

*HEGEL*  
*THE CONSUMMATE*  
*NEOPLATONIST*

*Philip Stanfield*



*The Sparring Antennae Galaxies*

‘The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect attunement, and all things come to pass through conflict.’

Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXV

‘...it is the inner which stirs us; we are in the case of one who sees his own reflection but not realising whence it comes goes in pursuit of it.’

Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V.8.2

‘I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker...The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel’s hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.

In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.’

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, Postface to the Second Edition 1873

‘...*not a single* professor of political economy, who may be capable of very valuable contributions in the field of factual and specialised investigations, can be trusted *one iota* when it comes to the general theory of political economy. For in modern society the latter is as much a *partisan* science as is *epistemology*. Taken as a whole, the professors of economics are nothing but learned salesmen of the capitalist class, while the professors of philosophy are learned salesmen of the theologians.’

Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, 321-322

Processed in a sick convict culture that as much *prides itself* on toadying to the interests of first British and now U.S. capital (to the Americans who fought for and won their independence from the British) – from the skirts of Mother Britannia to the coat-tails of Uncle Sam – as it is a racist bully in its region.

A culture overseen by ideologues who claim to be the upholders of the highest values of secularism but in fact whose function is to never lose control of the ideas and whose treacherous, thieving elements, in addition to their greed, are ruthless in pursuing that end and by vicious, vindictive authoritarians, protected by their mates and their system. Australians, know your place and all will be well.

A people who have everything and yet, basking in their ‘decency’ - the narrow bounds of which belief are used so effectively to control them - so readily behave, personally and through their representatives, far worse than as though they have nothing. Ask the first Australians. Ask the mere handful of refugees trying to find safety here, including those fleeing from devastation participated in by Australians. Ask the elderly.

Till the end of my life I will salute Jørn Utzon for his bigness of spirit and *vision* that ‘laid-back’, ‘down to earth’ (cynical) Australians are so suspicious of, that so provokes them (despite the now obligatory student-recruitment blather to the contrary pumped out by competing universities), resulting in his fleeing from this nation and for refusing to ever be drawn back by the embarrassed provincial rabble (still attempting to demean his Opera House by proposing to raise petty cash from sleepovers in it – why not in St Mary’s or Parliament House, symbols of the authority so reassuring to Australians?) that his departure exposed.

22.11.2017

Email to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Sydney

21.04.15

Hello Professor Benitez,

Last semester my pursuit academically of a most profound influence on Western culture which I have focused on for the previous thirty two years came to an end, with my failure to complete and submit my Honours thesis on the mystic Hegel.

That focus, an obsession, has dominated my life at the expense of all else - it is what I have lived for.

I send you this email to explain why I failed to submit my thesis and in so doing to emphatically reject any shame associated with that failure, particularly after more than three decades of total commitment, and to raise with you an immeasurably greater failure by academic philosophers, a failure which I have struggled against for the entirety of that period at both this university and UNSW.

When I began my first degree in 1982 at the then City Art Institute (now the College of Fine Arts, UNSW) I quickly came to see that there was something seriously lacking in the theory of art being taught, that it was superficial and incorrect.

I also believed that whatever it was that *was* missing from the tuition and literature pervaded Western culture and when recognised, would be the basis for *an entire cultural re-reading*, an *honest* re-reading.

I wrote a long essay which I titled 'The Poverty of Art' in which I attempted to work out what that influence was and serialised it in the student publication. The only response was when I was asked on one occasion by the editor what I thought of her reduction of the font size to such a degree that the text could not be read.

Since then this interest has become an obsession, one that has, until the decline of that stage of capitalist ideology known as postmodernism when a slowly increasing number of academics began looking for something 'new', gone against the ideological grain - as an *overt* example, when I was in 3rd year Fine Arts at this university in 1988 my tutor warned me to stop writing as I was doing otherwise 'they' would come down on me. I went into the Honours year with that threat hanging over my head.

In 1992 I began a Masters by research thesis titled 'Neoplatonism and the Cubist Aesthetic' at CoFA. For three years, in breach of the regulations, the College failed to provide me with a supervisor. I was patronised with the appellation 'autodidact' and advised to read a beginners book on philosophy by an academic who I was told was an 'expert' on Plato, who refused to supervise me and who, on my asking him, admitted total ignorance of an entire subject area of a chapter in that book he recommended to me, by Danto - a chapter on neurophilosophy.

This was during the heyday of postmodernism - itself suffused with mysticism.

I went to the main campus of UNSW and also came to this university looking for supervision from academic philosophers or at least some support, someone who could help me.

On 08.01.93 I met with George Markus who didn't like what I was saying regarding the impact of mysticism on Western culture and told me that he didn't 'support my project'.

On 05.04.93 I met with David Armstrong who kindly suggested that I 'start at the beginning'. Both of them showed not the slightest awareness of the fundamental significance of mysticism in Western culture to the present.

I had similar experiences meeting with Philip Cam (30.11.92) and Peter Slezak (07.12.92) at UNSW. Slezak said he thought 'we had finished with idealism'.

In 1998 you approved my attending your course on Plato and Aristotle (which I paid to do because my eventual supervisor at CoFA would not authorise my attending the course). I did not submit my essay for it because my supervisor was putting increasing pressure on me to complete my thesis.

In your lecture on 05.03.98 you said 'There are strains of mysticism in Plato' and in your lecture on 12.03.98 you said that Plato tried to get under the language to the real things. At the end of that lecture I asked you "What can you say about the concepts of 'contemplation' and 'intuition' in regard to Platonism and Neoplatonism?" You replied 'It is an awfully big question. It requires a long answer.' You acknowledged that you did not know much about Neoplatonism.

Disgusted with my experiences at CoFA over years, culminating in the refusal of my supervisor and his partner, the course co-ordinator, contrary to all the supporting evidence, to allow me to upgrade to a PhD, I left the course. After so many years, I was not prepared to do a partial thesis.

I wanted to give up on my vision because it had cost me so much but I could not - I had made significant headway in understanding what this influence was and *is* in Western culture and I have never lost sight of either its significance or potential.

As a way of resuming my commitment, I enrolled in courses at the Centre for Continuing Education and the WEA, particularly courses run by Kerry Sanders.

In those courses covering a wide range of philosophers, I argued for the influence of mysticism, particularly Neoplatonism, in Western culture and philosophy.

Not only did Sanders show not the slightest knowledge of Neoplatonism (in her University Preparation Course on the two dates allocated for her tuition of Neoplatonism she never even mentioned it), she spectacularly expressed the standard academic hostility to it in her class on 22.05.08 when, in quoting Derrida's denial in response to a question regarding the influence of Neoplatonism on his philosophy, she added slowly, with emphasis, 'you complete fuckwit'. In her class on 01.05.08 she had told the class that she had been Derrida's water-bearer when he had come to Australia.

She pronounced the name of the greatest Western mystic Plotinus 'Plotoneus' and when discussing Michelangelo in a class, she said 'Plato stripped away vast amounts in pursuit of Form' and that 'Plotinus gave us an incorrect way of understanding what Plato was saying.'

Her thesis, done in your department and for which she was awarded a PhD was written in the shadow of Neoplatonism, yet it wasn't even referenced in her bibliography. When I pointed this out to her she replied that she had not referred to Plotinus because 'we didn't know (of him)'.

Not only did I argue for the impact of Neoplatonism and mysticism on Western culture through the courses I did with her (in a class by Ray Younis I read out a statement to that effect), I had several discussions with her outside class on the matter.

I said to her that it is *the most gross failure of intellectual and social responsibility* that mysticism is not being taught (as distinct from advocated) by academics and that academics should be held to account for this failure.

She was the first academic to show real interest in what I had to say and I wanted her to teach it.

Sanders eventually said that I would be glad to know that she *was* going to teach it in her course on the Middle Ages and she asked me for my material on Neoplatonism. I replied that *I* would like support for what *I* had been trying to do since 1982. She looked shocked and said nothing in reply.

I had hoped that in return for what I was giving her - *the basis for an entire cultural re-reading - to begin with*, as postmodernism was going into clear decline (that decline she has raised in the outline for one of her recent courses), that she would give me the support I had never had, in return - both to do a PhD (she teaches at Sydney College of the Arts, the Centre for Continuing Education, the WEA and has taught at UNSW) and to teach it myself (I put proposals to both the CCE in 1999 and 2008 and to the WEA in 2009).

She refused, giving as her justification that I am intolerant of the views of others. This is not only a serious criticism personally but particularly so in relation to philosophy since it amounted to the implication that I cannot do philosophy, to which tolerance is fundamental. I asked her, from 162 hours of classtime and social experience to give me one instance.

This teacher of philosophy, of reason, critical thinking and the syllogism said she could not give me one instance.

How could one show *greater* intellectual tolerance than to be a materialist as I am and also argue for the immense and *living* significance of mysticism? It is a 'tolerance' which, historically, *academics* have utterly *failed* to show.

While Sanders refused to give me *any* support in Australia - to teach the impact of mysticism, to do a PhD on it (I had a BA from City Art Institute and a Fine Arts Honours BA from your university) or even to refer me to someone who *might* supervise me, she *did* volunteer to give me a 'glowing' reference towards doing a thesis overseas, which I have never asked her for nor applied to do.

I was becoming increasingly concerned that having given her (finally got her to recognise), whose erudition I acknowledged to her, *the basis for an entire cultural re-reading* and been given no assistance by her for what *I* wanted to do and had been trying to do since 1982 in return, that she was now teaching it, as indicated by her course outlines.

When I asked her about this, she denied it, finally refusing to even answer my question - on one occasion (11.05.14) the person who told me that she would always think of me as a friend even threatened to call security in Fisher library on me.

When I told her on 26.09.13 that I expect another B+ for my next essay she replied 'Looks like you will be getting a 2nd class, which won't be enough to go on with' adding 'Looks like your love affair with the University of Sydney is coming to an end.' She offered me not the slightest support or assistance.

Obviously Sanders is free to support who she chooses, but I set this out as part of my experience in my commitment and efforts on this most important matter.

I engaged in an email exchange with Jason Riley at the CCE who authorises the courses taught there, to find out to what extent she was now teaching mysticism. On 29.08.14 I received a final reply from him in which he stated that he could not confirm the extent to which Sanders is/might be doing so.

My heart went into fibrillation and I went to see a doctor who told me to go straight to hospital, which I did.

The increasing stress with regard to Sanders, resulting in this fibrillation, was fundamental to why I did not submit my thesis.

On 20.11.14 I received a reply from Ann Brewer the CEO of the CCE in response to my enquiry regarding Sanders' teaching mysticism - she replied simply, contrary to Sanders' course outlines, that Sanders wasn't teaching it. Again, my heart went into fibrillation.

I regard my failure to submit my thesis as not at all reflecting negatively on either my ability or commitment which has been, since 1982 *total*, but, ultimately, on Australian culture.

The marker for my essay for Professor Thom's Philosophy of Music seminar wrote that my essay comprised 'a hermeneutics of suspicion according to which Neo-Platonism is everywhere, despite the fact that all the powers of Western culture have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre.'

The marker should make the time to at least look through the Contents lists of William Franke's 2 vol. anthology *On What Cannot be Said* (there is no copy in Fisher) to be disabused of that criticism.

Professor Grumley, with regard to my arguing the impact of mysticism on Habermas has charged me with a lack of intellectual merit, for making simple assertions that I hold as convictions with regard to the role of mysticism in Western culture which I am not prepared to criticise in accordance with conventional critical standards.

Yet it was *Habermas* who wrote of the 'great significance' of an 'element of Jakob Böhme's mystical speculations' (God's seeing 'Himself confirmed in His own freedom through an alter ego' - which was 'the subject of [his] doctoral dissertation' and was also central [as Magee, to whom Professor Grumley referred me, argued] to Hegel's mystical philosophy) for him, and my argument



regarding the impact of mysticism on Habermas was consistent with that of two professors, one emeritus, from the University of Newcastle. If *I* have abandoned 'conventional critical standards', so have *they*.

I note that while these severe criticisms were being made of my work at one end of the university, the tuition of mysticism was now developing, apace, at the other - at the CCE (where it was never done until recently - my first proposal in 1999 was treated as a joke) and in a growing range of areas, with one of those courses (Jewish mysticism) being run by a Department of the University.

Mysticism is also now being taught at the WEA and at a growing number of Australian universities including the ANU, Monash, the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland.

Mysticism in modern Western culture has been treated like pornography, its dynamism and methods drawn upon in private while denied and appropriated in public as the achievements of patriarchal linguistic reason, in the name of an increasingly challenged Western supremacism.

In no area of Western culture does this dishonesty run more deeply than in philosophy.

In 2009 I sent an email to academics at several Australian universities asking if they teach Neoplatonism in their courses.

Paul Crittenden at the University of Sydney replied 'its a rather neglected field I'm afraid in current philosophy'. David Runia at the University of Melbourne replied 'Nowhere is this subject very strong in Australia.' Harold Tarrant at the University of Newcastle replied 'There have never in recent times been U/G courses taught that are devoted to that subject'. You replied 'I'm sorry to say that Neoplatonism isn't taught in my department.' Damian Grace at UNSW replied 'Historical neoplatonism doesn't get much attention'. Carole Cusack at the University of Sydney replied 'there is little demand for such an obscure subject among undergraduates'. I received replies in a similar vein from others.

It is not I who am remiss, it is the Department of Philosophy, and I charge the department with maintaining the most gross failure of intellectual and social responsibility in not teaching mysticism, the influence of which runs right through Western culture at the deepest level, and in not teaching the philosophy that was developed from it - dialectical materialism - the epistemology, itself requiring continual development, of modern science.

To blame undergraduate students for a lack of demand for the subject is emblematic of the degree of academic failure of which I process.

While not a Marxist, I assert that bourgeois philosophy is an increasing impediment to the requirements of scientific and social development.

A prognostication: much sooner than later, mysticism will be taught in your department - I notice that an image for Hypatia is in this year's student guide - first a toe, then the foot?

I will complete my thesis and put it on the web.

Sincerely, Philip Stanfield

‘there is no evidence that Hegel ever read Cusa’ (Magee, quoting Walsh)

In his Introduction in Volume I of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-1826* (Trans. Robert F. Brown and J.M. Stewart, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2009), Hegel named nine of his sources (pp. 99-101).

In that order (I use the details from the Bibliography), I exemplify references to Cusanus below the title:

Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie für den akademischen Unterricht*, 3rd edn., ed. Amadeus Wendt (Leipzig, 1820)

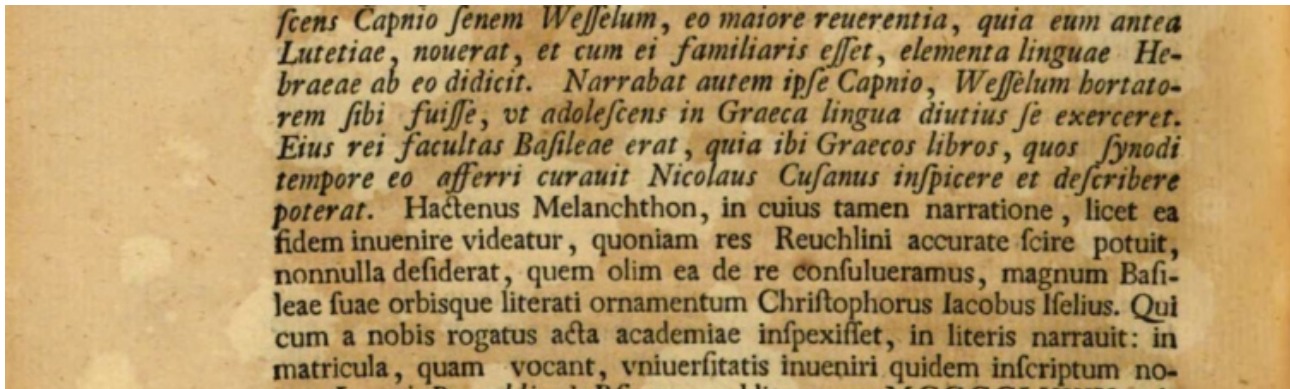
<b>Dritter Theil. Dritte Periode.</b>	
<b>Neuere Philosophie von dem 15. Jahrh. bis auf die</b>	
<b>neuesten Zeiten. Uebersicht.</b>	§. 268.
<b>1. Abschn. 1. Zeitr. Erneuerung und Combina-</b>	
<b>tion alter Systeme.</b>	
<b>Griechen in Italien. Streit über Plato u. Aristoteles.</b>	§. 277.
<b>Kampf gegen die Scholastik.</b>	§. 278.
<b>A. Erneuerung alter Systeme.</b>	§. 279.
<b>1. Erneuerter Platonismus.</b>	
<b>Nic. Cusanus. Akademie zu Florenz. Platonismus in</b>	
<b>Verbindung mit Cabbalistik, Magie, Mystik, Theosophie.</b>	§. 280.
<b>2. Erneuerte Aristotelische Philosophie u. Gegner derselb.</b>	§. 290.

*From Contents*

Thomas Stanley, *Historia philosophiae vitas opiniones resque gestas et dicta philosophorum sectae cuiusuis complexa...* (Leipzig, 1711) (Latin translation from English)

Hegel wrote ‘Its dominant viewpoint is that there are only ancient philosophies, and the era of philosophy was cut short by Christianity. So this treatise only contains the ancient schools...’

Jacob Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1742-4). (Hegel owned the 1756 edn.)



scens Capnio senem Wesselum, eo maiore reuerentia, quia eum antea  
Lutetiae, nouerat, et cum ei familiaris esset, elementa linguae He-  
braeae ab eo didicit. Narrabat autem ipse Capnio, Wesselum hortato-  
rem sibi fuisse, ut adolescens in Graeca lingua diutius se exerceret.  
Eius rei facultas Basileae erat, quia ibi Graecos libros, quos synodi  
tempore eo afferi curauit Nicolaus Cusanus inspicere et describere  
poterat. Haecenus Melanchthon, in cuius tamen narratione, licet ea  
fidem inuenire videatur, quoniam res Reuchlini accurate scire potuit,  
nonnulla desiderat, quem olim ea de re consulueramus, magnum Basi-  
leae suae orbisque literati ornamentum Christophorus Iacobus Iselius. Qui  
cum a nobis rogatus acta academiae inspexisset, in literis narrauit: in  
matricula, quam vocant, vniuersitatis inueniri quidem inscriptum no-

*From page 360 of vol. 4.1*



Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben*, 8 pts. in 9 vols. (Göttingen, 1796-1804)

Leben des Pomponatius, seine Zeitgenossen  
und den Inhalt des Buchs; Tubingae  
1791. 8. — Nicolai Cusani Opera, Ba-  
sil. 1565 fol. Tomi III. Im ersten Bande  
sind enthalten: *De docta ignorantia praeci-  
sionis veritatis inattingibilis ad Iulium  
Cardinalem* libb. III cum *Apologia*; *de con-  
jecturis*, sive omnem humanam veri posi-  
tivam assertionem esse conjecturam, libb.  
II.; *dialogorum* libri IV (in den beyden  
ersten Büchern de sapientia, im dritten de  
mentis natura); *Compendium* sive directio  
speculandae veritatis; *dialogus* de possi-  
bilitate sive materia univrsi; de venatio-  
ne sapientiae. Die übrigen Schriften des  
Nicolaus sind mehr theologischen, physika-  
lischen und mathematischen Inhalts. —  
*Laurentii Vallae Opera* Basil, 1540. et  
1543 fol. Zur Philosophie gehören: De

*From page 101 of vol. 6.1*

## Inhalt des neunten Bandes.

### Sechstes Hauptstück. Sechste Periode.

Allmähliche Entfesselung der Vernunft. Vorbereitung auf selbstständigeres Philosophiren durch Benutzung fremder Quellen.

Vom 14ten bis zum 16ten Jahrhundert.

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erklärten,

Als eigentliche Gegner der scholastischen Philosophie traten auf der Philolog Laurentius Valla, geb. zu Rom 1415; Nicolaus aus Cusel; Rudolph Agricola, geb. in Friesland 1442, st. 1485; Johann Ludovicus Vives, aus Valencia in Spanien, st. 1537; Jacob Faber, geb. in der Picardie 1440, u. a.

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*From page 315*

Thaddä Anselm Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen*, 3 vols. (Sulzbach, 1822-3)

Hegel wrote 'Most worth recommending is Rixner's *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* in 3 volumes (Sulzbach, 1822-3)...he is a man of intelligence who provides a particularly useful selection of key passages...the accuracy of the citations and the other features make it highly commendable.'

— 164 —

**im Complementum theologicum, figuratum  
in complementis mathematicis. Vide ejus-  
dem opera, Basileae 1565. — Nachher ward die  
Mathematik immer mehr und mehr auf das Sinnliche,  
und nach und nach gar nicht mehr zur allegorischen  
Beleuchtung übersinnlicher Gegenstände angewandt. —  
Derselbe Nicol. Cusanus schrieb auch de docta  
ignorantia, d. h. von der Unerreichbarkeit und Un-  
erkennbarkeit Gottes, der zugleich das absolute  
Maximum und Minimum ist. —**

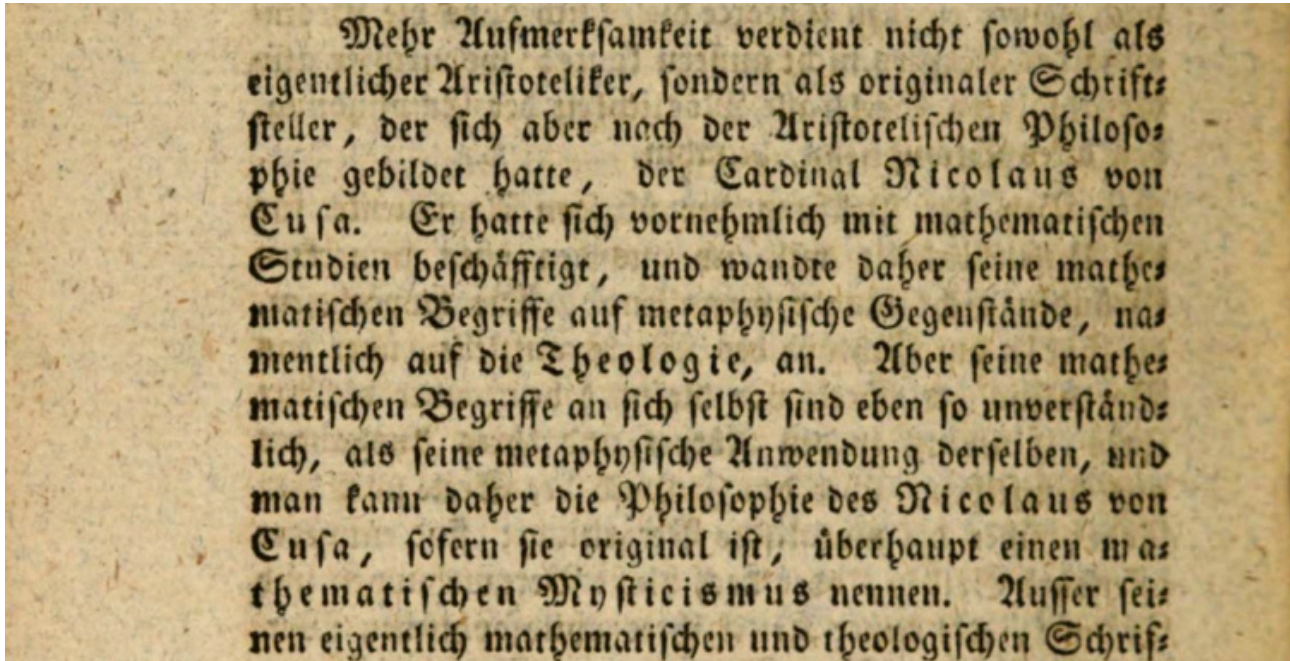
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*From page 164 of vol. 2*



Most importantly, Hegel did not name the other history by Buhle that he used – *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, 6 vols. (Göttingen, 1800-4). Brown, the editor, showed in his Notes that Hegel paid close attention to it with regard to his writing on Bruno (see vol. III, The Second Period: Medieval Philosophy, Notes 102, 104, 126, 129).

