53 Indeed, many of the difficulties encountered in imagining alternatives to the existing politics probably reside in the attempt to think about politics without falling into a normative position, which simply determines the succession from one form of political theology to the other, thus justifying new forms of exclusion. Once again Hegel demonstrates a desire here to think outside the theologico-political scheme, denying to philosophy a regulatory power, and seeking, rather, a thought that does not tell us how we should act, or what is the legitimate political actor of social transformations, but is always a step behind political events.

54 Butler 2012, p. 19.

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