The most thorough discussion of Cusanus' philosophy in comparison to Hegel's sources above is in volume 2.1 of this history by Buhle, between pp. 341-353 (the Notes refer to both 2.1 and 2.2).



*From page 342 of vol. 2.1*

Cusanus' texts referred to in volume 2 of Buhle's *History*

- De concordantia catholica* (On Catholic Concordance, 1434)
- De docta ignorantia* (On Learned Ignorance, 1440 – Buhle discusses)
- De coniecturis* (On Surmises, 1441-2 – Buhle discusses)
- De Ignota Litteratura* (On Unknown Learning, 1442-3 – Johannes Wenck)
- De quaerendo Deum* (On Seeking God, 1445)
- De dato patris luminum* (On the Gift of the Father of Lights, 1446)
- Apologia doctae ignorantiae discipuli ad discipulum* (A Defence of Learned Ignorance from One Disciple to Another, 1449)
- (Idiota) de sapientia* (The Layman of Wisdom, 1450 – Buhle discusses)
- Epistolae contra Bohemos* (Epistles Against the Bohemians/Hussites, 1452)
- De visione Dei* (On the Vision of God, 1453)
- De mathematica perfectione* (On Mathematical Perfection, 1458)
- Cribrationes Alchorani* (*Cribratio Alkorani*, A Scrutiny of the Koran, 1461)
- De venatione sapientiae* (On the Pursuit of Wisdom, 1463)
- De apice theoriae* (On the Summit of Contemplation, 1464 – Cusanus' last work)

## R e g i s t e r.

- monius Saccas, das Christenthum zu bestreiten. I, 649.
- Mothe (Franz de la) dessen Leben. II, 947. Character seiner Schriften. eb. Inhalt seines skeptischen Werks. eb. 59.
- Müller (August Friedrich) dessen bürgerlicher Character; IV, 704. Erklärung der logischen Wahrheit; 705. metaphysischen. eb. Annahme einer Correspondenz zwischen den Objecten und unsern Empfindungen von ihnen. eb. Verwerfung der Verstandesbegriffe a priori. eb. Unterscheidung zwischen Verstand und Vernunft. eb. Definition der Natur. eb. Eintheilung der Ursachen. eb. Unbegreiflichkeit der selbstständigen Natur. eb. Unmöglichkeit einer Causa-  
sai; oder Disciplinary; Erklärung der Dinge. 706. Unstatthaftigkeit des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde. eb. Natur der Substanzen. eb. Nicht-Objectivität des Raums und der Zeit. eb. Beweis für das Daseyn Gottes. eb. Distinction der Ewigkeit Gottes an sich selbst, und der Ewigkeit der geschaffnen Welt. eb. Misslungener Versuch, das Problem, wie sich die Freyheit mit der göttlichen Allwissenheit reime, zu lösen. 707.
- Newton (Isaak) dessen Leben, IV, 107. philosophischer Character, 108. dessen Theorien: der Schwere. 109. (Anwendung derselben auf das Universum. III.) des Lichts. II2. Denkart über die Bestimmung der Natursprincipien. II5. Ansechtung seiner Theorien. II6. Sein System der Chronologie; eb. und ergetische Schriften. II9. Beweis für die Fortdauer der Sensationen nach dem Verschwinden der Objecte. V, 272. Bestimmung der Regeln für die Methode der Naturforschung. 377.
- Nicolaus von Eusa (ein späterer Aristoteliker) Sein philosophischer Character. II, 342. Verzeichniß seiner Schriften und ihrer Ausgaben. eb. Uebersicht seines in der docta ignorantia entwickelten theologischen Systems. 342-347. Ruthemastlicher Verfasser der ihm beigelegten Schrift, der apologia doctae ignorantiae. 348. Inhalt des Buchs de conjecturis; eb. de sapientia. 351. Seine mathematische Schrift und übrigen theologischen. 352. 353.
- (aus Eusel) dessen Zeitalter. II, 81. Schrift gegen die Scholastiker. eb.
- Nilus dessen Verdienste um die Wiederherstellung Griechischer Litteratur im Occident. II, 29.
- Nizollus (Marius, ein Antis peripatetiker.) II, 665. Sein human

## **Introduction**

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#### **15. Conclusion**

#### **References**

## Introduction

In capitalist ideology - a system of belief delimited by exploitative interests - Hegel's philosophy is held to embody the mastery of conceptual reason. Hegel demanded this recognition through his philosophical assertions which he gave weight to with the complexity and bulk of his output. This recognition has been willingly granted - particularly after his death<sup>1</sup> - maintained and propagated by generations of career-building academic ideologues.

In fact, the holding and teaching of his philosophy as such embodies one of the greatest *lies* in Western philosophy and culture - that what is Neoplatonic and works *through* and *beyond* concepts is linguistic only and rigorous in its conceptualisation. It is a lie that can be traced to the gates of Plato's republic, from which the artist (and thus Plato himself) was excluded - both the artist and Plato who were crucial to Plotinus - together with all the richer and more subtle aspects of how we reason.

That reason is held to be only linguistic and conceptual is both patriarchal (the richness and complexity of our thought is reduced to identifiable and manipulable symbols) and supremacist (other ways of thinking in non-Western cultures which have long and esteemed histories 'fail' this standard). The *West* in its *practice* fails this standard. The 'reason' of Hegel is the reason of Plotinus.

From a materialist perspective ('matter' or objective reality is primary to consciousness) I will argue that Hegel's philosophy is *most obviously* Neoplatonic, that it is the consummation of a philosophical current begun by Plotinus and that Hegel's philosophy can neither be understood nor accorded the full appreciation it deserves without understanding that current.<sup>2</sup>

His philosophy, contrary to its place in capitalist ideology is, in the best tradition of Neoplatonism, profoundly poetic. His *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the most lyrical, his *Logic* the most austere. Hegel, like Cusanus, conflated the Neoplatonic hypostases and employed the same devices to convey his philosophy as did Plotinus and other Neoplatonists and mystics.

The tool that Hegel used to enrich and further anchor his Neoplatonism in this world which *most* pervades his philosophy is the Trinity - a Trinity Hegel acknowledged may have been derived from Neoplatonism. Where Neoplatonism is the framework, the Trinity is both the overlay and was woven into it. The *Christian* Trinity - which Hegel's is not - is also a partial and, in the hands of

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<sup>1</sup> 'it was quite common for him to be linked with mysticism in general' Glenn Alexander Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme' in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, Eds., Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei, Routledge, New York, 2014, 566-613, 603

<sup>2</sup> 'The evidence that Hegel was influenced by mysticism and took it seriously until the end of his life is, in short, abundant. ...If one is ignorant of the mystical tradition, then the claim I have just now made will seem implausible.' Glenn Alexander Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism,' in Frederick C. Beiser, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, 253-280, 264

academics, very successful disguise to stave off the recognition of a 'pornography' that pervades Hegel's and their theorising and Western culture. Hegel's philosophy is *not* Christian.

Just as that Hegel was a Neoplatonist is not conceded, so his knowledge of and immense debt to Cusanus who *is* known as a Neoplatonist. The motive is the same - the maintenance of the lie of 'reason' and of the patriarchy and supremacism of Western dominated, capitalist ideology - ultimately, domination and exploitation by the Western bourgeoisie. Here too, Hegel was complicit - in addition to unjustified claims of originality (Cusanus also was accused of plagiarism), a sympathy for 'subjectivism' and 'atheism' could mean the end of a promising career - both then and (with the decline of that stage of capitalist ideology known as 'postmodernism' - itself suffused by Neoplatonism and mysticism) a little less now.

Marx and Engels took this great current in philosophy - a current that has contributed so much to Western and global culture - from its influence on Michelangelo to that on Kepler, Nietzsche, Proust, Picasso, Popova, Stepanova, Emerson and Joyce to name but a few - and stood it on material feet. The epistemology for the world within became that for the world without.

The hostility towards Neoplatonism and Marxism by the bourgeoisie and their inability to acknowledge and *embrace* them are for the same reasons - both the prime importance to this current of what the bourgeoisie have assigned to 'the feminine' - the ephemeral, the creative, that which resists control and particularly, its recognition of the engine of contradiction with its resultant flux. Everything but change itself will pass.<sup>3</sup>

The dialectical materialist perspective that grew from a philosophy developed in reaction to change brought out its revolutionary content. The bourgeoisie - their domination and exploitation too, will pass.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Everything that surrounds us may be viewed as an instance of Dialectic. We are aware that everything finite, instead of being stable and ultimate, is rather changeable and transient; and this is exactly what we mean by that Dialectic of the finite, by which the finite, as implicitly other than what it is, is forced beyond its own immediate or natural being to turn suddenly into its opposite. We have before this (§80) identified Understanding with what is implied in the popular idea of the goodness of God; we may now remark of Dialectic, in the same objective signification, that its principle answers to the idea of his power. All things, we say - that is, the finite world as such - are doomed; and in saying so, we have a vision of Dialectic as the universal and irresistible power before which nothing can stay, however secure and stable it may deem itself.' G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, Trans., William Wallace, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975, Remark to §81, 118. The ideological silence for so long in academia with regard to the impact of mysticism, particularly its primary Western form Neoplatonism and the distortions written and spoken in the attempt to explain that influence away can be compared with the erasure of a two thousand year history of materialism from Indian philosophy. The only place where this 'survives' is in the writing of those who hated it. Some of those in the West who built their careers on never using the word 'mysticism' other than disparagingly or on explaining it away are now teaching it as though it has been ever thus. They make a mockery of philosophy and excellently exemplify the early stages of a major adjustment in capitalist ideology - from 'modernism' to 'postmodernism' to...? What will the new 'ism' be that denies or instils doubt regarding the primacy of objective reality?



## 1. Hegel and capitalist ideology

The claim in Beiser regarding Kant - that he 'lies far more within the Platonic tradition...than many scholars are willing to admit'<sup>1</sup> applies far more so to the relationship between Hegel and that of Neoplatonism. The evidence of Neoplatonism in Hegel's philosophy is so consistent, the challenge should be to argue that he was *not* a Neoplatonist rather than that he was.

But Hegel was the high point of the capitalist assertion that we in the West are the bearers of reason - he made that claim himself. Hence so much hangs on him ideologically. Expose who he was philosophically and you threaten the whole ideological structure of which he is a key part.

This is why academics won't touch the connection between Hegel and Cusanus, because it *proves* his mysticism, his Neoplatonism. Even if, as all the academics write, Hegel *didn't* know of Cusanus, why is it that the Christian Cusanus, whose philosophy exemplifies so many parallels and similarities with Hegel's is readily known as a Christian Neoplatonist, yet Hegel is only known as a Christian?

Magee, who argues that Jakob Böhme's writing had a profound effect on Hegel wrote that many Hegel scholars

find it simply unacceptable that Hegel might have been seriously interested in (or - worse yet - influenced by) one of the most obscure mystics in the Western canon. To most professional philosophers, mysticism is not merely a non-rational enterprise, but an *irrational* one: one contrary to reason. Thus, their attitude tends to be that we must save Hegel from Boehme.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Hegel and Western supremacism

In his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Hegel, Paul Redding wrote that Hegel's account of history and the history of philosophy are clearly Eurocentric.<sup>3</sup> Hegel not only justified that Eurocentrism on the basis of Christianity: 'Christians...are initiated into the mysteries of God, and this also supplies us with the key to world history,'<sup>4</sup> 'It was through Christianity that this Idea

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, Routledge, London, 2009, 64

<sup>2</sup> Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme,' *op. cit.*, 654

<sup>3</sup> Paul Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/>

<sup>4</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, Trans., H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, 41

came into the world,<sup>5</sup> ‘human beings are freed through Christ and everyone has access to freedom,’<sup>6</sup> he did so by taking a clearly supremacist position with regard to ‘reason’

Negroes are to be regarded as a race of children...The Mongols...spread like monstrous locust swarms over other countries and then...sink back again into the thoughtless indifference and dull inertia which preceded this outburst. ...(the Chinese) have no compunction in exposing or simply destroying their infants.

It is in the Caucasian race that mind first attains to absolute unity with itself. ..and in doing so creates world-history.

The principle of the European mind is, therefore, self-conscious Reason...In Europe, therefore, there prevails this infinite thirst for knowledge which is alien to other races. ...the European mind...subdues the outer world to its ends with an energy which has ensured for it the mastery of the world.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Paul Redding and Hegel’s Neoplatonism

Redding wrote

It is common within recent accounts of the emergence of German Idealism to find stressed the impact of Spinozism on the generation to which Schelling and Hegel belonged, but it is less common to find discussion of the neoplatonic aspects of their thought, despite the fact that this was commonly noted in the 19th century.<sup>8</sup>

Redding maintains this failure to analyse the relationship between Hegel’s philosophy and Neoplatonism. He many times raises it but then leaves it as a mere statement or fails to pursue it to any depth - ‘Again we see a Neoplatonist dimension to Hegel’s approach to spirit...,’<sup>9</sup> ‘Hegel’s constant use of the notion of the Neoplatonists’ treatment of “negation”...,’<sup>10</sup> ‘Hegel showed clear

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<sup>5</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind, Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Trans., William Wallace, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, 239

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, vol. I, Trans. Robert F. Brown and J.M. Stewart, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2009, 195

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 42-45; ‘Europe, forms the consciousness, the rational part, of the earth, the balance of rivers and valleys and mountains - whose centre is Germany. The division of the world into continents is therefore not contingent, not a convenience; on the contrary, the differences are essential,’ G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature, Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Trans., A.V.Miller, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004, 285; ‘No philosophy in the proper sense (can be found in the Oriental world)...spirit does not arise in the Orient...In the West we are on the proper soil of philosophy,’ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 89, 91

<sup>8</sup> Paul Redding, ‘Mind of God, Point of View of Man, or Spirit of the World? Platonism and Organicism in the Thought of Kant and Hegel’, *Von Kant bis Hegel 4*, Concordia Univ., Montréal, October, 2008, 9; ‘the Neoplatonic characteristics of Hegel’s thought came to be widely acknowledged during the nineteenth century, Feuerbach, for example, describing Hegel as “the German Proclus” (PPF: 47),’ Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 137

<sup>9</sup> Paul Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1996, 118, note

<sup>10</sup> Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 151

features of the type of thought found in the Platonism of late antique philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus...Importantly it was these neo-platonist, and especially *Proclean* features, that would be central to Hegel's understanding of Christianity, and especially the doctrine of the trinity...,<sup>11</sup> 'A particularly clear application of the Plotinian processes of egress and regress from "the one" within the living realm is to be found in Hegel's discussion of life in chapter four of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>12</sup> 'With its dark mystical roots, and its overtly religious content...'.<sup>13</sup> Or he qualifies it - 'Hegel's "Neoplatonic" schema...'<sup>14</sup> 'Hegel often seems to invoke imagery consistent with the types of neo-Platonic conceptions of the universe that had been common within Christian mysticism...'<sup>15</sup>

Redding repeated Hegel's statement that Neoplatonism could be termed Neoaristotelianism<sup>16</sup> but, while prepared to write that Hegel might be said to have been 'a *Christian* Aristotelianised Platonist'<sup>17</sup> despite continuing 'And the point of view of most orthodox Christian thought in the nineteenth century (and since) this will hardly be recognisable as a form of Christianity, indeed, a form of *religious* thought at all,'<sup>18</sup> he refuses to refer to him simply as he was - a Neoplatonist.

Most importantly, Redding wrote that Hegel's conception of the Trinity is Neoplatonic.<sup>19</sup> Hegel emphasised that the Trinity (his *Neoplatonic* version of it) was fundamental to his philosophy. A person who attended Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion noted: 'the Trinity may have entered Christian doctrine from the Alexandrian school, or from the Neoplatonists.'<sup>20</sup>

Hodgson, the editor of the publication of those lectures added that F.A.G.Tholuck with whom Hegel corresponded 'was convinced that the doctrine of the triad was widespread in Islamic thought and in late Greek philosophy, and that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is closely linked with Neoplatonism.'<sup>21</sup>

Where is Redding's thorough analysis of all these roads to Neoplatonism in relation to the master of 'Reason'? There is none.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', 6, in Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis Eds. *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion, Volume IV: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Religion*, Chesam: Acumen, 2007

<sup>12</sup> Redding, 'Mind of God, Point of View of Man, or Spirit of the World? Platonism and Organicism in the Thought of Kant and Hegel', op. cit., 10

<sup>13</sup> Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel', op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 108

<sup>15</sup> Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel', op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> 'Neoplatonism too, or the Alexandrian, Neo-Aristotelian philosophy, is no eclecticism but a uniting of its predecessors,' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 246; Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 13

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Paul Redding, 'The Metaphysical and Theological Commitments of Idealism: Kant, Hegel, Hegelianism', 19, for volume, Douglas Moggach, Ed., *Politics, Religion and Art: Hegelian Debates*, Northwestern University Press

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit. 199

<sup>20</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I, Ed. Peter C. Hodgson, Trans., R.F.Brown, P.C.Hodgson, J.M.Stewart, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007, 157

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## 2. The criticism by Hegel and Plotinus of their societies

Both Plotinus and Hegel thought of us as fragmented - spiritually and socially. Hegel's criticisms were multiple - of vain, power-hungry priests who had abandoned their flocks, of the Deistic Enlightenment, of the 'subjective feeling' which holds that God cannot be cognised and denies the reconciliation of reason and faith. He wrote

The Spirit shows itself as so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for a mere mouthful of water, it seems to crave for its refreshment only the bare feeling of the divine in general. By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.<sup>1</sup>

Hegel and Plotinus believed we have forgotten our true nature, resulting in self-alienation and an acquisitiveness for material things. Both believed that philosophy can make us spiritually whole again, within a cohesive community infused with divine spirit.

Consistent with Neoplatonism, Hegel equated philosophy with theology, which he called 'the intellectual science of God'.<sup>2</sup>

This linkage between (philosophy and religion) is nothing new. It already obtained among the more eminent of the church fathers, who had steeped themselves particularly in Neopythagoreanism, Neoplatonic, and Neoplatonist philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Philosophy, a continual divine service,<sup>4</sup> urges its disciples<sup>5</sup> to ascertain the inner unity of all existence, to gain a cognitive knowledge of the eternal and non-worldly<sup>6</sup> - of what God is. The philosophies of Hegel and Plotinus set out the pathway for our return to God, both an ascent and a journey within, fuelled by desire and remembrance, to the core of our being. Plotinus' last words were 'Strive to bring back the god in yourselves to the Divine in the universe.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans., A.V.Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, 5

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. II, 252. Plotinus and Hegel made the same distinction between 'sense-knowledge' and 'authentic science.' Proclus defined 'theology' as the science of the Gods. In Eastern Neoplatonism 'the philosopher became a priest and a theologian at the same time,' Radek Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, 32

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 153

<sup>4</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, Trans., T.M.Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2010, 101

<sup>5</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 171

<sup>6</sup> Expressing a deep dissatisfaction with the societies in which they lived, both Plotinus and Hegel developed a philosophy oriented to the 'non-worldly'.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Henry 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought' in Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), Trans. Stephen MacKenna, Penguin, London, 1991, lii

He believed that upon restoring ourselves to Intellect, we again become creators of everything, again become God. This core Neoplatonic commitment to creativity is reflected in Hegel's Absolute Spirit in which he intended philosophy to give the highest expression conceptually to the metaphorical, mythical and image-making potential, to the 'picture-thinking' of the other two *sensuous* forms of Spirit - art and religion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 'This science is the unity of Art and Religion. Whereas the vision-method of Art, external in point of form, is but subjective production and shivers the substantial content into many separate shapes, and whereas Religion, with its separation into parts, opens it out in mental picture, and mediates what is thus opened out; Philosophy not merely keeps them together to make a totality, but even unifies them into the simple spiritual vision, and then in that raises them to self-conscious thought.' G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, Trans., William Wallace, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, 302. Plotinus' metaphor of a sculptor perfecting his soul (*The Enneads* I.6.9) embodies the three forms of Absolute Spirit.

### 3. Hegel and subjectivity

Hegel thought that the great advance in modern philosophy was the recognition of the importance of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> While Descartes was most important to this development, Hegel correctly traced a line from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* with its 'First Science of Theology' and particularly its theorising the divine activity of thought thinking itself to Neoplatonism, which philosophy was then absorbed into the Christian doctrine of the Trinity,<sup>2</sup> enabling Hegel to reinforce the process, spirituality and immanence of his Neoplatonism.<sup>3</sup> Hegel believed that modern philosophy had resumed the primary current in philosophy which had been interrupted by the Middle Ages.

Schlitt wrote that Hegel's philosophy of religion is a movement of divine subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> His *entire* philosophy is such

The proper subject matter of religion is not the sensibility and feeling of the finite subject, which abandons any cognition of God, but the infinite self-consciousness of the absolute subject, which encompasses finite subjects within itself.<sup>5</sup>

In his *Science of Logic* he gave that movement poetic Neoplatonic expression

Each new stage of *forthgoing*, that is, of *further determination*, is also a withdrawal inwards, and the greater *extension* is equally a *higher intensity*. The richest is therefore the most concrete and most *subjective*, and that which withdraws itself into the simplest depth is the mightiest and most all-embracing.<sup>6</sup>

Not only is subjectivity the essential nature of Spirit, it reconciles itself *with* itself - in *another*, giving the Absolute. This 'principle of the modern age,' one's own subjectivity, was explored in the first phenomenology, the *Enneads*. Hegel wrote

If I now go further (than the standpoint of 'empirical' understanding) and seek to view consciousness from a spiritually higher standpoint, I find that I

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<sup>1</sup> 'Modern philosophy is the philosophy of subjectivity, or simply subjective idealism.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 236

<sup>2</sup> 'God is subjectivity, activity, infinite actuality,' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 15

<sup>3</sup> The kingdom of God is an 'ascent into pure inwardness,' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 367

<sup>4</sup> Dale M. Schlitt, *Divine Subjectivity: Understanding Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, University of Scranton Press, London, 1990, xvi

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, Editorial Introduction, 24

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, Trans., A.V.Miller, Humanities Press, New York, 1976, 840-841

am no longer observing. I forget myself in plunging into the object. I immerse myself in it as I seek to cognise and to conceive God. I surrender my particularity in it, and if I do this I am no longer in the relationship which, as an empirical consciousness, I wanted to maintain. ...if God is no longer a beyond for me, then I no longer remain a pure observer, I become interwoven with the thing instead.<sup>7</sup>

The utter self-focus of Hegel's Neoplatonic philosophy, expressed in mystical language, is clear

It is I who produce that beyond; the finite and the infinite are equally my product, and I stand above both of them, both disappear in me. I am lord and master of this definition: I bring it forth. They vanish in and through me - and thus the second position is established: that I am the affirmation which at first I placed outside in a beyond; the infinite first comes into being through me. I am the negation of negation, it is I in whom the antithesis disappears; I am the reflection that brings them both to naught.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 283-284

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 295

#### 4. Hegel's Reason

Hegel's claim to a mastery of conceptual 'reason' is the core of his philosophy. His status, on the back of its acceptance, is a major element in capitalist ideology and Western supremacism. Many a career has been and continues to be built through a servile pandering to it. That we in the West are the bearers of patriarchal 'reason' has been, particularly since the rise of capitalism, used as a justification for all forms of domination, exploitation and abuse - the noble white *man* goes forth to benefit assorted savages.

That Hegel is not recognised as a Neoplatonist shows both the power of ideology and the most determined ignorance by generations of academic guardians of the pervasive philosophy that *proves* his mysticism. Hegel himself, despite his demand that he be recognised as the master of conceptual reason, who showed how God can be cognised could not, short of openly declaring his Neoplatonism and thereby immediately putting an end to his career, have made the reality more obvious.

Where Divine Reason is the beginning and end for Plotinus<sup>1</sup> it is the Alpha and Omega for Hegel.<sup>2</sup> Where Plotinus wrote of 'a stationary wandering, a wandering within "the Meadow of Truth",'<sup>3</sup> Hegel wrote of 'an eternal realm of truth, a realm of eternal stillness, eternal rest.'<sup>4</sup>

Using the mystical device of metaphor, he theorised 'Reason' as a Neoplatonic development from unity to multiplicity

Reason is present here as the fluid universal *Substance*, as unchangeable simple thinghood, which yet bursts asunder into many completely independent beings, just as light bursts asunder into stars as countless self-luminous points<sup>5</sup>

and not only stated that his philosophy is *true* 'reason,' distinct from 'the understanding,' but that it is '*speculative*.' He repeatedly used these concepts in relation to logic,<sup>6</sup> the mystical, the religious, God, the divine - and to Neoplatonism itself. And so he should have. All of this *is* Neoplatonism

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<sup>1</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., III.2.15

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 19

<sup>3</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.7.13

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 259

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 212

<sup>6</sup> 'what explains Hegel's choice of the title *Logic* is the word's derivation from the Greek *logos*, a favourite topic of the German mystics, especially Eckhart. The ascent to the Absolute Idea of the Logic closely parallels the classical mystic ascent to the *Logos* or the Universal Mind.' Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 266



The expression ‘mystical’ does in fact occur frequently in the Neoplatonists, for whom (word in Greek) means none other than ‘to consider speculatively’. The religious mysteries too are secrets to the abstract understanding, and it is only for rational, speculative thinking that they are object or content.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction Hegel made between (the feminine) ‘*die Vernunft*’ and (the masculine) ‘*der Verstand*’ is exactly that which Plotinus made between the reason of contemplation<sup>8</sup> and discursive reason, that Proclus made<sup>9</sup> and that Cusanus made between ‘*intellectus*’ and ‘*ratio*’. The former pertains to Plotinus’ universe of Intellect - what Hegel referred to as ‘the reason-world,’<sup>10</sup> the other to the universe of the senses.

Hegel wrote that *Vernunft* is ‘speculative’ because it is reasoning that is dialectical, that recognises that contradiction is the engine of thought, that thought develops on that basis. This is Neoplatonism. He wrote that *Verstand* is dead because it holds separate what is contradictory - it holds concepts apart, overlooking their connectedness. This dichotomy of ‘reasons’ is Neoplatonic.

Of Hegel’s use of the concept ‘speculative’: Plotinus *founded* the Western speculative school of philosophy *that provided a ‘rational’ account of the mystical*,<sup>11</sup> of which school Hegel was its consummate member. Proclus frequently used the concept ‘speculative’ as did Cusanus, both in the same way as Hegel, in the same set of conceptual relationships. This is Neoplatonism.

The Neoplatonic dependence of speculation on recollection plays a decisive role in the development in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Neoplatonic, speculative sublation of ‘either-ors’ functions both within the thinking of an individual and within the community of individual perspectives comprising Spirit’s cultus. Magee correctly wrote ‘Hegel here has in mind precisely the thought of figures like Cusa.’<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 345. Hegel followed Plotinus in using space and time to exemplify the externality of the sensible world of the understanding, of *Verstand*.

<sup>8</sup> *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 212

<sup>9</sup> ‘the divine is an object neither of opinion nor of discursive reason,’ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Trans., E.R.Dodds, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, Prop. 123, 109

<sup>10</sup> ‘the reason-world may be equally styled mystical,’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, op. cit., 121

<sup>11</sup> ‘(Plotinus) is the last great philosopher of antiquity, and yet in more than one respect, and notably in the stress which he places on the autonomy of spirit, he is a precursor of modern times.

He is in the West the founder of that speculative mysticism which expresses in intellectual or rather supra-intellectual and ‘negative’ categories the stages and states of union with the Absolute. It is a mysticism wholly philosophical, transposed into a new key which is specifically Plotinian’ Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,’ op. cit., xlii; Chlup points out that ‘Eastern Neoplatonism...(attempted) not to capture all things all at once in their complexity, but rather to analyse this complexity into a network of exactly defined relations.’ Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 20

<sup>12</sup> Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, Continuum, London, 2010, 203. In this section I have only very briefly discussed Hegel’s Neoplatonic use of the concept ‘reason.’ I wanted to introduce it as early as possible, given its importance. I will discuss various other aspects of his reason including his use of language, of concepts and the syllogism later.

## 5. Hegel's Neoplatonic world of God the self

Hegel wrote that 'an individual man is God, and God an individual man.'<sup>1</sup> More precisely, the kingdom of God lies *within* and a process which is both a withdrawal inwards and an 'ascent' to it is required to gain knowledge of it. Plotinus' system provided Hegel with his model for a conjunction of the mystical and the metaphysical, the religious and the philosophical.<sup>2</sup> It is a model for 'strong individuals who reach god by their own internal effort.'<sup>3</sup>

That world within is *created* by thinking

thinking that strikes home within itself, going within itself, spreading out from there and creating its world from within.<sup>4</sup>

Plotinus described it as God giving birth to a universe within himself

The vision has been of God in travail of a beautiful offspring, God engendering a universe within himself in a painless labour<sup>5</sup>

The universal of this world of consciousness<sup>6</sup> develops from the power of a singularity - the Neoplatonists used metaphors of seed and tree to describe it. Plotinus compared it with a tree

The Supreme is the Term of all; it is like the principle and ground of some vast tree of rational life; itself unchanging, it gives reasoned being to the growth into which it enters.<sup>7</sup>

Cusanus compared it with a seed and a tree

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, op. cit., 534

<sup>2</sup> Henry, 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,' op. cit., li

<sup>3</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 261

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 230

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.8.12

<sup>6</sup> 'each of us is an Intellectual Cosmos,' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., 169; '(human nature) enfolds intellectual and sensible nature and encloses all things within itself, so that the ancients were right in calling it a microcosm, or a small world.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), 1440, in *Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance, A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1990, 3-151, III,3,198; 'Outside there is the natural world; inwardly there is our world, where we are,' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I, op. cit., 258; 'the world...of consciousness,' Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 8

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.8.15

For when we take note of a very small grain of mustard and behold its power and might with the eye of our intellect, we find a vestige [of God], so that we are aroused unto marvelling at our God. For although the grain is so small in physical size, nevertheless its power is endless. In this piece of grain there is present (1) a large tree with leaves and branches and (2) many other grains in which, likewise, this same power is present beyond all numbering.<sup>8</sup>

as did Hegel, never missing the opportunity for metaphor, as well as drawing on the One - the wholly simple that contains not-yet existent multiplicity

The entire tree is contained within the seed. Nothing comes forth from the seed that is not in it, and this seed is simple, is a point. ...It is essential to know that there is something wholly simple that contains multiplicity within itself, but in such a way that the multiplicity does not yet exist.

A more important example is the 'I'. When I say 'I', this 'I' is something wholly simple; it is the wholly abstract universal, common to everyone. Yet it is the manifold wealth of the individual's representations, impulses, desires, and the like. Each 'I' is a whole world, and this whole world is contained within this simple point, within the 'I', which has in itself the energy of all that comes forth from it.<sup>9</sup>

The activity, the thinking within this immaterial 'mind'<sup>10</sup> is utterly self-referential - it is the exploration by self of itself.

Thinking is movement within self, but pure reference to self, pure identity with self. ...Thinking is...at the same time also mediation with itself<sup>11</sup>

In exploring itself, the 'I' creates and knows or assimilates its objects. Self-knowledge is knowledge of the whole

I know everything as mine, as 'I', that I grasp every object as a member in the system of what I myself am, in short, that I have in one and the same consciousness myself and the world, that in the world I find myself again,

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De quaerendo Deum* ('On Seeking God'), 1445, in *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 314-330, III, 44

<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, vol. I, op. cit., 50; '(Spirit) seeks to...fulfil and realise its own true nature...just as the seed bears within it the whole nature of the tree and the taste and form of its fruits, so also do the first glimmerings of spirit contain virtually the whole of history,' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 53. Another Neoplatonist, Bergson, whose philosophy influenced some of the most creative artists and writers of the first half of the twentieth century wrote in *Creative Evolution* '...life is tendency, and the essence of a tendency is to develop in the form of a sheaf, creating, by its very growth, divergent directions among which its impetus is divided.' In H. Larrabee, ed. *Selections from Bergson*. New York, 1949, 72.

<sup>10</sup> 'Mind is just this elevation...above the material,' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 179

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 111; '(the soul) can be an object of consciousness to itself. ...(in Neoplatonism) the 'self' which is thus known is not an isolated individual, but contains *in potentia* the whole range of reality. ...to know the self truly is to know it as actually one though potentially all things, and thus as divine,' Dodds' commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 203

and, conversely, in my consciousness have what *is*, what possesses *objectivity*. This unity of the 'I' and the object...constitutes the principle of mind<sup>12</sup>

For Hegel and his fellow Neoplatonists, the completion of the process of emanation and return to the most profound unity entails the fullest consciousness and activity.<sup>13</sup> Given his stated aim to cognise the only object of philosophy - God, Hegel's acknowledgement of what previous Neoplatonists achieved in this regard could not be more significant

the dialectic is none other than the activity or vitality of what thinks itself within itself. The Neoplatonists look upon this connection as exclusively metaphysical, and through it they have come to cognitive knowledge of theology, the unfolding of the mysteries of the divine essence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 165

<sup>13</sup> A.H.Armstrong in Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, William Heinemann, London, 1966-1988, vol. I, xxvii

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 207

## 6. Key elements in the Neoplatonism of Hegel and Plotinus

### 6.1 Plotinus' phenomenology of spirit

Plotinus' austere phenomenology, written more than one thousand five hundred years before Hegel's, is a study of Soul's emanation from and journey back to the philosopher's god, to itself in its own activity - rediscovering itself in the process - and to unity with other Souls in their One true source; a study of consciousness as it thinks outwards and continues to develop in return through its levels or hypostases, energised by desire and recollection.

The second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle is the universe of Spirit, the unity-in-multiplicity of Divine Mind and of all 'minds'. Everything that is in the sensory universe - including 'matter', now immutable - is in this universe, but mutually inclusive, far more alive and eternal.

### 6.2 Movement and rest

Movement that is spiritual, moral, rational and dialectical is the primary life of the *Enneads*. It is a marker of Neoplatonism that this movement is *both* activity and rest. Plotinus wrote of

a movement not spatial but vital, the movement of a single living being whose act is directed to itself, a being which to anything outside is at rest, but is in movement by dint of the inner life it possesses, the eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

Of his second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle (Intellect, Divine Mind, First Thinker and Thought) he wrote

(Intellect) is both at rest and in motion; for it moves around Him [the Good].  
So, then, the universe, too, both moves in its circle and is at rest.<sup>2</sup>

The *greatest* activity and stillness are those of God, the One, which Cusanus excellently illustrated in *De possess<sup>3</sup>* with the metaphor of a spinning top - the faster it rotates, the more it is at rest. Hegel drew on this Neoplatonic relationship between activity and rest when he wrote

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<sup>1</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.4.8

<sup>2</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. II, II.2.3. Plotinus also referred to the 'static activity' of Intellect (II.9.1)

<sup>3</sup> 'God, who is not only maximal motion but also minimal motion (i.e., motion which is most at rest),' Nicholas of Cusa, *De Posses<sup>t</sup>* ('On Actualised-Possibility'), 1460, in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1986, 914-954, 10

Reason in and for itself is eternal and at rest, but it is likewise activity, and its actions are exclusively rational. It produces itself from within itself<sup>4</sup>

### 6.3 A life of creative dynamism

Creation for the Neoplatonists (most importantly, of self) is a by-product of contemplation, of thought thinking itself. Many times Plotinus gave poetic expression to his vitalism. Particularly, given the importance of infinity to Hegel and his fellow Neoplatonists, Plotinus asked

How is that Power present to the universe?

As a One Life.

Consider the life in any living thing; it does not reach only to some fixed point, unable to permeate the entire being; it is omnipresent. If on this again we are asked, How?, we appeal to the character of this power, not subject to quantity but such that though you divide it mentally for ever you still have the same power, infinite to the core...Conceive it as a power of an ever-fresh infinity, a principle unfailling, inexhaustible, at no point giving out, brimming over with its own vitality.<sup>5</sup>

Life apart from God is only a shadow. Hegel often gave the same lyrical expression

The fecundity of the Earth causes life to break forth *everywhere* and in every way<sup>6</sup>

to the same dialectical vitalism

The things and developments of the natural and spiritual world constitute manifold configurations, and endlessly multiform existence<sup>7</sup>

As Beethoven concluded his Ninth Symphony with a paean by Schiller to Neoplatonic unity, Hegel concluded his *Phenomenology of Spirit* with a paean, adapted from Schiller, to Neoplatonic vitalism.<sup>8</sup>

### 6.4 Plotinus' sculptor

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<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 209; Again, drawing on Plotinus' One '(Science exists solely in) the self-movement of the Notion which pulsates within itself but does not move, inwardly vibrates, yet is at rest. It is self-identical, for the differences are tautological; they are differences that are none.' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 100

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.5.12

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 416

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 369. From the notes of one person who attended Hegel's lectures: 'The law of the vitality of things is what activates nature. But this law is only in the inner being of things; in space and time it exists only in an external manner, for nature knows nothing of the law.' Ibid., 384

<sup>8</sup> 'from the chalice of this realm of spirits/foams forth for Him his own infinitude,' Adaptation of Schiller's *Die Freundschaft*, Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 493

But how are you to see into a virtuous Soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.<sup>9</sup>

Neoplatonism, the philosophy of purification, perfection and unification - of self-making and self-knowing - is built on this simile which recurs in the writing (and in the case of Michelangelo, his sculpture!) of the Neoplatonists.<sup>10</sup> In Hegel's philosophy the work of this sculptor of the soul can be traced as a spiritual movement through the *Phenomenology of Spirit* then through the *Science of Logic*, finding completion in Absolute Idea and again as the complete movement of emanation and return through the Trinity of the *Encyclopaedia*. As one gains in (self-)knowledge, one makes and shapes oneself spiritually. For Hegel, we are self-creating as a *species*, and *history* is the mark of Spirit's struggle to know itself. Spirit too, is *Artist*.<sup>11</sup>

the spirit contrives to perceive itself and to know itself as an existent world, and to have itself as its own object. As such, it is like an artist who is impelled to project his own being outside himself and to satisfy himself in his own work.<sup>12</sup>

## 6.5 Emanation and return

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<sup>9</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.6.9

<sup>10</sup> 'For the wise thought as if [along the following line]: a craftsman [who] wants to chisel a statue in stone and [who] has in himself the form of the statue, as an idea, produces – through certain instruments which he moves – the form of the statue in imitation of the idea,' Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II,10,151; 'Finally, there remains within yourself a pathway of seeking God, viz., [the pathway] of removing boundaries. For when in a piece of wood a craftsman seeks the face of a king, he removes all things bounded otherwise than is that face. For through faith's conceiving, he sees in the wood the face that he seeks actually to behold with his eye. For to his eye that face is future—[that face] which, in his intellectual conception, is present to his mind by faith. Therefore, when you conceive God to be something better than can be conceived, you remove all that is bounded and contracted,' Nicholas of Cusa, *De Quaerendo Deum* ('On Seeking God'), 1445, in *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 314-330, V, 49. Of '*The living work of art*' Hegel wrote 'Although each individual knows how to play the part of at least a torch-bearer, one of them comes forward who is the patterned movement, the smooth elaboration and fluent energy of all the participants. He is an inspired and living work of art that matches strength with its beauty; and on him is bestowed, as a reward for his strength, the decoration with which the statue was honoured, *and the honour of being, in place of the god in stone, the highest bodily representation among his people of their essence.*' (my italics) Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 438. The philosophy of Nietzsche was profoundly influenced by Neoplatonism - from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the final 'aphorism' in *The Will to Power* which, beneath the Nietzschean drama, is a synopsis of the *Enneads* - 'Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysms of intoxication. The noblest clay, the most precious marble, man, is kneaded and hewn here, and to the chisel-blows of the Dionysiac world-artist there echoes the cry of the Eleusinian mysteries, "Do you bow low, multitudes? Do you sense the Creator, world?,"' Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, (1872), Trans., Shaun Whiteside, Ed., Michael Tanner, Penguin, London, 1993, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 424

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 101

The *Enneads* are built on a process of emanation from unity, to distinction and the development of multiplicity, to the resolution of that multiplicity in the return to unity. Hegel maximised the number of ways he could explore this process by laying his Neoplatonic reading of the Trinity (to which I will return) over and weaving it into what he stated in the Introduction to his ‘lesser’ *Logic* are the three subdivisions of philosophy

I. Logic: the science of the Idea in and for itself.

II. The Philosophy of Nature: the science of the Idea in its otherness.

III. The Philosophy of Mind: the science of the Idea come back to itself out of that otherness.

In his ‘lesser’ *Logic* he wrote

(The Idea is) an eternal creation, eternal vitality, and eternal spirit...it forever remains reason. The Idea is the dialectic which again makes this mass of understanding and diversity understand its finite nature and the pseudo-independence in its productions, and which brings the diversity back to unity.<sup>13</sup>

in his *Philosophy of Nature*

the eternal divine process is a flowing in two opposite directions which meet and permeate each other in what is simply and solely *one*.<sup>14</sup>

in his *Philosophy of Mind*

the ‘I’ sets itself over against itself, makes itself its own object and returns from this difference, which is, of course, only abstract, not yet concrete, into unity with itself.<sup>15</sup>

Of God he wrote

“God creates the world.” In other words, God posits the world as something that is other, distinct from him (hence something naturally posited); [yet] the world is [also] what continues to belong to God and to be posited by him, so that it has the movement of betaking itself back to him.<sup>16</sup>

of the Absolute

The Absolute is the universal and one idea, which, by an act of ‘judgement’, particularises itself to the system of specific ideas; which after all are constrained by their nature to come back to the one idea where their truth lies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, op. cit., 278

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 26

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 11

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 323

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, op. cit., 275



of Spirit

Spirit's development is a mutual separation and, by means of it, a coming-to-itself. ... Whatever takes place in heaven and on earth takes place only in order to attain this goal, which is spirit's eternal life, its finding itself, its coming to be *for itself*, its coming together with itself. In its forward movement there is an estrangement, a cleavage. But it is spirit's very nature to become estranged from itself in order to find itself once again.<sup>18</sup>

of consciousness

consciousness on its onward path from the immediacy with which it began is led back to absolute knowledge as its innermost *truth*. This last, the ground, is then also that from which the first proceeds<sup>19</sup>

of history

What takes shape is a multiplicity or abundance of determinations, with the unity of course remaining, but determining itself within itself, deepening itself internally. The deepening itself internally is by the same token a going-outside-itself, but one that maintains the determinations in unity.<sup>20</sup>

Even when writing of the 'four elements,' he discussed them using the Neoplatonic model, sustained by the implication of Christ's coming into the world and crucifixion

In the same way that Nature displays itself in the universal elements of Air, Water, Fire, and Earth: Air is the enduring, purely universal, and transparent element; Water, the element that is perpetually sacrificed; Fire, the unity which energises them into opposition while at the same time it perpetually resolves the opposition; lastly, Earth, which is the firm and solid knot of this articulated whole, the *subject* of these elements and of their process, that from which they start and to which they return<sup>21</sup>

Using different concepts, every one of these quotations describes the same Neoplatonic process of emanation and return in the 'world' of consciousness, in the 'world' of the 'I.'

The systematic philosophy that Plotinus presented unsystematically in his fifty-four tractates is a study of spiritual and moral development, of the One and the Good, a logic of divine thought, a philosophy of nature and of 'mind.' Hegel pulled these strands apart and reworked the same Neoplatonic process in each.

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<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 215

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 71

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 266

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 300

He wrote that philosophy is ‘a going-within-itself, a becoming more internally profound’<sup>22</sup> and that the point of departure and goal of philosophy is to know that *truth is only one*, ‘to know it as the source from which all else, all laws of nature, all phenomena of life and consciousness, just issue forth, and to know that they are only reflections of it.’<sup>23</sup> Plotinus’ philosophy, as does Hegel’s, holds that that truth is the whole.<sup>24</sup> While the philosophy of the latter is much more detailed, that detail was, far more often than not, a development on what was already present or implicit in that of the former.

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<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 174

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

<sup>24</sup> ‘The authentic and primal Cosmos is the Being of the Intellectual Principle...(it is) a life living and having intellection as one act within a unity: every part that it gives forth is a whole; all its content is its very own, for there is here no separation of thing from thing, no part standing in isolated existence estranged from the rest, and therefore nowhere is there any wronging of any other, even among contraries. Everywhere one and complete,’ Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., III.2.1

## 7. Hegel conflated the Neoplatonic hypostases

### 7.1 in the philosophy of Plotinus

In his discussion of Plotinus' philosophy in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, having written of nothing other than the One and unity with it, Hegel continued

What is characteristic in Plotinus is his great enthusiasm for the elevation of spirit to the Good and True - to what has being in and for itself. ... The main thing is to raise oneself up to the representation of pure being, for that is the simplifying of the soul through which it is transposed into blissful stillness, because its object too is simple and at rest. ... In general, and according to its principal moments, this content is that what is first is essential unity, is essential being [*Wesen*] as such, as primary. The principle is not things as subsisting, not the apparent multiplicity of existence; on the contrary, it is strictly their unity. ... The defining of the One is what matters most. ... The first being [*Sein*] overflows... Plotinus designates this bringing forth as a going-forth, a procession. ... God or the Good<sup>1</sup> is what engenders... So what is first is what we call the absolute being [*Wesen*]. Understanding, *nous*, or thinking consists then in the fact that by returning to itself the primary being beholds itself; it is a seeing *and* something seen [*ein sehendes Sehen*]. ... These are the main definitions for Plotinus. The first aspect, [that] of *dunamis* or *energeia*, is the positing by means of the idea's returning into itself.<sup>2</sup>

Hegel's fundamental error repeatedly exemplified in the above - among several errors - was to conflate Plotinus' first and second hypostases - the One/the Good with Intellectual-Principle/Intellect/Divine Mind/Being.

Not only did Plotinus hold the One to be beyond the definition, beyond the seeming conceptual clarity so important to Hegel, the main thing for Plotinus, the goal of his philosophy, is for us to raise ourselves *beyond* the unity-in-multiplicity of the second hypostasis (*nous*/Being) and to return to unity with the One - *beyond* that which *creates* to the highest consciousness in that which *generates*. Plotinus wrote

It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it: in order that Being may be brought about, the source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of

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<sup>1</sup> While both Plotinus and Proclus did refer to the One as 'God,' Plotinus also wrote 'We must therefore take the Unity as infinite not in measureless extension or numerable quantity but in fathomless depths of power. Think of The One as Mind or as God, you think too meanly; use all the resources of understanding to conceive this Unity and, again, it is more authentically one than God,' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.6

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 334-337

generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new: this product has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and so an Intellectual-Principle.<sup>3</sup>

Any discussion of God's 'Mind' or our 'mind,' of the activity of thinker, thinking and thought, of seer and seeing (which require a subject and its object - i.e. distinction) *and* of Ideas<sup>4</sup> pertains to the *second* hypostasis - they play no part in the first

Generative of all, The Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time: it is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is.<sup>5</sup>

## 7.2 in the philosophy of Proclus

After his discussion of Plotinus' philosophy, Hegel went on to that of Proclus, of whom he wrote that his main work is 'On Plato's Theology'. He continued

He finds it necessary to show the Many as One and the One as Many – to lead back to unity the forms that the Many assumes.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the person who found it necessary to show the Many as One and the One as Many in the philosophy of Proclus was Hegel. Proclus was utterly consistent with Plotinus on the relationship between the One and the many - for both, the One is *distinct* and 'the many' refers to the unity-in-multiplicity of the second hypostasis, generated by the One.

For *the many* so far as many, and *the one* so far as one are different from each other. And so far as neither is from neither, they have no sympathy with each other.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.2.1

<sup>4</sup> 'What is new (in Plotinus' system)...is the notion of making the 'Ideas' states of being of the Intellect and no longer distinct objects, of bringing the very subject of thought into the intelligible world, of considering the hypostases less as entities than as spiritual attitudes. His theology is a synthesis of cosmogony (world) and psychogony (soul).' Henry, 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,' op. cit., li-lii.

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.3; 'we know the divine Mind within, that which gives Being and all else of that order: but we know, too, that other, know that it is none of these, but a nobler principle than anything we know as Being; fuller and greater; above reason, mind, and feeling; conferring these powers, not to be confounded with them.' Ibid., V.3.14

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 341-342. In the footnote, the editor wrote 'The dialectic of the One and the Many is its (*The Elements of Theology*) opening theme: "Prop. 1. Every manifold in some way participates in unity"...' Proclus, as I show, was absolutely clear on this point. The unity to which he was referring in Prop. 1 was not that of the One but the unity-in-multiplicity of the second hypostasis. Not only does the editor quote Prop. 5 'Every manifold is posterior to the One,' Prop. 4, which he failed to quote is 'All that is unified is other than the One itself.'

<sup>7</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, Trans., Thomas Taylor, 1816, The Prometheus Trust, Frome, 1995, Bk. II, Ch. I

*the one* itself will not be different from itself; for it would be many and not one. Nor will it be the same with itself. For this thing which is same is in another, and same is not *the one itself*. For *the one* is simply one, because it is not many.<sup>8</sup>

*The one* therefore is exempt from the many. The many however subsist primarily in the summit of the first intellectual Gods, and in *the intelligible place of survey*, as we are taught in the second hypothesis. *The one*, therefore, entirely transcends an order of this kind, and is the cause of it.<sup>9</sup>

Further, in both *On the Theology of Plato* and in his *Elements of Theology*, Proclus' writing again repeatedly exposed Hegel's fundamental error in his discussion of Plotinus' philosophy by restating Plotinus' position regarding the relationship between the One and being

there is a certain one prior to being, which gives subsistence to being, and is primarily the cause of it; since that which is prior to it is beyond union, and is a cause without habitude with respect to all things, and imparticipable, being exempt from all things.<sup>10</sup>

the First Principle...has unity only, which implies that it transcends Being<sup>11</sup>

Hegel continued his conflation of the first and second hypostases into his discussion of Proclus' triad in the second hypostasis. Hegel wrote 'As for the definition of the triad, its three moments are the One, the Infinite, and the Limit.' Again, the One is distinct from this triad. Proclus wrote

Hence it is necessary to arrange *the one* prior to *the one being*, (my italics) and to suspend the one being from that which is one alone. For if *the one* and the one being were the same, and it made no difference to say one and being (since if they differed, *the one* would again be changed from the one being,) if therefore *the one* differs in no respect from the one being, all things will be one, and there will not be multitude in beings, nor will it be possible to denominate things, lest there should be two things, the thing and the name.<sup>12</sup>

### 7.3 and in his own philosophy

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Bk II, Ch. XII. Of Proclus' *The Elements of Theology*, Helmig and Steel wrote 'The work is a concatenated demonstration of 217 propositions, which may be divided into two halves: the first 112 propositions establish the One, unity without any multiplicity, as the ultimate cause of reality...', Christoph Helmig, Carlos Steel entry, 'Proclus,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/proclus/>

<sup>10</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. III

<sup>11</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Trans. E.R. Dodds, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, Prop. 115. Redding noted 'Proclus...wanted to say that the One couldn't be thought of as a type of knowable object, couldn't even be thought of as having being.' University of Sydney tutorial 17.09.10

<sup>12</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. XX. This 'one being' became the Divine Mind and Being that creates being of Cusanus and Hegel. More on this later.

Hegel's conflation of the hypostases in his discussion of the philosophies of Plotinus and Proclus is repeated in his own system which he then structured under a Neoplatonic use of the Christian Trinity. For maximum philosophical and creative potential, Hegel collapsed the first hypostasis down into the second - he made Being the first 'definition' of the Absolute<sup>13</sup> and used 'One', 'God,' 'Being' and 'Mind' interchangeably. He wrote in his *Encyclopaedia Logic* 'the One forms the presupposition of the Many: and in the thought of the One is implied that it explicitly make itself Many.'<sup>14</sup>

Where Proclus sought to bridge a perceived gap between the transcendent, unparticipated One and the beings it generated by using participated henads, three of the most important uses of Christianity to Hegel (in addition to its poetic potential as metaphor and allegory) were that he both solved this problem, with Christ as *God's* participation in the world - the reverse of the world participating in its creator - and, in the process had his first necessary negation and with Christ's death and resurrection, *its* negation.<sup>15</sup>

Hegel also brought the third hypostasis Soul and its product the material world *up* into this realm. As if in response to Plotinus asking

what reflection of that world could be conceived more beautiful than this of ours? What fire could be a nobler reflection of the fire there than the fire we know here? Or what other earth than this could have been modelled after that earth? And what globe more minutely perfect than this, or more

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<sup>13</sup> 'If we enunciate Being as a predicate of the Absolute, we get the first definition of the latter. The Absolute is Being.' Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 125. Inwood wrote that Cusanus was the first to use 'Absolute' as a noun (in *De docta ignorantia*), Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, 27. Plotinus used 'Absolute' repeatedly as a noun: 'Certainly this Absolute is none of the things of which it is the source,' III.8.10 (in the tractate 'Nature, Contemplation, and the One,' translated by Creuzer in 1805); 'a defined One would not be the One-Absolute: the absolute is prior to the definite.' V.3.12; 'And how does the secondarily good (the imaged Good) derive from The Good, the Absolute? What does it hold from the Absolute Good to entitle it to the name?' V.3.16, Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit. Inwood, like so many academics - particularly in philosophy - would benefit in so many ways from studying the writing of Plotinus, a philosopher every bit the equal of and as important as Plato and Aristotle (Hegel described Alexandrian Neoplatonism as 'the consummation of Greek philosophy' [Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 202]) - but that would mean confronting his careerism and ideological prejudice - both challenges beyond academic lovers of wisdom and truth.

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 142; 'Early Christian theologians, for example, the fourth century thinker Marius Victorinus, "telescoped" the first two hypostases (the One and Intellect), combining them in the divine mind. According to Blumenthal, Plotinus himself occasionally telescoped the second and third hypostases (Intellect and World Soul). Later Neoplatonic thinkers, including Cusanus and Bruno, telescoped all three hypostases. This tendency to telescope the original Plotinian hypostases seems to have carried through to Kant's conception of the intuitive understanding.', Charles, O. Nussbaum, *The Musical Representation, Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, 348-349; 'Hegel's conception of the Trinity is more like that of the pagan Neoplatonists than their early Christian appropriators such as Victorinus and Augustine. For Hegel, "the Father" is simply the indeterminate universality of Plotinus' "one" which by necessity unfolds into *nous*, which is identified with "the Son". As has been pointed out, Victorinus in the first systematic treatment of the Trinity doctrine, "telescopes" Plotinus' first two hypostases by making "nous" or "logos" consubstantial in "The Father".' Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 138, note. Cusanus also conflated the three hypostases. Hence his brilliant pronouncements on the world in *De docta ignorantia* were based in metaphysics not science.

<sup>15</sup> 'God...is the foundation, the beginning point, the point of departure, though at the same time it is simply the abiding unity and not a mere soil out of which the distinctions grow. Instead all distinctions remain enclosed within this universal.' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 374; '(God distinguishes) himself from himself while [remaining] at the same time the eternal sublation of the distinction.' *Ibid.*, vol. III, 278

admirably ordered in its course, could have been conceived in the image of the self-centred circling of the World of Intelligibles?<sup>16</sup>

Hegel argued that

The sensible in general has as its fundamental characteristic externality, the being of things outside each other. Space-time is the externality in which objects are side by side, mutually external, and successive. The sensible mode of consideration is thus accustomed to have before it distinct things that are outside one another. Its basis is that distinctions remain explicit and external. In reason this is not the case.<sup>17</sup>

In the realm of reason, of Neoplatonic Life, 'the perfect life, the true, real life'<sup>18</sup> is unity-in-multiplicity where

the simple substance of Life is the splitting-up of itself into shapes and at the same time the dissolution of these existent differences; and the dissolution of the splitting-up is just as much a splitting up and a forming of members. With this, the two sides of the whole movement which before were distinguished, viz. the passive separatedness of the shapes in the general medium of independence, and the process of Life, collapse into one another.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., II.9.4.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 280

<sup>18</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. I, I.4.3

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 108; '...we must think of it as a quiet, unwavering motion; containing all things and being all things, it is a multiple but at once indivisible and comporting difference.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.5

## 8. Subject and object

### 8.1 What is Neoplatonic thinking?

It is the divine activity of a 'subject' generated from unity dialectically engaging with its other, its 'object'. As a result of what develops from that first distinction, (self-)knowledge is finally attained and spiritual reunion achieved. In Hegel's philosophy, subject comes to unite with its objects in the consciousness of the individual just as self comes to unite with its others in the social cultus.

Plotinus defined thinking as a soul's

kind of seeking its substance and its self and what made it, and...in turning back in its contemplation and recognising itself it is at that point rightly and properly Intellect.<sup>1</sup>

For Hegel

Thought's occupation with itself is a self-producing...Thought brings itself forth, and what it produces in this way is philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

### 8.2 In knowing its objects, subject knows itself

Plotinus wrote that self-intellection begins with the *need* for self-knowledge and asks whether the subject can know its objects without knowing itself, arguing that self and content must be simultaneously present

it is obvious that the Intellectual-Principle must have knowledge of the Intellectual objects. Now, can it know those objects alone or must it not simultaneously know itself, the being whose function it is to know just those things? Can it have self-knowledge in the sense (dismissed above as inadequate) of knowing its content while it ignores itself? Can it be aware of knowing its members and yet remain in ignorance of its own knowing self? Self and content must be simultaneously present<sup>3</sup>

He emphasised that the second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle/Intellect/Divine Mind - Hegel's 'reason-world' - and the objects themselves are all identical activity comprising knower, knowing and known, seer, seeing and seen.

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<sup>1</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H. Armstrong, op. cit., vol. VII, VI.7.37

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 45

<sup>3</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.1



the Intellectual-Principle, its exercise of intellection, and the object of intellection all are identical. Given its intellection identical with intellectual object and the object identical with the Principle itself, it cannot but have self-knowledge: its intellection operates by the intellectual act, which is itself, upon the intellectual object, which similarly is itself. It possesses self-knowing, thus, on every count; the act is itself; and the object, seen in that act-self, is itself.<sup>4</sup>

### 8.3 How is the subject to know itself? Distinction, desire and possession

For Plotinus, Intellect requires distinction *within itself* in order that there be/that it have knowledge

Either we must exhibit the self-knowing of an uncompounded being - and show how that is possible - or abandon the belief that any being can possess veritable self-cognition.<sup>5</sup>

He notes the ‘strange phenomenon’ of a distinction in one self but continues

Unless there is something beyond bare unity, there can be no vision: vision must converge with a visible object. ...in so far as there is action, there is diversity. If there be no distinctions, what is there to do, what direction in which to move? An agent must either act upon the extern or be a multiple and so able to act upon itself: making no advance towards anything other than itself, it is motionless, and where it could know only blank fixity it can know nothing.<sup>6</sup>

Not only must there be diversity but that diversity must be in identity as well

The intellective power, therefore, when occupied with the intellectual act, must be in a state of duality, whether one of the two elements stand actually outside or both lie within: the intellectual act will always comport diversity as well as the necessary identity<sup>7</sup>

In describing Hegel’s method, Magee unintentionally summarised the Neoplatonic position

when the subject wishes to know itself, it must split itself into a subjective side, which knows, and an objective side, which is known.<sup>8</sup>

Fuelled by recollection, desire by the subject (and Soul) to unite with its object (and source) motivates subject (and Soul) in its passage through multiplicity to that union whereby subject

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., V.3.5

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., V.3.1

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., V.3.10

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 69-70

dissolves object within itself.<sup>9</sup> Hegel expressed the complex process from distinction to unity in the closing words of his *Philosophy of Mind* in a quotation from the *Metaphysics*

thought...becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is *active* when it *possesses* this object.<sup>10</sup>

## 8.4 Hegel's application of this Neoplatonic distinction

### 8.4.1 consciousness and its other, self-consciousness

This is the distinction between 'me' and 'myself'

Consciousness essentially involves my being *for myself*, my being *object* to myself. ...this absolutely primal division, the distinction of me from myself<sup>11</sup>

Consciousness develops into self-consciousness which then has consciousness for its object. This is the subject of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which consciousness undergoes development through stages towards becoming aware of its 'essence,' attaining 'absolute knowing.'

what consciousness examines is its own self...For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself<sup>12</sup>

### 8.4.2 The 'I' and its other, 'Not-I'

The 'I' distinguishes itself from itself, becoming its opposite. Self-consciousness confronts itself as another 'I.' Hegel wrote

I am aware of the object as mine; and thus in it I am aware of me. The formula of self-consciousness is I = I ...as it is its own object, there is strictly speaking no object, because there is no distinction between it and the object.<sup>13</sup>

Plotinus addressed this problem of identifying an object (and a world) in the 'I,' long before Hegel

Then, again, in the assertion 'I am this particular thing', either the 'particular thing' is distinct from the assertor - and there is a false statement

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<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 166

<sup>10</sup> *Metaphysics* xii, 7, 1072b in Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 315

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 178

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 54

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 165

- or it is included within it, and, at once, multiplicity is asserted: otherwise the assertion is 'I am what I am', or 'I am I'.

If it be no more than a simple duality able to say 'I and that other phase', there is already multiplicity, for there is distinction and ground of distinction, there is number with all its train of separate things.<sup>14</sup>

### 8.4.3 God and his other, Christ

In order to fully know himself, God must disembody himself through Christ's appearance in the world. God's revelation is the first negation in the process of self-knowing. His reunion with himself in his other through Christ's death and resurrection is the negation of that.

God has revealed that his nature consists in having a Son, i.e. in making a distinction within himself, making himself finite, but in his difference remaining in communion with himself<sup>15</sup>

Magee, to his credit and very rare for an academic, argues that Hegel was an Hermetic thinker and that Jakob Böhme was a crucial influence on Hegel. He wrote that the notion of a process of development and actualisation in God is perhaps the most significant point of influence on Hegel by Böhme

the 'other' is necessary for God's self-consciousness. Without self-consciousness God would not be God, for His knowledge would be incomplete.<sup>16</sup>

But there are errors and points of contention in Magee's forceful argument that strangely discounts any consideration of the influence of Neoplatonism on Hegel or the relationship between Hermeticism and Neoplatonism. I will address Magee's argument in detail later but discuss a couple of the more salient points here.

He wrote that two of the doctrines of the *Hermetica* that became enduring features of the Hermetic tradition are 'God requires creation in order to be God' and 'God is in some sense "completed" or has a need fulfilled through man's contemplation of Him.'<sup>17</sup> Not only did I find neither in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, I found the *opposite* in them

in the all there is nothing that he is not...For god is all.<sup>18</sup>

Then, so great and good was he that he wanted there to be another to admire the one he had made from himself, and straightaway he made mankind, imitator of his reason and attentiveness. God's will is itself perfect

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<sup>14</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.10

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 17

<sup>16</sup> Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2001, 38

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>18</sup> *Hermetica*, Trans., Brian, P. Copenhaver, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000, XII, 23

achievement since willing and achievement are complete for him at one and the same moment of time.<sup>19</sup>

Nothing in this situation is stable, nothing fixed, nothing immobile among things that come to be in heaven and earth: the lone exception is god, and rightly he alone, for he is whole, full and perfect in himself and by himself and about himself.<sup>20</sup>

he wants nothing who is himself all things or in whom all things are. Rather let us worship him by giving thanks, for god finds mortal gratitude to be the best incense.<sup>21</sup>

### Böhme's words

No thing may be revealed to itself without contrariety. If it has no thing that resists it, it always goes out from itself and does not go into itself again. If it does not go into itself again, as into that out of which it originally came, it knows nothing of its cause.<sup>22</sup>

are essentially the same as of those of Plotinus, quoted above. Magee shows no awareness of or interest in this nor does he consider even the possibility of the influence of Neoplatonism on Böhme and Hegel.

#### 8.4.4 'Mind' and its other, itself

'Mind' is a distinguishing of itself from itself on the Neoplatonic model of knower, knowing and known

mind as such, is Reason which sunders itself, on the one hand, into pure infinite form, into a limitless Knowing, and, on the other hand, into the object that is identical with that Knowing.<sup>23</sup>

'Mind' is only actual through the subject seeing in its object what it lacks, what is essential to it and overcoming its Other, thereby making explicit the implicit identity of subject and object

this relation to the Other is, for mind, not merely possible but necessary, because it is through the Other and by the triumph over it, that mind comes to authenticate itself and to be in fact what it ought to be according to its

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<sup>19</sup> *Asclepius*, Ibid., 8

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), 'The Seventh Treatise/The Precious Gate/On Divine Contemplation (1620)' in *The Way to Christ* (1624), Trans., Peter Erb, Paulist Press, New York, 1978, 196

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 179

Notion...The Other, the negative, contradiction, disunity, therefore also belongs to the nature of mind.<sup>24</sup>

#### 8.4.5 being and its other, nothing

In his *Science of Logic* Hegel utilised all his skill as a prose poet, arguing that being and nothing comprise the first relationship in all that is to develop from there, and that they are reconciled by becoming in determinate being.

Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure *being*.<sup>25</sup>

Theorising on this first dialectical relationship in Intellect runs right through the Neoplatonic tradition. After considering what first emanates from the One, Plotinus wrote

We may take it as proved that the emanation of the Transcendent must be a Not-One, something other than pure unity<sup>26</sup>

Proclus showed a subtlety equal to Hegel in his discussion of being, non-being and the negation of being

with respect to non-being itself, with which there is also a negation of beings, at one time considering it as beyond being, we say that it is the cause and the supplier of beings; but at another time we evince that it is equivalent to being; just as I think...that non-being is in no respect less, if it be lawful so to speak, than being<sup>27</sup>

Cusanus likewise when writing about the relation between creation, being and nothing in *De docta ignorantia*

Who, then, can understand created being by conjoining, in created being, the absolute necessity from which it derives and the contingency without which it does not exist? For it seems that the creation, which is neither God nor nothing, is, as it were, after God and before nothing and in between God and nothing—as one of the sages says: “God is the opposition to nothing by the mediation of being.” Nevertheless, [the creation] cannot be composed of being and not-being. Therefore, it seems neither to be (since it descends from being) nor not to be (since it is before nothing) nor to be a composite of being and nothing.<sup>28</sup>

and again between Being, being and not-being in *De possess*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 82

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.15

<sup>27</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. II, Ch. V

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II,2,100

So, in order that I may now tell you the things you asked me concerning negation, let us take the negation which seems to be the first of all negations: viz., “not-being.” Doesn't this negation both presuppose and deny?

...For through the negation [“not-being”] you see—by a simple intuition from which you exclude everything subsequent to not-being—that the presupposed [being], which precedes not-being, is the eternal being itself of all being.<sup>29</sup>

Neoplatonic negation, not the Christian Trinity, is the engine of a process of self-knowing both philosophical and religious that is generated from unity, that develops creatively in multiplicity and as a result of that development returns to unity, to the greatest activity in the greatest stillness of consciousness. This development in Intellect, in Mind, in the ‘reason-world’ begins with a necessary first distinction and dialectical relationship between two elements - consciousness/self-consciousness, ‘I’/‘Not-I,’ God/Christ, Mind/itself, being/nothing, and irrespective of the terminology used to analyse that process, follows the Neoplatonic model.

### 8.5 Hegel’s recognitive theory of Spirit and his Neoplatonic cultus

Hegel’s recognitive theory is the extension from and culmination of the process that takes place between subject and its object *within* the consciousness of an individual to what takes place between subject and object *externally*, between *individuals* in society. The end-point of divine unity in the former finds its fullest manifestation in the latter as a collective cultus.

The *Enneads* addresses not only the return to unity of one soul but the return to the unity-in-diversity of *all* souls which Plotinus believed we always are. He maintained that we are one and have the One God within us.

The Neoplatonic focus on self and the goal of unity to be found between two elements of self (self-consciousness and now, self-consciousness in its otherness) is clear in Hegel’s theory

*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. ...A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness (my italics) become explicit for it.*<sup>30</sup>

Redding set out Hegel’s recognitive theory as Hegel wished it to be understood

from X’s particular perspective, Y is presented as an objective Subject-Object, that is, an objective being with intentionality. Because X can see its own intentional desire reflected back to it in Y’s action, it can grasp *itself* as the subject of that intention. But it can only recognise Y.’s behaviour as intentional because that behaviour is directed toward an *object*, and X itself *is* that object. So X.’s recognition of Y’s behaviour as intentional, a

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<sup>29</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De Possess* (‘On Actualised-Possibility’), op. cit., 66-67

<sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 110

recognition that is a precondition for grasping its own subjectivity, also implies that X must grasp its own *objectivity*.<sup>31</sup>

But Redding unintentionally points to the basis of Hegel's argument - that relationships between subject-objects function Neoplatonically. Redding did this by stating that for Hegel, the concepts of recognition and spirit are linked and by sandwiching his discussion between references to Neoplatonic speculative reason (Hegel's *Vernunft*), to Cusanus' Neoplatonic *coincidentia oppositorum*, to Neoplatonic perspectivism and to the Neoplatonic interest in the relation between finite and infinite - the finite being the individual subject and the infinite being Plotinus' unity-in-diversity of perspectival souls - Hegel's cultus - thus, an infinite unity-in-diversity of finite subject-objects

Here again we encounter Hegel's own version of the Cusan 'identity of opposites'...the 'contradiction' works here at the level of the 'indexicality,' 'subjectivity,' or 'point of view' from which the intentions are held, not at the level of any propositional *content*: it arises when an intention is common to subjects facing each other from *opposed points of view*. ...It is thereby that each Subject-Object becomes self-conscious of itself *as* Subject-Object, or, to use the Cusan term, as a 'finite-infinite.'<sup>32</sup>

Redding quoted Hegel's well-known description in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* of what comprises his cultus

the experience of what Spirit is - this absolute substance which is *the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses* (my italics) which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is "We" and 'We' that is 'I'<sup>33</sup>

and continues his discussion on the progression from subject to subjects-objects by employing the Plotinian tropes of mirror and seeing,<sup>34</sup> later used by Eckhart (quoted by Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.<sup>35</sup>) and Cusanus in *De visione Dei*

The problem of the self-mirroring mirror or the self-seeing eye is overcome by postulating a structure engaging two Subject-Objects in which each is

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<sup>31</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 112

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 111-112; 'The ability to recognise the self in the other clearly includes a hermeneutic dimension: one must be able to recognise the other as an objective but intentional being, a being who is *in* one's world but in it as a being like oneself with recognisable beliefs and desires *about* that world. That is, one has to recognise the other not only as a being within one's perspectively disclosed world but also as at the apex of another world-disclosing perspective.' Ibid., 100

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 110

<sup>34</sup> Plotinus wrote of the relationship between subject and object 'In the pure Intellectual...the vision and the envisioned are a unity; the seen is as the seeing and seeing as seen.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.8

<sup>35</sup> 'The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one and the same. In righteousness I am weighed in God and he in me. If God did not exist nor would I; if I did not exist nor would he.' In Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 347-348

simultaneously ‘mirror and eye.’ And this act, at the same time, furnishes that ‘turning point’ of nature into spirit<sup>36</sup>

## 8.6 God loves himself in his collective other

Hegel wrote

(In saying that God is love) the consciousness of the One is to be had only in the consciousness of the other. God is conscious of himself, as Goethe says, only in the other, in absolute externalisation.<sup>37</sup>

By distinguishing himself from himself, the God of the consummate religion Christianity makes himself an object for himself. Infinite spirit reveals itself to finite humans through Christ who is both infinite and finite. With Christ’s death and God’s return to self, the consciousness of the many individuals in the community is transfigured in a cultus of Spirit, embodying the unity of infinite and finite in the world and symbolising the reconciliation of God with humanity. Thus the kingdom of Spirit is established on earth and the concept of religion is brought to completion.

Strip away the Christian terminology and the pattern for God and individuals is the same. There is the necessity of distinction - for God, by his diremption in the world, for individuals, another individual in a society of individuals. The goal of the process is not the ‘reconciliation’ of one with another but the *completion* of one self in another and, taken to the fullest extent, with others in a cultus - in that other and those others I behold myself.<sup>38</sup> The content of this completion, this unification, is Plotinus’ Absolute

the content of the subjectivity which reconciles itself with itself in another is here the Absolute itself: the Spirit which only in another spirit is the knowing and willing of itself as the Absolute and has the satisfaction of this knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

Of Hegel’s words, which culminate in overt Neoplatonism

This other, because it likewise exists outside itself, has its self-consciousness only in me, and both the other and I are only this consciousness of being-outside-ourselves and of our identity; we are only this intuition, feeling, and knowledge of our unity.<sup>40</sup>

Redding wrote

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<sup>36</sup> Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 114

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 193

<sup>38</sup> ‘The process is a battle. I cannot be aware of me as myself in another individual, so long as I see in that other an other and an immediate existence: and I am consequently bent upon the suppression of this immediacy of his.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 171. The aggressive language Hegel employs to describe this process is not Neoplatonic - it most probably is sourced in the writing of Böhme. I see it as a means for Hegel of creatively flavouring the broth of his Neoplatonic process just as he used the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ repeatedly to the same effect.

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, op. cit., 540

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 276



Hegel seems to be saying that the modern God only exists in a particular form of interaction in modern society.<sup>41</sup>

His words regarding Nietzsche, whose philosophy was also profoundly influenced by Neoplatonism point, though yet again with a total absence of development, to the correct source

This idea of living individuals all caught up in a network of relationships with each other looks like a dynamic version of Leibniz's monadology and this goes back to Neoplatonism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Redding, from slide for lecture 9, 'German Philosophy: Leibniz to Nietzsche,' the University of Sydney 2010

<sup>42</sup> Redding in his lecture at the University of Sydney, 18.10.10. Redding did not expand on this assertion.

## 9. Hegel's cognition of God

Hegel wrote that, contrary to the view of the church and the Enlightenment that we can know neither God nor truth, not only *can* we know God and truth, to do so is our highest duty

we should *know* God *cognitively*, God's nature and essence, and should esteem this cognition above all else.<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy for Hegel is the cognition of what flows from God, of His nature in its manifestation and development. Divine cognition is the knowledge of what an object's determinations are, of

what its content is, so that our knowing is a fulfilled and verified knowledge in which we are aware of the necessary connectedness of these determinations.<sup>2</sup>

Cognition is 'a judging or dividing, a self-distinguishing *within oneself* (my italics).'<sup>3</sup> Truth for Hegel and the Neoplatonists is the identity of thinking or knowing with its object. Plotinus' words, that truth occurs in the coalescence of seeing subject with seen object, in the identity of object known with the knowing act or agent<sup>4</sup> are repeated in those of Hegel

(Kant's disparaging statement that truth is) the agreement of cognition with its object (is) a definition of great, indeed of supreme, value.<sup>5</sup>

### 9.1 What is cognised?

It would seem that there is an unbridgeable difference between Plotinus and Proclus on the one hand and Hegel on the other with regard to what can be known. For Plotinus and Proclus the One is beyond knowledge and the second hypostasis is the realm of true knowledge. Hegel argued that God *can* and must be cognised.

But the words of Plotinus describing Intellectual-Principle could be Hegel's describing his 'reason-world'

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 88

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 162

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., vol. III, 301

<sup>4</sup> '(In perfect self-knowing) the object known must be identical with the knowing act (or agent), the Intellectual-Principle, therefore, identical with the Intellectual Realm. And in fact, if this identity does not exist, neither does truth... Truth cannot apply to something conflicting with itself; what it affirms it must also be.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.5

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 593

(it is) a multiplicity striving towards unity; that is to say, a One-that-is-many.<sup>6</sup>

As I have argued earlier, Hegel's incorrect conflation of the hypostases in his discussion of the philosophies of both Plotinus and Proclus point to what he did with the hypostases in his own philosophy - conflating them, giving a One/God/Mind/Being, and replacing them in his 'reason-world' with his Neoplatonic version of the Christian Trinity.

Plotinus and Proclus themselves blurred the division between the first two hypostases and laid the ground for the conflation of them in their discussion of knowledge in relation to priors and their sequels. Plotinus wrote of the One

We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it; we hold it not so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. ...we are, in fact, speaking of it in the light of its sequels; unable to state it, we may still possess it.<sup>7</sup>

Proclus wrote similarly in his *Elements of Theology*

All that is divine is itself ineffable and unknowable by any secondary being because of its supra-existential unity, but it may be apprehended and known from the existents which participate it: wherefore only the First Principle is completely unknowable, as being unparticipated.<sup>8</sup>

## 9.2 God is a Neoplatonic process

The Neoplatonic Supreme thinks himself. He is the activity, the *process* of the Neoplatonic knowledge of self, of subject contemplating its object. For Plotinus, the second hypostasis is both thought (thinking being) and the objects created in that activity. Thought is the things it knows - knowledge is undifferentiated from its objects

The Intellectual-Principle...is the things it knows...it resides with its objects, identical with them, making a unity with them; knowledge of the immaterial is universally identical with its objects.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel added the philosophical and prose-poetic device of a Christian patina to his Neoplatonism - now God as Being, as *actus purus*, eternally constituted distinctions within Himself *and took them back into himself*, not Intellectual-Principle. Christ perfectly justified and symbolised differentiation within sameness.

Christian theology...conceives of God, that is, of Truth, as spirit and contemplates this, not as something quiescent, something abiding in empty

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<sup>6</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.15

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., V.3.14

<sup>8</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., Prop. 123

<sup>9</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.4.2

identicalness but as something which necessarily enters into the process of distinguishing itself from itself, of positing its Other, and which comes to itself only through this Other, and by positively overcoming it - not by abandoning it.<sup>10</sup>

### 9.3 Plotinus and Cusanus: impressions become concepts

Neoplatonism was never a fixed system of belief. Others after Plotinus, such as Proclus and Cusanus, developed and contributed to what he had first set out in his *Enneads*. The cognition of God is an example of this. For Plotinus, Intellectual-Principle and Soul (Universal Soul) are the knowing hypostases. Intellectual-Principle, *in its very effort* to unite with the One, creates and accumulates a multiplicity of successive ‘impressions.’ In clarifying and knowing that multiplicity of ‘impressions,’ it knows the One

Thus the Intellectual-Principle, in the act of knowing the Transcendent, is a manifold. It knows the Transcendent in very essence but, with all its effort to grasp that prior as a pure unity, it goes forth amassing successive impressions, so that, to it, the object becomes multiple: thus in its outgoing to its object it is not (fully realised) Intellectual-Principle; it is an eye that has not yet seen; in its return it is an eye possessed of the multiplicity which it has itself conferred: it sought something of which it found the vague presentment within itself; it returned with something else, the manifold quality with which it has of its own act invested the simplex.

If it had not possessed a previous impression of the Transcendent it could never have grasped it, but this impression, originally of unity, becomes an impression of multiplicity; and the Intellectual-Principle in taking cognisance of that multiplicity knows the Transcendent and so is realised as an eye possessed of its vision.<sup>11</sup>

Inspired by recollection of and desire to know and reunite with its source, Intellectual-Principle creates a subject/object distinction, then that which is distinguished develops into a unity-in-multiplicity. Through knowing (‘taking cognisance of’) that multiplicity, Intellectual-Principle comes to know the Transcendent (as the final step) *intuitively* - ‘realised as an eye possessed of its vision.’ Just as God as Spirit is only fully realised for Hegel in the cultus, Intellectual-Principle is only fully realised when it has completed *its* process.

It is now Intellectual-Principle since it actually holds its object, and holds it by the act of intellection: before, it was no more than a tendency, an eye blank of impression: it was in motion towards the transcendental; now that it has attained, it has become Intellectual-Principle<sup>12</sup>

Here, in the philosophy of Plotinus, further developed and clarified by Cusanus in this crucial area, is the basis for Hegel’s vaunted conceptual development - the conceptual development that Hegel

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<sup>10</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 12

<sup>11</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.11

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

believed enables us to cognise God. Cusanus wrote that our ‘minds’ are images of God’s ‘mind’ and as He creates the world, our ‘minds’ create *conceptually*

It must be the case that surmises originate from our minds, even as the real world originates from Infinite Divine Reason. For when, as best it can, the human mind (which is a lofty likeness of God) partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities, [which are made] in the likeness of real entities. Consequently, the human mind is the form of a surmised [rational] world, just as the Divine Mind is the Form of the real world.<sup>13</sup>

just as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of conceptual beings..And so, man has an intellect that is a likeness of the Divine Intellect, with respect to creating.<sup>14</sup>

The Divine Mind’s Conceiving is a producing of things; our mind’s conceiving is a conceptualising of things. ...If all things are present in the Divine Mind as in their precise and proper Truth, then all things are present in our mind as in an image, or a likeness, of their proper Truth. That is, they are present conceptually, *for knowledge comes about on the basis of [conceptual] likeness* (my italics).<sup>15</sup>

For Hegel, the cognition, expressed conceptually, of God’s activity as He eternally resolves self-generated contradictions, entails the cognition of God. Hegel believed that God as *process* - God himself - was set out in his *Science of Logic*

God...is absolute activity, creative energy, and his activity is to posit himself in contradiction, but eternally to resolve and reconcile this contradiction: God himself is the resolving of these contradictions.<sup>16</sup>

This God is Neoplatonic, not Christian.

#### 9.4 Hegel’s Intuition

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* (‘On Speculations’), 1441-2, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations*, Vol. 2, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2000, 163-257, 5, 164

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* (‘On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses’), 1458, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations: Six Latin Texts Translated into English*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1998, 792-827, 7, 794

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’), 1450, in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 531-589, 72, 543

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 271

Hegel mocked Romantic intuition<sup>17</sup> and Schelling's black cows of the Absolute.<sup>18</sup> He wrote

If...the True exists only in what, or better *as* what, is sometimes called intuition, sometimes immediate knowledge of the Absolute, religion or being...then what is required in the exposition of philosophy is, from this view-point, rather the opposite of the form of the Notion. For the Absolute is not supposed to be comprehended, it is to be felt and intuited<sup>19</sup>

Yet not only, as Engels noted, did Hegel have absolutely nothing to say about his *own* Absolute Idea,<sup>20</sup> the philosophy of this man of Science, of the concrete, of the concept, of fully articulated cognition is built no less on Neoplatonism, the pornography of academic philosophers, than were Romanticism and Schelling's philosophy.

Hegel wrote of the immediate 'knowledge' of God

'We know God immediately; this knowledge is a revelation within us.' That is an important principle to which we must essentially hold fast. ...Plato's ancient saying is apropos here: that we learn nothing, but only recollect something that we originally bear within ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

and wrote that thinking

is pure unity with itself...(and) can also be called pure *intuition*...such that between the subject and object there is no [difference] and, properly speaking, subject and object are not yet present...the content is only the universal itself.<sup>22</sup>

This universal of thinking where there is not yet a distinction between subject and object, where the subject has not yet *created* its object is precisely the original unity of Plotinus which Hegel noted in his discussion of the former's philosophy

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<sup>17</sup> 'Such minds, when they give themselves up to the uncontrolled ferment of [the divine] substance, imagine that, by drawing a veil over self-consciousness and surrendering understanding they become the beloved of God to whom He gives His wisdom in sleep; and hence what they in fact receive, and bring forth to birth in their sleep, is nothing but dreams.' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 6

<sup>18</sup> 'To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfilment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black - this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity.' Ibid., 9

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>20</sup> 'In his *Logic*, he can make this end a beginning again, since here the point of the conclusion, the absolute idea — which is only absolute insofar as he has absolutely nothing to say about it - "alienates", that is, transforms, itself into nature and comes to itself again later in the mind, that is, in thought and in history.', Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Part I: Hegel, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch01.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 412

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., vol. III, 190. 'pure thinking...is...absolute power...the blissful intuition of absolute truth.', Hegel in Peter C. Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F.Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2007, 227

What gets stressed...is the situating of oneself in the central point, in pure intuition or pure thinking, in spirit's pure unity with itself...So one begins here by placing oneself at this standpoint and by awakening it inwardly as a rapture<sup>23</sup>

Both Plotinus and Hegel made the same distinction between 'mindless' (sensuous consciousness) and 'mindful' (thinking religiously) intuition. Where Plotinus wrote

we are *continuously intuitive* (my italics) but we are not unbrokenly aware: the reason is that the recipient in us receives from both sides, absorbing not merely intellections but also sense-perceptions.<sup>24</sup>

Hegel wrote

Mindless intuition is merely sensuous consciousness which remains external to the object.<sup>25</sup>

Of 'mindful, true intuition,' in which 'we are immersed in the contemplation of the *object*,<sup>26</sup> and which enables one 'to apprehend the spiritual bond unifying all the details'<sup>27</sup> Hegel wrote that it

apprehends the genuine substance of the object. ...It is, therefore, rightly insisted on that in all branches of science, and particularly also in philosophy, one should speak from an intuitive grasp of the subject-matter.<sup>28</sup>

This process begins with a Neoplatonic unity of thinking in which there is no distinction (which Hegel calls 'immediate intuition') then, inspired 'with wonder and awe' by the object, the philosopher engages in cognising it, stripping away 'the inessentials of the external and contingent,' employing 'the pure thinking of Reason which comprehends its object...(possessing) a perfectly determinate, true intuition.' This is the Neoplatonic process of emanation and return - from unity to distinction between subject and its object in the process of the latter's cognition, to *unity again in the source*, but now made '*true* (my italics) intuition.'<sup>29</sup> Hegel wrote

intuition forms only the substantial form *into which* (my italics) (the) completely developed cognition concentrates itself again. In immediate intuition, it is true that I have the entire object before me; but not until my cognition of the object *developed in all its aspects* (my italics) has

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 335

<sup>24</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.3.30

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 199

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 204

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 200

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 199

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 200

*returned into the form of simple* (my italics) intuition does it confront my intelligence as an articulated, systematic totality.<sup>30</sup>

Recognise that intuition and this process are material and based in *praxis* and you have excellent philosophy - I have an intuition, I think about it linguistically as thoroughly as possible, testing it and my reasoning about it - and conclude the process having cognised that intuition in its fullness (having linguistically reasoned to a conclusion on the basis of practice what arose from my sub-consciousness).

Weeks wrote of Kepler (who referred to Cusanus as ‘divine’ in his *Mysterium Cosmographicum* published in 1596 and 1621)

Johannes Kepler regarded his initial intuition concerning the structure of the solar system to be a divine revelation of the divine plan of creation. Hence, his intuition can justifiably be called *mystical*. But in pursuing this intuition, he proceeded as a scientist and mathematician, not as a mystic.<sup>31</sup>

While Plotinus *did* think that intuition is the immediate unity of subject with its object, with that unity, as for Hegel, comes *knowledge*.<sup>32</sup> Plotinus *equated* intuition with knowledge<sup>33</sup> - and that knowledge, held with the highest degree of Neoplatonic consciousness, is attained after a complex process of dialectical thinking.

## 9.5 God is cognised in a perspectival community

A perspectival cultus is Neoplatonism’s end point. In it, the divine as eternal, infinite all-knowing lives amongst (with a Christian patina: is reconciled with) the multitude of a community, finite in their lives and knowledge.

The recognitive intersubjectivity in this cultus has, as previously discussed, its basis in the relation between subject and its object in consciousness.

The object is the subject’s means of self-completion. By uniting with it after a dialectical process in consciousness, the subject attains self-knowing. Knowing becomes *perspectival* in society where all, with different points of view, are subjects/objects in relation to others.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel sets out the development, from a phenomenological ‘we’ watching the drama of consciousness unfold to thinking of ourselves as belonging to the recognitive structure of a community which is ultimately, on the basis of recollection, historical.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism - From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993, 8

<sup>32</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.4.3

<sup>33</sup> ‘But, we need not record in memory all we see; mere incidental concomitants need not occupy the imagination; when things vividly present to *intuition, or knowledge* (my italics), happen to occur in concrete form, it is not necessary - unless for purposes of a strictly practical administration - to pass over that direct acquaintance, and fasten upon the partial sense-preparation, which is already known in the larger knowledge.’ Ibid., IV.4.8



In recognising and knowing myself in others, and they in me and others again, we all attain self-completion (self-knowing) as a unity of finite perspectives that is a plurality neither holistic nor atomistic, but one in which our differences are reconciled.<sup>34</sup>

God's process is *our* process, in our individual consciousness and in the cultus - this is so because God is *within* all. Both God and we find fulfilment in the perspectival community

God... beholds in this Other himself, recognises his likeness therein *and in it* (my italics) returns to unity with himself...it is the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son, reaching its perfect actuality and truth in the community of Christians; and it is as this that God must be known if he is to be grasped in his absolute truth<sup>35</sup>

Plotinus' primary aim was the same as Hegel's - to move his readers to seek liberation from their 'petty egos' by returning to the unity-in-diversity of the divine All.

The spiritual universe Intellectual-Principle contains all 'minds' - forms or intellects which are 'shadows' of the universal or divine Mind and which mirror the whole of Intellect's unity-in-multiplicity, but from their own individual perspective.<sup>36</sup>

Plotinus used the metaphor of viewing a painting to illustrate his perspectivism (Cusanus was to use the same idea for the same purpose in *De visione Dei* and *De coniecturis*)

Consider, even, the case of pictures: those seeing by the bodily sense the products of the art of painting do not see the one thing in the one only way<sup>37</sup>

He described the activity of a multiplicity in unity which, with a Christian overlay, became Hegel's cultus - what is, in effect, a cultus of self

Self-intellection - which is the truest - implies the entire perception of a total self formed from a variety converging into an integral; every single unity in this variety is self-subsistent and has no need to look outside itself... Consciousness, as the very word indicates, is a conperception, an act exercised upon a manifold<sup>38</sup>

For Proclus, while the unparticipated knows all unconditionally, subsequent intelligences are perspectival

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<sup>34</sup> Redding wrote of 'a "circular" intersubjective structure within which two self-consciousnesses recognise both their identity or like-mindedness, their "we-ness," and their difference and opposition, their "I-ness."...It is recognition of self in an objective yet intentional other which is the key to the reconciliation of opposites' Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 114, 127

<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 12

<sup>36</sup> John Dillon, 'Plotinus: an Introduction,' *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xcvi

<sup>37</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., II.9.16

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., V.3.13. The root of 'conscious' is the Latin 'conscius' - knowing with others or in oneself.

intellection embraces all things perpetually, and in all intelligences, but in each it delimits all its objects by a particular character. So that in the act of cognition and in the content known there must be some one dominant aspect, under which all things are simultaneously known and by which all are characterised for the knower.<sup>39</sup>

Cusanus maintained this position, adapted to Christianity - while God is infinite and omnivoyant (not bound to space and time), we are finite and restricted to perspectives. All viewing an icon of God will have the impression that they alone are being looked at by it, even though they view it from different positions.<sup>40</sup> While all of our sights differ, their source Absolute Sight is perfect Sight.<sup>41</sup>

Of looking at a face he wrote

you contemplate the face not as it is [in itself] but in its otherness, according to your eye's angle, which differs from [that of] all the eyes of other living beings. Therefore, a surmise (conjecture, speculation) is a positive assertion that partakes - with a degree of otherness - of truth as it is [in itself].<sup>42</sup>

Another device he used was to compare intellect in relation to truth to an increase in the angles of a polygon in relation to a circle - even if the former was comprised of an infinity of angles it could never equate with the latter.<sup>43</sup>

Cusanus described the perspectival Christian cultus in which all 'minds' partake of Divine Mind differently

For 'church' bespeaks a oneness of many [members] - each of whom has his personal truth preserved without confusion of natures or of degrees; but the more *one* the church is, the greater it is; hence, this church - [viz.] the church of the eternally triumphant - is maximal, since no greater union of the church is possible.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Prop. 170 ('Every intelligence has simultaneous intellection of all things: but while the unparticipated Intelligence knows all unconditionally, each subsequent intelligence knows all in one especial aspect.') in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 149

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), 1453, in *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism, Text, Translation and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, Trans. Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1988, 679-736, Preface, 3,4, 680-682

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 8, 683

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., 57, 190

<sup>43</sup> 'the intellect is to truth as [an inscribed] polygon is to [the inscribing] circle. The more angles the inscribed polygon has the more similar it is to the circle. However, even if the number of its angles is increased ad infinitum, the polygon never becomes equal [to the circle] unless it is resolved into an identity with the circle. Hence, regarding truth, it is evident that we do not know anything other than the following: viz., that we know truth not,' Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I, 10, 8

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 261, 149

Casarella wrote that the notion of *perspective* distinguishes Cusanus' mysticism from that of Eckhart and from pantheism, and that he developed the concept ontologically in *De visione Dei* and epistemologically in *De coniecturis*

our knowing occurs always from a certain viewpoint, one that could be replaced by another one, and hence...it is intrinsically perspectival. The human mind never fully grasps reality...It remains a *coniectura*.<sup>45</sup>

## 9.6 Hegel's perspectival community - the kingdom of God

As 'minds' in Intellectual-Principle are 'aspects' of the hypostasis' unity-in-multiplicity, Hegel thought that every individual is an aspect of the Idea and that

It is only in (individuals) altogether and in their relation that the notion is realised. The individual by itself does not correspond to its notion.<sup>46</sup>

Put another way,

the relationship of men to (the world spirit) is that of single parts to the whole which is their substance.<sup>47</sup>

Hegel's goal was the overcoming of dissonance and fragmentation through a communal and perspectival 'unity of consciousness' among people. This community, built on the negation (the return to unity of Father and Son with the crucifixion of Christ) of negation (God's diremption in sending Christ into the world) was to embody a transfigured subjectivity of Spirit.

Founded on reconciliation and the consciousness of the unity of divine and human, of infinite and finite, this *church* was to generate the principles of political and civil life out of itself. Both God and mankind needed this cultus for self-completion

God achieves self-knowledge or self-consciousness in the community, i.e. in man's knowledge of him. Thus God is not complete and fully formed independently of the world and of mankind<sup>48</sup>

Hodgson summarised this, writing of 'the universal divine human being, the community.'<sup>49</sup> Hegel's kingdom of God was, with the overlay of Christian mythology removed, Plotinus' 'kingdom' of Intellectual-Principle.

## 9.7 The cultus is the site of freedom

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<sup>45</sup> Peter J. Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2006, 83

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 275

<sup>47</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 52

<sup>48</sup> Michael Inwood in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Trans., Bernard Bosanquet, Ed., Introduction and Commentary, Michael Inwood, Penguin, England, 2004, 190

<sup>49</sup> Hodgson in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 136

The freedom of reason, synonymous with self-knowledge, is central to Hegel's philosophy - as it is to that of the other Neoplatonists. For Hegel, existence as free and rational beings depends on mutual recognition of each other as free and rational. In the cultus

*This freedom of one in the other unites men in an inward manner* (my italics), whereas needs and necessity bring them together only externally. Therefore, men must will to find themselves again in one another.<sup>50</sup>

Plotinus wrote that freedom is the activity of Intellectual-Principle's unity-in-multiplicity where 'minds' are both independent *and* united 'in an inward manner,' and that the proposals emanating thence are the *expression* of freedom. He wrote that the contemplating intellect

is utterly independent; it turns wholly upon itself; its very action is itself; at rest in its good it is without need, complete, and may be said to live by its will; there the will is intellection... Will strives towards the good which the act of Intellectual-Principle realises.<sup>51</sup>

### 9.8 Flight of the alone to the Alone - a priesthood of philosophers

Plotinus' search for the divine within himself and his doctrine of salvation from the world which he more than once referred to as a 'flight' seems to have been a result of disenchantment with aspects of the world. The *Enneads* concludes

This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.<sup>52</sup>

The Sage, having gone through a complex process of reasoning, is inward-oriented. Armstrong referred to this as the 'flight of the alone to the Alone'.<sup>53</sup>

Of Proclus and the 'late' Neoplatonists, Chlup stated that they

(assumed) the role of priests and theologians besides that of philosophers. ...they saw the endangered Hellenic cultural tradition as something to be treasured and admired<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 171

<sup>51</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.8.6

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., VI.9.11

<sup>53</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H. Armstrong, William Heinemann, London, 1966-1988, Vol. VII, 345. Armstrong added in the note 'These last words, in the common translation "flight of the alone to the Alone", are the only words of Plotinus at all generally known and remembered.' A damning indictment of Western philosophers.

<sup>54</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 186

Hegel, too, repeatedly wrote of thought taking flight into an ideal world<sup>55</sup> and Hodgson well expressed Hegel's motivating disenchantment

Our age is like that of the Roman Empire in its abandonment of the question of truth, its smug conviction that no cognitive knowledge of God can be had, its reduction of everything to merely historical questions, its privatism, subjectivism, and moralism, and the failure of its teachers and clergy to lead the people. It is indeed an apocalyptic time<sup>56</sup>

Hegel set out his 'solution' - a perspectival community of philosopher-priests, isolated from the world

Instead of allowing reason and religion to contradict themselves, we must resolve the discord in the manner appropriate *to us* - namely, reconciliation in the form of philosophy. How the present day is to solve its problems must be left up to it. ...

Religion must take refuge in philosophy. For the theologians of the present day, the world is a passing away into subjective reflection because it has as its form merely the externality of contingent occurrence. But philosophy, as we have said, is also partial: it forms an isolated order of priests - a sanctuary - who are untroubled about how it goes with the world, who need not mix with it, and whose work is to preserve this possession of truth. How things turn out in the world is not our affair.<sup>57</sup>

The Neoplatonists emphasised the social nature of thought and creativity<sup>58</sup> and all had the same concern for resolving the conflicts of their time in a religious community on the basis of Neoplatonism or, in the case of Cusanus and Hegel, Neoplatonism garbed in the Christian fable.

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<sup>55</sup> 'Philosophy, then, is the reconciliation of the decay that thought has initiated, a reconciliation taking place in an ideal world, one into which thought takes flight when the earthly world no longer satisfies it.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 68; '(When a people's) best times are past and decay sets in...satisfaction resides then in the ideal realm. Spirit flees from the present and seeks a locus that is not present-day existence but instead a world apart from it, and that is the locus of thought. These are the times when we see philosophy come on the scene for a people.' Ibid., 272-73. Just as Hegel tied Neoplatonism, which he believed to have been the consummation of Greek philosophy and the greatest flowering of philosophy to the decline of the Roman Empire, so he considered, consistently, his own Neoplatonic philosophy in relation to the *entirety* of philosophy and *his* time; 'in the development of the state itself, periods must occur in which the spirit of nobler natures is forced to flee from the present into ideal regions, and to find in them that reconciliation with itself which it can no longer enjoy in an internally divided reality' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 143

<sup>56</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, Editorial Introduction, 23

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 161-162

<sup>58</sup> 'Cusanus consistently emphasises that man's creativity is not exercised simply on his own individual behalf and that his thoughts are not conceived in solitude, but rather that both the active and contemplative life are conducted in relationship to the needs and contributions of other men.' Pauline Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1982, 231

## 10. Concepts, propositions, predication and the speculative sentence

### 10.1 Hegel, philosopher of concrete concepts

In bourgeois ideology Hegel is known as the philosopher of concrete concepts, the hard man, master and exemplar of reason. Whilst he agreed that we are *always* thinking - even in sleep - (something of immense importance that he never explored or allowed to influence his theorising) he believed that it is only in the waking state that 'Intellect' and 'Reason,' for him the modes of proper thought, are active and that *conceptual* thought is our essence.

Hegel equated 'conceptual' with 'scientific' - philosophy for him is the scientific grasp of Truth which could only be expounded as a conceptual *system*. Philosophy proceeded according to the *categories* of reason. This rigour supposedly gives us reasoned knowledge of the Idea and of fully concrete Spirit, a conceptual account of the Absolute and, above all, true self-knowledge.

### 10.2 Hegel's concepts are spiritual, religious and open

Hegel's concepts are, as is his philosophy, spiritual and religious - his system is the service of God *the self* and his concepts must be assessed on that basis

the content of philosophy, its need and interest, is wholly in common with that of religion. The object of religion, like that of philosophy, is the eternal truth. God and nothing but God and the explication of God. Philosophy is only explicating *itself* when it explicates religion, and when it explicates itself it is explicating religion. For the thinking spirit is what penetrates this object, the truth; it is thinking that enjoys the truth and purifies the subjective consciousness. Thus religion and philosophy coincide in one. In fact philosophy is itself the service of God, as is religion.<sup>1</sup>

For Hegel the activity of 'reason,' of forming concepts and dialectical thinking is the *practice* of religion. He described the conceptual grasp of an object Neoplatonically

The conceptual grasp of an object consists in fact in nothing but that the self makes the object its own, penetrates it and brings it to its own form.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the categories of logic, 'the all-animating spirit of all the sciences' comprise a 'spiritual hierarchy,'<sup>3</sup> a movement of concepts or thought determinations which, though expressed in

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 152-153

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Raymond Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, 144

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 40

language, is not reducible to language.<sup>4</sup> Hegel wrote of a movement of ‘pure thought’<sup>5</sup> - God ‘as he is in and for himself’ - ‘the pure thought of *eternity*.’<sup>6</sup> Jaspers wrote

In this thinking concepts are not defined with logical cogency and are not related to one another, but denote guiding threads whose meaning is disclosed in the course of attempts at speculative thinking.<sup>7</sup>

Marcuse wrote

All fundamental concepts of the Hegelian system are characterised by the same ambiguity. They never denote mere concepts (as in formal logic), but forms or modes of being comprehended by thought.<sup>8</sup>

### 10.3 Speculative exposition preserves the dialectical form

Speculative reason looks for the principle of motion in an object that makes it what it is. The *speculative* proposition or, much better, *sentence* (*spekulativer Satz*) reflects the dialectical nature of consciousness in its self-development. In the dialectical movement of thought, every thing comprises a coexistence of opposed elements and speculative exposition preserves this form.

Findlay described the superficial view of the proposition of judgement as

an external connection of independently significant elements...(whereas) the speculative view...sees...the self-development, through complimentary differences, of a single significant content. ...the fixed points of reference necessary for the former are lacking in the latter.<sup>9</sup>

The task of speculative reason is not the analysis of concepts but the development of them - speculative dialectic shows fixed (false, limited) distinctions of the understanding breaking down in their development. Speculative philosophy is a continual unfolding of consciousness to itself. Hence, for Hegel, categories develop themselves.

Hegel continued the Neoplatonic emphasis, established by Plotinus, on the metaphors of sight and mirror in his incorporation of the meanings of ‘speculative’ in his philosophy - from *theoria* ([divine] ‘contemplation,’ ‘speculation,’ from *theoros* ‘spectator’), from *speculum* (‘mirror’) and *speculatio* (‘contemplation,’ ‘speculation’) - ‘reality’ and consciousness, infinite and finite, ultimately subject and object mirror and contemplate each other, developing conceptually through their relationship.

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<sup>4</sup> Dale M. Schlitt, *Divine Subjectivity: Understanding Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., 37

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 843

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 187

<sup>7</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, Ed., Hannah Arendt, Trans., Ralph Manheim, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1966, 128

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, Routledge, London, 2000, 25

<sup>9</sup> Findlay in Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 503

Cusanus placed the greatest importance on our 'mind's' generation of concepts as an image of the working of God's 'Mind' and his study of them as the 'coincidence of opposites' was, within idealist philosophy, fully, *dialectically* developed by Hegel. This aspect of Cusanus' philosophy is one of the greatest debts Hegel owed to him (which I will discuss later).

#### 10.4 Neoplatonic concepts are always dynamic

Neoplatonism has shown that concepts have *life*. Cusanus and particularly Hegel explored the potential of concepts in their inter-relationship and development. Verene wrote that in the speculative proposition the subject is not separate from the predicate but

is extended into the predicate and the meaning of the predicate must ultimately be found by returning from it into the subject term.<sup>10</sup>

Findlay wrote of

a logical flux, a passing of contents tracelessly into one another... In a given exercise we both can and should preserve comparative clarity, distinctness, and fixity, but the thought-material we are coercing never fully acquiesces in our fixations, and forces endless revision upon us no matter how we seek to withstand this.<sup>11</sup>

#### 10.5 The importance of negation

For the Neoplatonists, 'the true is the whole.' Magee set out Hegel's position

each standpoint in Hegel's dialectic is 'false' because each, taken on its own, is only a part of the whole. Taken in abstraction from the whole, each part is, in a way, misleading. For instance, each category of the *Logic* is a 'provisional definition' of the Absolute. Each on its own terms, is false as a definition - but each is part of the entire system of the *Logic*, which constitutes the complete articulation of the nature of the Absolute. (my italics)<sup>12</sup>

But 'the whole' is not something bounded, it is a *process* the essential, unrelenting aspect of which is *negation*, the driver of the dialectic. Hegel, who wrote

Everything concrete, everything living contains contradiction within itself; only the dead understanding is identical with itself<sup>13</sup>

concluded his explication of God in his *Science of Logic* with his most 'concrete' concept Absolute Idea. With it, we are to accept that negation has now found completion, when surely the primary

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1985, 23

<sup>11</sup> Findlay in Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., Foreword xv-xvi

<sup>12</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 251-252

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 192-193



lesson of the *Science of Logic*, which documents the movement of incompatibles in their never ending unrest is the opposite

To hold fast to the positive in *its* negative...this is the most important feature in rational cognition<sup>14</sup>

Negation in the process of emanation and return drives the *Enneads* no less than it does Hegel's use of the Christian myth (God goes into the world/first negation, God dies and returns to self/negation of that negation) and his *Science of Logic*. Just as the second hypostasis negates the first (because agent, object and movement are introduced) so the first hypostasis negates the second (because agent, object and movement disappear). The third hypostasis (the equivalent of God's diremption) negates the second by lighting and ordering the world which engagement is in turn negated (the equivalent of Christ's death and resurrection) by Soul's return to the second hypostasis.

Further, Plotinus wrote of his second hypostasis, Hegel's mystical 'reason-world'

In that Intellectual Cosmos, where all is one total, every entity that can be singled out is an intellective essence and a participant in life: it is identity and difference, movement and rest, the object moving and the object at rest, essence and quality. All There is pure essence...and therefore quality is never separated from essence.<sup>15</sup>

## 10.6 Hegel used his concepts mytho-poetically

Magee wrote that Hegel was less interested in the truth of statements than in the 'truth' or meaning of concepts and that Hegel's form of speculation is identical with mytho-poetic circumscription

Hegel rejects propositional thought, which would *define* the Absolute, and instead 'talks around' or 'thinks around' the Absolute, revealing at each point some aspect or part of it. The totality of Hegel's philosophical speech is the Truth, the Absolute itself. ...His is truly a mythology of reason: a new myth-form made of ideas<sup>16</sup>

Hegel's philosophy is *not* 'a new myth-form made of ideas' nor does he employ concepts in a 'radically different way,'<sup>17</sup> his philosophy is the highest development of an *ancient* form in the expression of ideas which has been treated as pornography by generations of career-building, time and ideology serving academics - Neoplatonism.

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<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 834

<sup>15</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.9.10. 'Plotinus in particular...radically modified the ancient discipline of dialectic by prioritising the thinking of differences in identity and identities in difference. By setting the categories of identity and difference at the centre of dialectic, Plotinus fashioned a powerful dialectical mode of contemplation that was influential throughout the Middle Ages, with Nicholas of Cusa representing perhaps the last and best known example' Andrew Cole, *The Function of Theory at the Present Time*, The Chicago Blog, 07.12.15, <http://pressblog.uchicago.edu/2015/12/07/hegel-and-the-birth-of-theory.html>

<sup>16</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 95

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Just as concepts (particularly the hypostases themselves) were stepping-stones to be 'thought around' for Plotinus and the Neoplatonists prior to Hegel, from and to spiritual unity with their highest concept the One-Absolute, so Hegel, *following particularly Plotinus, Proclus and Cusanus* used *his* concepts in the same way from and to spiritual unity with *his* God/One/Absolute. What makes Hegel's philosophy 'mythical' is his overlay of the Christian myth across his Neoplatonism.

Hegel rejected the definition and propositional thought of *Verstand* both because he correctly saw their deadening limitations and because he faced the challenge confronted by all Neoplatonic philosophers and by those inspired by Neoplatonism and mysticism - how best to express and *evoke*, to draw their audience into the dynamic subtleties and spiritual flux of 'reality.' Inevitably he employed the devices of poetry including images, metaphors and symbols - myth, in Christian form, being the most important of them - Christian mythology provided Hegel *with* images, metaphors and symbolism.

Hegel's argument is buried in the dense mystical *tapestry* he wove using concepts as focal or anchor points. He wrote that speculative thinking is from one point of view akin to the poetic imagination and he used words and concepts to *create* a rationalised *feeling* for the Absolute, rather than to attain a literal cognition of it. In his philosophy, God comes to know himself Neoplatonically - most importantly, he does so dialectically.

### **10.7 Hegel and Plotinus rejected propositions of the understanding from their speculative philosophy**

Hegel rejected from his philosophy those traditional tools of reason that are employed to test the worth and validity of concepts - the proposition of the understanding (*Verstand*) and the formal syllogism - and he did so all for the same reason - that they deny the unity-in-difference and the principle of negation which are the engine of the conceptual *openness* and *poetry* of his *Neoplatonic* system, the *mysticism* of which neither he nor his ideological proponents would or could ever acknowledge.

For Hegel, the propositional language of the understanding, of *Verstand* is inadequate for the expression of the complexity of philosophical Truth. Dialectic, pre-eminently exemplified in poetry, is essential to philosophical demonstration. Hegel believed the proposition of the understanding is an empty form because it distinguishes between, *separates* subject and predicate resulting in a meaning other than what was intended. Such a proposition *denies* the complexity of the experience of consciousness (the process of freedom, reconciliation and truth), giving something that is one-sided

One difficulty which should be avoided comes from mixing up the speculative with the ratiocinative methods, so that what is said of the Subject at one time signifies its Notion, at another time merely its Predicate or accidental property. The one method interferes with the other, and only a philosophical exposition that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition could achieve the goal of plasticity.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel echoed Plotinus who asked rhetorically

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<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 39

What, then, is Philosophy?

Philosophy is the supremely precious.

Is Dialectic, then, the same as Philosophy?

It is the precious part of Philosophy. We must not think of it as the mere tool of the metaphysician: Dialectic does not consist of bare theories and rules: it deals with verities...Dialectic...has no knowledge of propositions - collections of words - but it knows the truth and, in that knowledge, knows what the schools call their propositions...it leaves petty precisions of process to what other science may care for such exercises.<sup>19</sup>

## 10.8 Proclus and Cusanus on propositions

Proclus, follower and systematiser of Plotinus, sought to structure the unsystematic presentation of his master's philosophy in the two hundred and eleven propositions of his *Elements of Theology* and men with interests as diverse as Kepler and Coleridge responded equally to the same speculative Neoplatonic dynamism of his writing, which pushed beyond the linguistic constraints of mere propositions of the understanding

His language flows like a torrent, inundating its banks, and hiding the dark fords and whirlpools of doubts, while his mind full of the majesty of things of such a magnitude, struggles in the straits of language, and the conclusion never satisfying him, exceeds by the copia of words, the simplicity of the propositions.<sup>20</sup>

The most beautiful and orderly development of the philosophy which endeavours to explain all things by an analysis of consciousness, and builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself, is to be found in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus.<sup>21</sup>

Cusanus also believed that speculative thinking focuses on what functions *beyond* the constraints of propositions of the understanding, of *ratio*. Jaspers wrote of his philosophy

Whatever may be formulated in a proposition, in a word, is for this very reason not yet the point which thinking strives to attain - a point beyond the formulation, the 'absolute ground,' 'being itself,' 'what precedes being.' And even these expressions are only signs.<sup>22</sup>

## 10.9 Hegel's ultimate concepts - beyond predication

### 10.9.1 God

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<sup>19</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.3.5

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Thomas Taylor in his Introduction to Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by E.R.Dodds in his Introduction to Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* op. cit., xxxiii

<sup>22</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 140

‘God,’ to which all roads lead in Hegel’s philosophy, was for him the most perfect concept, the ‘most perfectly real.’ Hegel believed that predication is not appropriate to God because it cannot grasp God in his thinking. *Verstand’s* definition of God by the use of determinate predicates amounts only to a list of particular, rigid characteristics which remain unresolved contradictions.

God’s determinateness is not constituted by a predicate or a plurality of predicates...(because) each determinate content has become just as immovable, just as rigidly *for itself*, as the natural content was to begin with ...The predicates do not correspond to the reality of the concept...the concept in itself is real, wholly free totality, free totality present to itself.<sup>23</sup>

Plotinus also wrote that God has no qualities, but is simple and single - that no name is apt to it. Proclus argued that while what is *around* the One (the henads) can be predicated, the One cannot. Cusanus also argued that God cannot be predicated and he did so using words very similar to those of Hegel - what displayed for the latter the rigidity and separation of *Verstand* in relation to *Vernunft* did so for the former those of *ratio* (understanding/discursive reason) in relation to *intellectus* (intellect/intellectual vision)

just as God transcends all understanding, so, *a fortiori*, [He transcends] every name. Indeed, through a movement of reason, which is much lower than the intellect, names are bestowed for distinguishing between things. But since reason cannot leap beyond contradictories: as regards the movement of reason, there is not a name to which another [name] is not opposed.<sup>24</sup>

### 10.9.2 Absolute

Hegel thought the aim of philosophy is cognition of the Absolute. He famously mocked in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* the Absolute in which

the A = A...(where) all is one. To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands...fulfilment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black - this is cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity.<sup>25</sup>

How did *Hegel* position this concept in his ‘full body of articulated cognition’? To repeat, Engels observed that Hegel had absolutely nothing to say about his own Absolute Idea,<sup>26</sup> with which he concluded the lengthy development of his categories in his *Science of Logic*. Magee also made an excellent point when he wrote that Hegel’s system *embodies, realises* the Absolute rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 185-186

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’), op. cit., I,24,76, 40

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., Preface, 9

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Part I: Hegel, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch01.htm>

describes (or, as *I* would write, defines) it - that for Hegel, simply to give the Absolute voice is to give it being.<sup>27</sup>

Where is the criticism in academia of Hegel's posturing hypocrisy on this issue? The ideology of the dominant class is at stake, and the silence of that which cannot be spoken reigns supreme behind cloistered walls. Not only did Hegel write that the concept 'Absolute' is devoid of predicates<sup>28</sup> and is synonymous with that of 'God,'<sup>29</sup> he many times equated 'God' with his conflation of the One in his overlay of the Christian myth on his Neoplatonic philosophy. An example

God is One, in the first instance the universal.  
God is love and remains One, [subsisting] more as unity, as immediate identity, than as negative reflection into self.  
God is spirit, the One as infinite subjectivity, the One in the infinite subjectivity of distinction.<sup>30</sup>

To give a developmental account ('exhibiting' or '*self*-exposition' to use Hegel's words<sup>31</sup>) of the 'Absolute' as Hegel did - at great length - is not to *define* it - which Hegel did as *little* as those he mocked or criticised. A process, even in its complex totality, is not a definition.

Magee wrote

Hegel takes over the idea of an Absolute from Schelling, including the idea that the Absolute transcends the distinction between subject and object.<sup>32</sup>

This is incorrect. As I have argued previously, *Plotinus* was the first to use, and repeatedly, 'Absolute' as a noun - long before Cusanus and the German idealists who were inspired by him - including in his tractate 'Nature, Contemplation, and the One,' translated by Creuzer in 1805 (Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* was first published in 1807), and Hegel took over that idea from *Plotinus*, as he did the transcendence of the distinction between subject and object and much else besides.

Hegel theorised his Absolute consistent with his conflation of the Neoplatonic hypostases in his 'reason-world' - Plotinus' second hypostasis

the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 98

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 351

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 118

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, 78

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 530

<sup>32</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 160

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., Preface, 10

For Hegel, this 'reason-world' is a systemic whole in which Mind or Being becomes conscious of itself. In the 'unanalysable'<sup>34</sup> beginning there is absolute identity which develops into a dialectically self-differentiating unity of 'mutually antagonistic'<sup>35</sup> elements eventually resulting in the sublation of the distinction between subject and object (between subjects/objects). Philosophy gives a 'rational,' dialectical account of the nature of the Absolute. *All of this* is explained by Hegel's conflation of the Neoplatonic hypostases.

*Plotinus* wrote that a defined One would not be the One-Absolute (Absolute One) because the Absolute is prior to the definite<sup>36</sup>

this Absolute is none of the things of which it is the source - its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of it - not existence, not essence, not life - since it is That which transcends all these.<sup>37</sup>

### 10.9.3 Spirit

Hegel's discussion of Spirit or consciousness is thoroughly Neoplatonic - it is One<sup>38</sup> which through the *process* of producing itself, of self-differentiation and the positing of distinctions makes itself its own object, thereby gaining knowledge of itself. It is the process of the divine's coming to self-consciousness in mankind. As with 'God' and 'Absolute,' it is

an eternal *process* (my italics) of self-cognition in self-consciousness, streaming out to the finite focus of finite consciousness, and then returning to what spirit actually is, a return in which *divine* self-consciousness breaks forth. The community is a process of eternal becoming.<sup>39</sup>

Hegel wrote

Spirit is consciousness that *has Reason*...by passing through a series of shapes (Spirit must) attain to a knowledge of itself.<sup>40</sup>

Again, *utterly* Neoplatonic. The metaphor of the sculptor shaping and perfecting his soul<sup>41</sup> resonates through the *Enneads* and Western culture - specifically, Soul is shaped in its passage through Intellectual-Principle in its return to the One.

Shaping Soul through Reason's thinking is the activity of Intellectual-Principle - *Intellectual-Principle* is the sculptor

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<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 75

<sup>35</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 23

<sup>36</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.12

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., III.8.10

<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 52

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 233

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 265

<sup>41</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.6.9

The Intellectual-Principle is in one phase the Form of the Soul, its shape; in another phase it is the giver of the shape - the sculptor, possessing inherently what is given - imparting to Soul nearly the authentic reality<sup>42</sup>

#### 10.9.4 **Concept/Notion** (using Miller's and Wallace's translations)

Hegel wrote in his *Science of Logic* that it is essentially only Spirit that can comprehend the Notion as Notion because it is Spirit's 'pure self.'<sup>43</sup>

As Plotinus described the creative energy of his second hypostasis, 'boiling over with life'<sup>44</sup> in its self-differentiating, so Hegel described Notion as the vital, boundless *activity* of *its* self-differentiating. As Plotinus wrote of Intellectual-Principle's being at rest and in motion<sup>45</sup> - a 'stationary wandering'<sup>46</sup> within itself, Hegel wrote of Notion pulsating within *itself* but not moving, inwardly vibrating yet at rest.<sup>47</sup> For both, what characterises this activity - 'the very heart of things (that) makes them what they are'<sup>48</sup> - is its vital, divine nature.

#### 10.9.5 **Absolute Idea**

Absolute Idea is the culmination of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. It is the identity of the theoretical and practical Idea, God as divine thought thinking itself, embodied in the 'mind' of the philosopher - the union of subject and object.

This same union of subject and object occurs at the conclusion of the *Enneads*. Findlay wrote that 'the Absolute Idea is defined by Hegel as the eternal *vision* of itself in the Other.'<sup>49</sup> Plotinus wrote

In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it<sup>50</sup>

Magee writes that Absolute Idea 'is understood to "contain" all the preceding categories, as, in effect, (Absolute's) definition.'<sup>51</sup> Such a claim, even though it is putting Hegel's view, should not go without criticism. It is the attempt to impose a *complete* definition on *a process which is without*

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., V.9.3

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 618

<sup>44</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. VI, VI.5.12

<sup>45</sup> '(Intellect) is both at rest and in motion; for it moves around Him (the Good). So, then, the universe, too, both moves in its circle and is at rest.' Ibid., vol. II, II.2.3

<sup>46</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.7.13. Plotinus also wrote of the 'static activity' of Intellect. Armstrong op. cit., vol. II, II.9.1

<sup>47</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 100

<sup>48</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 232

<sup>49</sup> Findlay in Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., Foreword, xi

<sup>50</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.10

<sup>51</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 99

*end* in which such a definition has no part. The same provisional and inadequate 'definition' of the Absolute by the categories in their dialectical development should apply no less to 'Absolute Idea.'

The Neoplatonists, like the sorcerer's apprentice, summoned forth a magnificent power - they gave expression to how the world (for them, in consciousness) works. Hegel took this to the highest point of development within Neoplatonism and Marx, having stood this philosophy 'on its feet,' applied it in its correct material orientation. But these greatest dialecticians all made the same error in seeking to impose the products of their own consciousness, their own volition on infinitely greater processes prior to it - from the soaring conclusion of the *Enneads* to that of the *Science of Logic*, from the Prussian state to communism.



## 11. Hegel, prose poet

### 11.1 Language is the 'mind's' perfect expression

In his *Philosophy of Mind* Hegel wrote that the body is only the 'mind's' first appearance, while language is its perfect expression.<sup>1</sup> In his *Science of Logic* he wrote

The forms of thought are, in the first instance, displayed and stored in human *language*.<sup>2</sup>

He believed we cannot think without words (although as previously noted, he also wrote we are thinking all the time, including in sleep<sup>3</sup>) and that words give our thoughts their highest and truest existence which only becomes definite when we objectify them

(The existence of words) is absolutely necessary to our thoughts. We only know our thoughts, only have definite, actual thoughts, when we give them the form of objectivity<sup>4</sup>

For Hegel, what cannot be expressed in language has no reality. Such is the power of ideology and so strong the Siren call of possible joys in pandering to it that Hegel's assertion regarding the necessity of language to thought and reality itself has been accepted almost unanimously.

But Hegel's equating expression in language with reality is no less flawed than was his philosophical forebear's banishing of poets from his ideal state in defence of fundamentally the same 'rational principles' - Plato, one of the most influential poets in the West being among those to suffer exclusion.

I will argue that Hegel was, as the consummate Neoplatonist, a great prose poet, that he employed a range of poetic devices to convey the content and meaning of his philosophy which always functions beyond the separation and definition of the *Verstand* he was so critical of and that Hegel's philosophy can be neither fully understood nor appreciated without according it that recognition.

Not only did Lauer write

it is no more strange to entertain the notion of Hegel as poet than it is to consider the harsh things that Plato had to say about poetry and the poets

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 147

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 31

<sup>3</sup> 'it is also inadequate to...(say) vaguely that it is only in the waking state that man *thinks*. For thought *in general* is so much inherent in the nature of man that he is always thinking, even in sleep. In every form of mind, in feeling, intuition, as in picture-thinking, thought remains the basis.' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 69

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 221

and at the same time to claim that Plato himself is to be numbered among the greatest of the poets<sup>5</sup>

*Hegel* noted that

Plato philosophised in a mythological way. People praise him for making many things accessible in the form of representational images.<sup>6</sup>

Franke wrote of Hegel's philosophy

Since the rational is coextensive with language and all it can express, this means that what is not expressible in language simply has no reality. Yet Hegel's writings also provocatively show the limits of this position and point to another possibility, a possibility of infinite difference, of something...that would remain forever inexpressible to Logos.<sup>7</sup>

### 11.1.1 The German language has many advantages

Benz wrote that the German language of the High Middle Ages did not reflect

the scholastic development of philosophy, theology, and the sciences - (it) was essentially poetic. ...a language of images, allegories, parables (and) not a language of abstract concepts and philosophical and logical terms.<sup>8</sup>

He stated that the great spiritual revolution in Germany was provoked by the ignorance of Latin of the German Dominican nuns to whom Eckhart, as the prior of the Dominican order, had to give sermons - he was compelled either to attempt to translate his abstract theology in Latin into the poetic imagery of the German of his time or to create a new terminology of abstraction improvised in German.

It was to this poetic richness of the German language that Hegel referred in his Preface to the second edition of his *Science of Logic*

German has many advantages over other modern languages; some of its words even possess the further peculiarity of having not only different but opposite meanings so that one cannot fail to recognise a speculative spirit of the language in them: it can delight a thinker to come across such words and

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<sup>5</sup> Quentin Lauer, 'Hegel as Poet' in *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, Ed., Robert L. Perkins, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1984, 1-14, 1

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 284

<sup>7</sup> William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2014, 26

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, Trans., Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2009, 8. Eckhart introduced new philosophical and theological terms into German. Benz wrote that it was with him that philosophical speculation in German began, further developed by Jakob Böhme. 'All the ontological terms, for example, Sein, Wesen, Wesenheit, das Seiende, das Nichts, Nichtigkeit, nichtigen, all the terms such as Form, Gestalt, Anschauung, Erkenntnis, Erkennen, Vernunft, Vernünftigkeit, Verstand, Verständnis, Verständigkeit, Bild, Abbild, Bildhaftigkeit, entbilden, all the concepts such as Grund, Ungrund, Urgrund, ergründen, Ich, Ichheit, Nicht-Ich, entichen, Entichung, are the creations of German mystical speculation' Ibid., 10

to find the union of opposites naïvely shown in the dictionary as one word with opposite meanings, although this result of speculative thinking is nonsensical to the understanding.<sup>9</sup>

a thought he repeated

It is a delight to speculative thought to find in the language words which have in themselves a speculative meaning; the German language has a number of such.<sup>10</sup>

Central to his dialectic and exemplifying the above is the verb *aufheben* and its noun *Aufhebung* - concepts rich in contradictory meaning (to sublimate, to lift or raise up, to seize, to retain, to preserve, to reverse [a judgement], to put an end to) and he drew on these meanings, in relation to both concepts and things, at the same time.

He wrote of sublation

*To sublimate*, and the *sublated* (that which exists ideally as a moment), constitute one of the most important notions in philosophy. ...‘*To sublimate*’ has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to. ...what is sublated is at the same time preserved; it has only lost its immediacy but is not on that account annihilated. ...Something is sublated only in so far as it has entered into unity with its opposite<sup>11</sup>

### 11.1.2 The sound of speech

Hegel regarded poetry as the most perfect art because it is the means for the richest expression of spiritual freedom. He thought of poetry as the articulation of inner life and ideas in language, particularly when spoken - the art of sound as speech.

When the poet attended to ‘the choice, placing, and sound of words,’<sup>12</sup> the result would be the most perfect art given expression by ‘the freest, and in its sound the most perfect instrument the human voice, which unites in itself the character of wind and string instruments’.<sup>13</sup> Küng quoted Bloch - ‘Hegel’s language proves to be Luther’s German set to music’<sup>14</sup>

Hodgson wrote

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<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 32

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, op. cit., 969

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 922

<sup>14</sup> Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel’s Theological Thought*, Trans., J.R.Stephenson, Crossroad, New York, 1987, 193

(With regard to his speculative philosophy, Hegel) is not offering empirical descriptions but imaginative constructions. For this purpose the medium of oral lectures was ideally suited, and it is notable that Hegel was reluctant to constrain the fluidity of speech through publication.<sup>15</sup>

## 11.2 On the importance of feeling to philosophy

Hegel criticised the Enlightenment for its lack of ‘old fashioned’ religious feeling and he argued for the importance of ‘feeling.’ In ‘The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason’ (1822) he wrote ‘Only in the *region of feeling* can the impulse to truth take refuge.’<sup>16</sup> In *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* he wrote

the Christian...worships truth in symbolic form...the philosopher...immerses himself in eternal truth through rational thought. ...the feelings themselves are one and the same.<sup>17</sup>

Hegel would have endorsed Lauer’s words

philosophy cannot dispense with emotion, not only in the sense that the human spirit’s relation to truth is emotional but also in the sense that only when significant truth is allied to beauty is it genuinely compelling, because authentic philosophy is an activity of whole human persons<sup>18</sup>

I will argue in this chapter that Hegel built his use of words and language so that a *feeling* for the Absolute becomes *knowledge* of it - as did Plotinus.

## 11.3 Hegel’s speculative thinking and his poetic imagination

‘Speculative,’ dialectical philosophy cannot be *other* than poetic because it is the attempt to most accurately explicate the processes of the world - for the idealist, those of the ‘inner world’ of consciousness, for the materialist, those of the objective world of matter, which subsumes consciousness.

Hegel exemplified his recognition of that challenge when he wrote in his *Philosophy of Nature*

We have now to make the *transition* from inorganic to organic Nature, from the prose to the poetry of Nature.<sup>19</sup>

The poetry of nature for him was that of Life (the capitalisation indicates Hegel’s mystical understanding of the concept) which

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<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Hodgson, ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,’ in Beiser, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, op. cit., 230-252, 232

<sup>16</sup> Hegel in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F.Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 164

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 45

<sup>18</sup> Lauer, ‘Hegel as Poet’, op cit., 13

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 270

can be grasped only speculatively; for it is precisely in life that the speculative has an existence. ...Wherever inner and outer, cause and effect, end and means, subjectivity and objectivity, etc., are one and the same, there is life.<sup>20</sup>

and, I add following Hegel, *there* also is poetry.

He wrote in his *Lectures on Fine Art* that poetry, the most spiritual of the arts, is the point at which art dissolves into 'the prose of scientific thought' and that speculative thinking is akin to the poetic imagination

(Poetry) abides by the substantive unity of outlook which has not yet separated opposites...there is none of the Understanding's dissection of that living unity in which the poetic vision keeps together the indwelling reason of things and their expression and existence<sup>21</sup>

Not only is the subject matter of poetry 'the infinite wealth of the spirit'<sup>22</sup> and of spiritual connectedness, as Magee and others have commented, the real power behind dialectic is imagination, which facilitates the utterance of what is inward.

In 'The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism,' written in 1796 or 1797 (ten years before he published his *Phenomenology of Spirit*) in Hegel's handwriting and generally considered to be the expression of his views, Hegel wrote of philosophising as an aesthetic act and that great philosophy is a genre of poetry - 'the art of philosophy'

I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, that in which it embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act and that *truth and goodness are siblings only in beauty*. The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet. Men without aesthetic sense are our literal-minded philosophers. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. ...  
First of all I shall speak here of an idea which, so far as I know, has never occurred to anyone else - we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of ideas, it must be a mythology of *Reason*.<sup>23</sup>

Responding to the creative vitalism of Neoplatonism, Hegel wrote

the poet is required to give the deepest and richest inner animation to the material that he brings into his work<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 274

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, op. cit., 973, 975

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 972

<sup>23</sup> Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 25-26

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, op. cit., 998

and that

in poetry the...rational is expressed...as vitalised, manifested, animated, all-determining, and yet at the same time expressed in a manner which lets the all-embracing unity, the very soul of the vitalisation produce its effect<sup>25</sup>

Hegel thought that both poetry and philosophy are a self-making (for the materialist, they are the product of the world reflecting on itself). The purpose of both is the liberation of the human spirit - synonymous with spirit's coming to know itself as self-creative and self determining through artistic presentation. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel wrote that philosophy is thinking which is at the same time a 'making'. As such

it is like poetry in being creative of that which is supremely beautiful; it is like poetry in being an activity whose product is itself.<sup>26</sup>

In writing of a poetical work of art, Hegel summarised his philosophy

It is now clear that every genuinely poetical work of art is an inherently infinite [i.e. self-bounded] organism: rich in matter and disclosing this matter in a correspondent appearance; a unity...a whole...which closes with itself into a perfect circle without any apparent intention; filled with the material essence of actuality...creating freely from its own resources in order to give shape to the essence of things<sup>27</sup>

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* he referred to the source of this as

the many-named One. This One is clothed with the manifold powers of existence and with the 'shapes' of reality as with an adornment that lacks a self<sup>28</sup>

### 11.3.1 Speculative philosophy and metaphor

Not only was Jaspers correct to argue that metaphors are necessary to 'speculative' cognition, they are *unavoidable* - our language is *full* of them and our mutual understanding depends on them. Barfield wrote

Every modern language, with its thousands of abstract terms and its nuances of meaning and association, is apparently nothing, from beginning to end, but an unconscionable tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors...A man

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Lauer, 'Hegel as Poet,' op. cit., 8

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, op. cit., 996

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 419

cannot utter a dozen words without wielding the creations of a hundred named and nameless poets.<sup>29</sup>

Geary wrote that metaphors are ‘entombed in even the simplest words’<sup>30</sup> and he quoted Emerson from his essay ‘The Poet,’ in which Emerson described language as ‘fossil poetry’

language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin.<sup>31</sup>

Philip Wheelwright thinks that ‘three-fourths of our language may be said to consist of worn-out metaphors.’<sup>32</sup>

Metaphors appeal to the senses, particularly sight - itself a fundamental metaphor of mysticism. They allow thought greater abstraction and, as Verene noted, they *always* point to what is not present in the literal sense of words.<sup>33</sup>

### 11.3.2 Hegel and metaphor

Redding said that Hegel came out of an idealist tradition in which truth can be expressed in metaphorical and imagistic ways.<sup>34</sup> I will argue not only that the use of metaphor was a major device in Hegel’s philosophical method but that he *based* his philosophy on a metaphor - just as Plotinus built his philosophy on the metaphor of a sculptor.<sup>35</sup>

Verene wrote

To the logical mind, the Understanding in Hegel’s terms, tropes are improper forms of speech because they are imprecise. Logic attempts to exclude all such figurative meanings. But from the standpoint of dialectic and Reason, tropes allow thought to enter into new stages of consciousness. Tropes are not arbitrary because the *translatio* presupposes the discovery of a *similitudo* that makes the transfer possible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973, 63, quoted in James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*, HarperCollins e-books, Pymble, Australia, 2011, 46

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 50

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Cited in Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism*, Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1968, 181

<sup>33</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 24

<sup>34</sup> Interview of Paul Redding on ‘Philosopher’s Zone,’ ABC Radio National 27.10.13

<sup>35</sup> ‘The vivid images and metaphors used by (Plotinus) apparently did not just act as illustrations of mental concepts, but served rather to attune the mind to nondiscursive modes of grasping reality.’ Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 180. Geary wrote that ‘a simile is just a metaphor with the scaffolding still up,’ Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*, op.cit., 36

<sup>36</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 22-23

### 11.3.3 Hegel's 'Trinity' - symbolism and allegory within a Neoplatonic metaphor

Hegel's philosophy is not Christian. Nor is his treatment of the Trinity consistent with Christian Neoplatonism - with Christian belief deeply influenced by Neoplatonism, as was that of the cardinal Cusanus.<sup>37</sup> His philosophy *does* establish him as the consummate Neoplatonist.<sup>38</sup>

Hegel believed that the doctrine of the Trinity is the basis of Christianity and it is held in academia, as Hegel wished it to be known, that this Christian Trinity is reflected in his tripartite division and ordering of (his) philosophy - Logic, Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Mind.<sup>39</sup>

Given the significance of the concept 'Trinity' to Hegel it is necessary for me to first discuss this in some detail.

Hegel's 'Trinity' and the three primary divisions that underlie the entirety of his philosophy reflect *not* the Christian Trinity but the first triad in Proclus' second hypostasis Intellect - Being, Life and Intelligence, thus making the relations and processes of the Christian Trinity *and* Hegel's tripartite division of philosophy *metaphors* for the relations and processes of Neoplatonism.

In Hegel's use of the Trinity God, Son and Spirit *symbolise* the key aspects of Neoplatonic process - unity, emanation and return (Hegel wrote about this in multiple ways - from unity to 'diremption' to 'reconciliation'; from universality to particularity to individuality; from *self-identity* to *self-differentiation* to *self-return*).

The Christian myth based on the Trinity is also an *allegory* - God, Son and Spirit function as characters for aspects of the soul in its spiritual origin, struggles and development, further *anchoring* Neoplatonism in the world and in Hegel's 'reason-world' of consciousness.

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<sup>37</sup> 'popular forms of Christianity in the German states had long had a deep-running Neoplatonic pantheistic-tending stream which had found expression in heterodox thinkers like Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and Jacob Bohme (1575-1624) who had often been associated with the heresies of "free thinkers" as well as with populist social movements. This, as we have seen in the case of Schiller, had especially been the case in the German region in which the 3 seminarians (Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin) were born and educated, the Duchy of Wurttemberg. Moreover, at the time, this movement seemed to be undergoing a revival. In the 1780s Bohme had been taken up by the Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader, and in the 1790s Plotinus himself was being read under the urging of Novalis, who had stressed the proximity of Plotinus' views to those of Kant and Fichte (Beierwaltes 2004: 87-88). ...Kant's already idiosyncratic Christian-Neoplatonic ("Augustinian") interpretation of Plato' etc. Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 126, 127

<sup>38</sup> 'His repeated profession of allegiance to the Lutheran faith ought not to be taken as a brief of Trinitarian orthodoxy.' from the Foreword by Louis Dupré, in Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994, x; from the SUNY Press blurb for this book: '(Hegel) made no secret of his filiation with the esoteric strands of Christian mysticism and this was clearly the way he was understood by F. C. Bauer, as well as Feuerbach, Engels, Marx and many of his immediate successors. It has always struck me as a major lacuna in Hegel scholarship that such a study had not appeared. Now it has been filled in considerable measure.' David Walsh, The Catholic University of America

<sup>39</sup> 'It is no coincidence that the three parts of the *Encyclopaedia - Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit* - correspond to the structure of the trinity' Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' op. cit., 10; 'Interestingly, Hegel draws a parallel between the three parts of his system - Logic, Nature, Spirit - and the three persons of the Christian Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 227-228; '(For Hegel the primary triad is Logic-Nature-Spirit) which in turn is patterned after the Christian Trinity.' Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 178; 'Finally, and most extravagantly, Hegel sometimes draws an analogy between the three sections of his system, Logik, Naturphilosophie and Geistesphilosophie as analogous to the doctrine of the Trinity.' Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 134



At every point, the Christian myth both disguises and reinforces Hegel's Neoplatonism through enrichment by its prose poetic effect. His conflation of the first and third hypostases into his adaptation of the Proclean triad in the second (following a similar use Cusanus made of Proclus' triad in *De docta ignorantia*), together with the influence of Eckhart and Böhme adds to and intensifies the same philosophical and creative effect.<sup>40</sup>

#### 11.3.4 The Christian Trinity and Neoplatonism

In his lectures on the philosophy of religion Hegel said

the Trinity may have entered Christian doctrine from the Alexandrian school, or from the Neoplatonists. ...that doctrine is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian religion.<sup>41</sup>

The editor added that F.A.G.Tholuck, with whom Hegel corresponded

was convinced...that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is closely linked with Neoplatonism.<sup>42</sup>

In his commentary on Prop. 176 ('*All the intellectual Forms are both implicit each in other and severally existent*') in Proclus' *The Elements of Theology* Dodds wrote of the Neoplatonic unity-in-distinction - Hegel's mystical 'reason-world'

A perfect system of knowledge would be a perfect type of organic unity: each part would involve, and be involved in the existence of every other part, yet without any blurring of the articulations which keep each part distinct and unique. In the content of a well-ordered human mind we may see an approximation to such a (unity-in-distinction)...The most elaborate discussion of the concept of (unity-in-distinction) is to be found in the *Parmenides* commentary, 751. 15ff. From Pr. it was taken over by the Christian Neoplatonists, who made use of it to explain the doctrine of the Trinity (e.g. ps.-Dion...Nic. Cusan. *de docta ignorantia* 38. 24 Hoffmann-Klibansky).<sup>43</sup>

In the section Dodds referred to in Book I of *De docta ignorantia* Cusanus, using the figure of a triangle as a metaphor, seeks to clarify the Trinity's triune unity-in-distinction

Furthermore, you can be helped to understand the foregoing if you ascend from a quantitative triangle to a non-quantitative triangle. Clearly, every quantitative triangle has three angles equal to two right angles. And so, the

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<sup>40</sup> '(The idea of the Trinity) properly belongs to church history. The main features are as follows: First, the Father, the One, is the abstract element that is expressed as the abyss, the depth (i.e., precisely what is still empty), the inexpressible, the inconceivable, that which is beyond all concepts...it is the negative of the concept, and its conceptual character is to be this negative' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 288

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vol. I, 157

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 291-292

larger the one angle is, the smaller are the other two. Now, any one angle can be increased almost but (in accordance with our first premise) not completely up to the size of two right angles. Nevertheless, let us hypothesise that it is increased completely up to the size of two right angles while the triangle remains [nonetheless a triangle]. In that case, it will be obvious that the triangle has one angle which is three angles and that the three angles are one.<sup>44</sup>

### 11.3.5 Proclus' triad: Being, Life and Intelligence

Chlup noted that the late Neoplatonists in antiquity tended to think in triads and thought that being must come before the thinking subject. Proclus exemplified both these in his philosophy - the former with a degree of obsession echoed by Hegel and the latter in his 'inner' triad within the second hypostasis which, I will argue, is the source of the basic structure of Hegel's philosophy.

Proclus set out this triad in *On the Theology of Plato* and in Prop. 101 in *The Elements of Theology*

*All things which participate intelligence are preceded by the unparticipated Intelligence, those which participate life by Life, and those which participate being by Being; and of these three unparticipated principles Being is prior to Life and Life to Intelligence.*<sup>45</sup>

He argued

For in the first place, because in each order of existence unparticipated terms precede the participated, there must be Intelligence prior to things intelligent, Life prior to living things, and Being prior to things which are. ...Being will stand foremost; for it is present to all things which have life and intelligence (since whatever lives and shares in intellection necessarily exists)...Life has the second place; for whatever shares in intelligence shares in life...The third principle is Intelligence; for whatever is in any measure capable of knowledge both lives and exists. ...Being stands foremost, next to it Life, and then Intelligence.<sup>46</sup>

Triads are very common in *On the Theology of Plato* and it is extremely difficult if not impossible to fully understand how Proclus positioned them and the function he accorded them all. It seems that for him the same triad Being/Life/Intelligence is also subordinate within the third hypostasis, Soul, but I think its initial existence in his second hypostasis was of the most interest to Hegel because that second hypostasis is the site of his 'reason-world.'

Dodds stated that Proclus insisted the Being/Life/Intelligence triad is not comprised of hypostases like the primary hypostases but are *three aspects of a single reality* (my italics), each implying the

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,38,23

<sup>45</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 91

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

others as cause or consequent<sup>47</sup> and as successive stages in the unfolding from the One - each predominates at a certain stage of the development, without excluding the others. Being becomes Life by procession, which becomes Intelligence by reversion.

While procession is creative, reversion is dependent on will - this is consistent with Plotinus (*The Enneads* III.2-3 and VI.8, 'On Free Will and the Will of the One').

Dodds writes that the triad is mirrored in each of its terms<sup>48</sup> and that

The motives governing this development seem to have been (a) the recognition that reality is logically prior to thought, since the thinker, in order to think, must first exist; (b) the desire to arrange causes in an ontological order corresponding to their degree of universality; (c) the post-Plotinian theory that all intelligibles have a triadic structure, mirroring at every level the fundamental triad<sup>49</sup>

This relationship between the parts within a triadic structure, with the dialectical potential now available - something Hegel thought was lacking in the relations between the hypostases<sup>50</sup> - was of most interest to him. He summarised this in his *Science of Logic*

Everything is a syllogism, a universal that through particularity is united with individuality; but it is certainly not a whole consisting of three propositions.<sup>51</sup>

The same obsessive triadic structuring of his philosophy has been noted by many commentators.<sup>52</sup> Helmig and Steel wrote of Proclus' philosophy

(This) triadic structure must be understood as expressing an intrinsic and essential relation between successive levels of being. The intimate relation between Being, Life, and Intellect is the origin of the basic structure uniting all causes to their effects, namely the relation of immanence, procession and

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<sup>47</sup> Prop. 103. *All things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature: for in Being there is life and intelligence; in Life, being and intelligence; in Intelligence, being and life; but each of these exists upon one level intellectually, upon another vitally, and on the third existentially.* Ibid., 93

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the net of Indra

<sup>49</sup> Dodds in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 252-253

<sup>50</sup> 'In the work of the Neoplatonists we saw the idea in its universality. But they did not show that three-in-oneness or trinity is what is true - and one must become conscious that this alone is what is true. ...A dialectical mode comes into play too, since the antitheses, which are taken as absolute, are brought back to their unity.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 17

<sup>51</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 669

<sup>52</sup> 'In Spirit, the fundamental form of necessity is the triad.' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 19; Inwood wrote of Hegel's triads 'a Hegelian triad, like the Neoplatonic triad, is a return journey, and, as in Proclus, the triadic scheme reappears at successive levels.' Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 297; 'A numerology pervades Hegel's system, in particular a fascination with Proclean triads', '(In Hegel's philosophy) each major subdivision of each science is a triad of enneads, "nines" (meaning that each science is an ennead of enneads). ... (Hegel's) system is a triad of triads of triads of triads of triads.' Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 122, 101

reversion...This triad has been called the “triad of triads,” the underlying principle of all triadic structures<sup>53</sup>

### 11.3.6 Hegel on Proclus’ triad

Hegel acknowledged that Proclus elaborated in detail and specificity on Plotinus’ philosophy and he expressed superlative praise for his trinity<sup>54</sup>

What is most definite and most excellent in Proclus is the more precise definition of the idea in its three forms, the trinity. He...calls these three ‘gods’. ...he considers the three abstract determinations in turn, each on its own account as a totality of the triunity...he grasps each of the three determinations of the absolute in turn as totality, and by doing so he obtains a *real* trinity. We must look upon this as an advance, as an outlook that is perfectly correct.<sup>55</sup>

Hegel then wrote

As for the definition of the triad, its three moments are the One, the Infinite, and the Limit. These are the abstract moments presented in his ‘Platonic Theology’<sup>56</sup>

As I have argued previously, Hegel’s conflation of the hypostases of Plotinus and Proclus when discussing their philosophies indicated how *he* himself expressed *his* Neoplatonism, for both philosophical and poetic effect, by conflating and *concentrating* the hypostases - into the primary triad in Proclus’ second hypostasis - Intellect.

Proclus *suspended* that triad from the One, which forms no part of it.<sup>57</sup> Consistent with Plotinus who set out the relationship between the One, Intellectual-Principle and Being, the primary element in Proclus’ triad is Being, not the One. The One *generates* Intellectual-Principle, the function of which is to *create* and which

by its intellectual act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Intellectual-Principle...now while these two are coalescents, having their existence in common, and are never apart, still the unity they form is two-

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<sup>53</sup> Christoph Helmig, Carlos Steel, ‘Proclus,’ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/proclus/>

<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that Hegel referred to Proclus’ triad as a trinity, with the implication of persons rather than things.

<sup>55</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 342

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> ‘this first triad subsisting from, and conjoined with *the one*,’ Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. XIII and as previously quoted ‘Hence it is necessary to arrange *the one* prior to *the one being*, (my italics) and to suspend the one being from that which is one alone. For if *the one* and the one being were the same, and it made no difference to say one and being (since if they differed, *the one* would again be changed from the one being,) if therefore *the one* differs in no respect from the one being, all things will be one, and there will not be multitude in beings, nor will it be possible to denominate things, lest there should be two things, the thing and the name.’ Ibid., Bk. III, Ch. XX.

sided; there is Intellectual-Principle as against Being, the intellectual agent as against the object of intellection; we consider the intellectual act and we have the Intellectual-Principle; we think of the object of that act and we have Being.<sup>58</sup>

In *On the Theology of Plato* Proclus referred to the elements or gods of his triad as bound (meaning Being), infinite and (as Hegel correctly noted) ‘mixed’

Such therefore, is the first triad of intelligibles, according to Socrates in the *Philebus*, viz. bound, infinite, and that which is mixed from these. And of these, bound indeed is a God proceeding to the intelligible summit, from *the imparticipable and first God*, (my italics) measuring and defining all things, and giving subsistence to every paternal, connective, and undefiled genus of Gods.<sup>59</sup>

Each element of this triad is comprised of a further triad of the same elements, which is another way of saying that each element mirrors the other two in its functioning. As Hegel wrote

the whole is the process of these three totalities positing themselves identically in one another. To this extent Proclus is much more definite and has gone much further than did Plotinus, and we can say that in this regard his work contains what is most highly developed and most excellent in the Neoplatonists.<sup>60</sup>

Hegel continued

Defined more specifically and concretely, the One is substance; the Infinite is life as such, and the Limit is *nous* or understanding. For what is concrete, for the unity of opposites, Proclus follows Plato by using the expression ‘the mixed’; but this is an unsatisfactory expression.<sup>61</sup>

To repeat, Hegel is indicatively and importantly incorrect with regard to the place and function of the One here - it has no part in this triad. For Plotinus and Proclus, the One is not substance, is not Mind, is not Being, does not think, does not create and is not many. All of these which Hegel attributed to their philosophies he applied in *his* philosophical and prose poetic conflation of them - *as well as* taking the same position as Plotinus and Proclus on the One, *denying* that it can be known.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.1.4

<sup>59</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. XII

<sup>60</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 342

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 343

<sup>62</sup> Hegel’s One is clearly flexible ‘*Insofar as* (my italics) the One is the absolute One, unknowable of itself and undisclosed, what is sheerly abstract, then it cannot be known.’ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 343

This primary triad - Being, Life and Intelligence (*nous*) - as with the hypostases, is also the site of emanation and return. As Dodds wrote, Being *becomes* Life by procession which *becomes* Intelligence by reversion.

Hegel wrote of this triad

Thus the limit goes forth from the One...the point to which all essentially reverts...just as this is presented in Plotinus too. ...The second moment is then the going-forth, the progression. Subsisting is what is first...it is at the same time the going-forward or the Infinite, and so, when concretely defined, it is life. Life contains within itself the subsisting, or *ousia*. It is itself the entire totality in the form of the Infinite or the indeterminate, so that it is a manifold. But it also contains within itself the Limit or the reversion whereby it is perpetually made conformable to the principle, to *ousia*, and brings an intellectual circle to completion. ...The third substance is thinking as such...It has as its object what is posited in the form of the Infinite, namely, life. This intellectual multiplicity that life is it contains within itself. Life is a moment of this third substance, but, at the same time, thinking is what leads the intellectual world back to the substance; it is what posits the unity of the circle of life with the first or absolute unity.<sup>63</sup>

This triad of triunities is the source of Hegel's tripartite division of his philosophy in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1830) into the *Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit*. As he wrote

All of this is just one idea - the abiding, the progressing, and the returning. Each of them is totality on its own account, but the last is the totality that brings everything back into itself. These three triunities make known in a mystical fashion the absolute cause of all things, the first substance. In its proper sense 'mystical' means 'speculative'. The mystical or speculative [task] consists in comprehending as a unity these distinctions that are defined as totalities, as gods.<sup>64</sup>

### 11.3.7 Hegel's Neoplatonic Trinity

In his editorial introduction to volume III of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (which Hegel delivered four times between 1821 and 1831), Hodgson noted that Hegel had structured his 'philosophical redescription'<sup>65</sup> of the Christian religion in two triads, one within the other. Where the outer triad is one of analysis applied to the previously addressed determinate or finite religions, the inner triad sets out the representation of the Christian God - the idea of God in and for itself (the immanent Trinity), the idea in diremption (the creation of the world) and the appearance of the idea in finite spirit (which includes estrangement, redemption and reconciliation).

Hodgson wrote that what this offered, rather than a trinitarian structure

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 343-344

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 344

<sup>65</sup> Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 11

is a *philosophical triad*, (my italics) drawn from the three branches of philosophy - the logical idea, nature, and (finite) spirit and recapitulated in Hegel's depiction of "the revealed religion" in §567-§570 of the *Encyclopaedia*. It has the peculiar result that *the "Son" ...occupies the third moment of the triad rather than the second.* (my italics) The third trinitarian moment, the "Spirit," becomes a kind of appendage, treated under Sec. C of the outer triad, "Community, Cultus."<sup>66</sup>

He added that for Hegel to give an adequate account of the Christian idea of God he needed to substantially modify this from a syllogism comprised of universal, particular and individual to the kingdoms of Father, Son and Spirit, which he did in later lectures.

Yet Hegel saw his entire system in terms of universal, particular and individual, where the logical Idea is the principle of universality, *nature* the principle of particularity and finite Spirit the principle of singularity. Hodgson wrote

Each of these, in turn, mediates between the other two; together they constitute the structure of Hegel's entire philosophical system.<sup>67</sup>

In his *The Elements of Theology*, Proclus not only named the elements of his triad - Being, Life and Intelligence and set out their sequence - there must be Being to create Life and there must be Life for there to be Intelligence, he argued that in that sequence of emanation and return, each element 'mirrors' the other two in its functioning. As stated above, Dodds argued that Life is the product of procession and Intelligence of reversion.

The processes of emanation, mediation and return between the elements in Hegel's Trinity replicate the processes of emanation, mediation and return between the elements of Proclus' inner triad - Proclus' Being is replicated in Hegel's God/Being/Mind, his Life is replicated in Hegel's nature and his Intelligence, as the unity of the other two, is replicated in Hegel's finite Spirit, which finds completion in a perspectival cultus.<sup>68</sup>

Hegel's *philosophical* Trinity is encapsulated in the three books of his *Encyclopaedia*. Organised in that order, these books embody the process of Neoplatonic emanation and return - from God as a dialectical process in the *Logic* to Section III in the *Philosophy of Spirit* which deals with Absolute Spirit (Art, Religion and finally Philosophy), concluding with

The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.<sup>69</sup>

It is, to state it again, a testament to the power of ideology and the attractions of careerism, particularly in a subject the practice and history of which is so intertwined with religion, that the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 273

<sup>68</sup> 'The truth of the Trinity is most adequately grasped in purely speculative, logical categories as the dialectic of unity, differentiation, and return. It is a mystery, but a rational mystery - the mystery of reason, of thought itself.' Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 16

<sup>69</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 315

fundamentals of Christianity should be confused with those of a pagan philosophy. The Christian God requires *no* ‘diremption’ in order to be ‘fully realised’ and to achieve a self-knowledge he already has through his engagement with humanity - he is perfect and omniscient. Hegel not only questioned this,<sup>70</sup> he denied it. We read in the *Philosophy of Nature*

God, as an abstraction, is not the true God, but only as the living process of positing His Other, the world, which, comprehended in its divine form is His Son; and it is only in unity with His Other, in Spirit, that God is Subject. <sup>71</sup>

Of God’s ‘diremption’ into the world, Hodgson correctly wrote ‘Here Hegel’s affinity with Neoplatonism and German mysticism is evident.’<sup>72</sup> Magee wrote

Notoriously, Hegel employs Neoplatonic emanation imagery to describe the transition from *Logic* to *Philosophy of Nature*, saying that the Idea “freely releases itself.” This sort of approach is to be found in Eckhart as well.<sup>73</sup>

For the Christian, nature is *not* ‘the son of God.’<sup>74</sup> There is no mystical equation between Christ and the world in the following

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour<sup>75</sup>

It is no surprise that Cusanus is readily recognised as a Christian Neoplatonist while Hegel, with his prominent position in both patriarchal capitalist ideology and Western supremacism (‘the man-master of Reason’), not at all so, yet the *religious* belief of Cusanus was consistent with Christianity where Hegel’s *philosophical* belief was not.

The former believed God to be perfect and made that aspect of his belief central to his philosophy,<sup>76</sup> he believed that God sent Christ into an imperfect world<sup>77</sup> to be the Saviour of those who followed

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<sup>70</sup> ‘If God is all-sufficient and lacks nothing, why does He disclose Himself in a sheer Other of Himself?’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 14

<sup>71</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 13. Magee wrote ‘On its own, logic (or the logos) is formal and one-dimensional. To be fully realised, the Idea must “express itself” in the world of space and time. Thus, the *Logic* must be supplemented by the *Philosophy of Nature*,’ Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 190

<sup>72</sup> Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 17

<sup>73</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel and Mysticism’ in Beiser, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, op. cit., 266

<sup>74</sup> ‘Nature is the son of God,’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 14

<sup>75</sup> John 3.16, *The Good News Bible*, American Bible Society, New York, 1976, 127

<sup>76</sup> ‘For, as Dionysius concludes at the end of *The Mystical Theology*: “above all affirmation God is the perfect and unique Cause of all things; and the excellence of Him who is unqualifiedly free from all things and is beyond all things is above the negation of all things.”,’ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’), op. cit., I,1,24; of Christ ‘we have in Him complete perfection...“He is the Image of the Invisible God”,’ Ibid., III,4,204

<sup>77</sup> ‘For He is the Form of being, or the Form of every formable form. But the creation, which is not what it is able to be, does not exist in an unqualified sense of “exist.” God alone exists perfectly and completely.’ Nicholas of Cusa, *De Possest* (‘On Actualised-Possibility’), op. cit., 14



him, not for his Father's self-knowledge and self-completion and yet, as with Plotinus' appreciation for the beauty of the world,<sup>78</sup> Cusanus also believed that the earth is a 'noble star,' quite distinct from Paul's belief that it was groaning with pain.

Hegel employed the Christian Trinity and myth to poetically enrich his philosophy, to disguise his Neoplatonism to present it as something new and to protect his career - he wrote of a dirempted, vital Spirit that is

estranged from itself; in Nature, Spirit lets itself go, a Bacchic god unrestrained and unmindful of itself<sup>79</sup>

The *organisational structure* of Hegel's Trinity, reflected in the three books of his *Encyclopaedia*, is the same as that of the three books of Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia* - the first book of which is concerned with God, the second with his creation the universe and the *third*, as Hodgson noted of Hegel's philosophical triad in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, with Jesus, and the, again, culmination in a perspectival church of the Spirit.<sup>80</sup> The Trinitarian *expositions* of Hegel and Cusanus both follow the Neoplatonic order and process of emanation and return in Proclus' triad Being/Life/Intelligence, Hegel's account being much more developed dialectically than the other two.<sup>81</sup>

### 11.3.8 The Trinity is a metaphor that points to a truth beyond itself

Redding wrote

for Hegel, religion is superseded by philosophy and...philosophy expresses *adequately* in terms of concepts what religion expresses less adequately in terms of images or pictures. (When he) talks of "God" or when he uses any other part of the vocabulary of religion (we must understand him as speaking) 'metaphorically'. Religious discourse is for Hegel a *façon de parler* which is not meant to be taken literally.<sup>82</sup>

Redding presents an accepted view - that Hegel's use of the religious imagery of the Christian myth is figurative and that the content of this finds full expression in Hegel's conceptual language. Magee made the same point - that Hegel's Trinity is

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<sup>78</sup> 'And we must recognise, that even in the world of sense and part, there are things of a loveliness comparable to that of the Celestials - forms whose beauty must fill us with veneration for their creator and convince us of their origin in the divine,' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., II.9.17

<sup>79</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 14

<sup>80</sup> 'For "church" bespeaks a oneness of many [members] - each of whom has his personal truth preserved without confusion of natures or of degrees; but the more *one* the church is, the greater it is; hence, this church - [viz.] the church of the eternally triumphant - is maximal, since no greater union of the church is possible.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., III,12,261

<sup>81</sup> '*On Learned Ignorance* devotes its first book to God, the second to the universe and a third to the God-man, Jesus Christ. While its order mirrors the outflow from God and return to him, this book does not distinguish philosophy and theology as contemporary thinkers might, but unites them in a single overview of Neoplatonic Christian reality.' Clyde Lee Miller, 'Cusanus, Nicolaus [Nicolas of Cusa],' Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cusanus/>

<sup>82</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 133

a figurative way of speaking about the three moments of the Absolute: Logic (or the account of the Absolute Idea), nature and Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

The Christian myth and the Christian Trinity are not only metaphors for Hegelian conceptualisation, but just as *they* ‘point beyond themselves to the truth that they do not literally express,’<sup>84</sup> so, likewise do Hegel’s concepts, dialectics and the primary divisions of his philosophy - Logic, Nature and Spirit which he found in Proclus’ ‘trinity’ Being, Life and Intelligence. They point to the *philosophical* truth of Neoplatonism, to the unity of subject and object, of subjects and objects, of *philosophical* souls finding their true selves - in a *Neoplatonic* community.

### 11.3.9 Core Neoplatonic metaphors Hegel used

#### 11.3.9.1 Emanation and return (including elevation and introversion)

The metaphor of an outgoing stream of consciousness and its return to unity underlies Hegel’s philosophy and he illustrated this with further metaphors in his discussion of it

To philosophical cognition, the progression (of consciousness) is a stream *flowing in opposite directions*, leading forward to the other, but at the same time working backward, so that what appears to be the *last*, founded on what precedes, appears rather to be the *first* – the foundation.<sup>85</sup>

Hodgson expressed it in a slightly different way

the rise of finite consciousness to the absolute is at the same time the return of absolute spirit to itself.<sup>86</sup>

Plotinus also drew on the metaphor of a fluid gushing from Intellectual-Principle, writing of life being

poured copiously throughout a Universe, engendering the universal things and weaving variety into their being, never at rest from producing an endless sequence of comeliness and shapeliness, a living pastime.<sup>87</sup>

#### 11.3.9.2 Light

‘Light,’ ‘the activating and animating agent in Nature’<sup>88</sup> is no less a mystical, spiritual concept for Hegel than it is for Plotinus - it is ‘simply Thought itself.’<sup>89</sup> Light, the sun, is a

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<sup>83</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 246

<sup>84</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 105

<sup>85</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, note 115, 227

<sup>86</sup> Hodgson, ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,’ op. cit., 236

<sup>87</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., III.2.15

<sup>88</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 106

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 93

pure force, an intensive life which holds itself within itself, the celestial sphere which has withdrawn into itself...in whose flux and reflux every distinction is extinguished.<sup>90</sup>

In his two *Logics*, touted by academic ideologues and careerists as masterpieces of the most rigorous conceptual reason, Hegel's mysticism when writing of 'light' is undeniable

Essence...is Being...a seeming or reflected light - Essence accordingly is Being thus reflecting light into itself. The Absolute is the Essence.<sup>91</sup>

one *pictures* (Hegel's appropriate italics) being to oneself, perhaps in the *image* (my italics) of pure light as the clarity of undimmed seeing<sup>92</sup>

and for added prose poetic effect, he equated the dispersal of Light with Christ's crucifixion

Pure Light disperses its (God's) unitary nature into an infinity of forms, and offers up itself as a sacrifice to being-for-self<sup>93</sup>

#### 11.3.9.3 **Mirror**<sup>94</sup>

Inwood wrote that for self-consciousness to develop, another is required as a mirror, reflecting oneself.<sup>95</sup> Hodgson expanded

(For Hegel) Reality is...a mirror of consciousness; but *consciousness is also a mirror of reality*. 'Speculation' (from the Latin *speculum*, 'mirror') involves a relationship of double mirroring in which a reversal in the flow of meaning occurs – from object to subject as well as from subject to object. The condition of possibility for this reversal is that subject and object, self and world, participate in, are moments of, an encompassing whole, which Hegel calls variously 'truth,' 'actuality,' 'the universal,' 'the absolute,' 'spirit' – or 'God.'<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 87. Plotinus made frequent use of the metaphor of light to express the unity of subject and its object of contemplation: 'shining down upon all, the light of godlike Intellection'; 'The only reasonable explanation of act flowing from it lies in the analogy of light from a sun...the One shines eternally, resting upon the Intellectual Realm' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.6.5 and V.3.12

<sup>91</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 162

<sup>92</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 93. Hegel's discussion of being and nothing in this section is *metaphorical*.

<sup>93</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 420

<sup>94</sup> See also 8.5 and 9.5, 10.3 and 11.3.5,6,7

<sup>95</sup> Inwood in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, xix

<sup>96</sup> Hodgson, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' op. cit., 234-235. As previously quoted, Plotinus wrote of the relationship between subject and object 'In the pure Intellectual...the vision and the envisioned are a unity; the seen is as the seeing and seeing as seen.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.8

#### 11.3.9.4 Sight<sup>97</sup>

The spiritual activity of ‘seeing’ (which equates with knowing) is the culmination of the Neoplatonic process. As previously argued (8.5), Hegel’s recognitive theory of Spirit finds completion in a cultus comprised of perspectival Subject-Objects, all simultaneously seeing/ knowing ‘mirror’ and ‘eye.’

Once again indicative of his concentrated prose poetic style, Hegel brought the metaphors of emanation, light, mirror and sight together in his illustration of the Neoplatonic vitalism of idea, also drawing on Plotinus’ One as the source which remains present within itself

all the emergent components in the living individual and their systematic arrangement proceed from the one idea, because all these particulars are simply mirror and images of this one vitality. They have their actuality only in this unity, and all their distinctions or diverse characteristics together are themselves just the expression of the idea and the form contained within it. So the idea is at once central point and periphery, the light source that in all its diffusion does not come outside itself but instead remains present and immanent within itself.<sup>98</sup>

#### 11.3.10 Hegel infused the Trinity with Neoplatonic symbolism

As Hegel’s distortions through conflation in his discussions of the philosophies of Plotinus and Proclus in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* are reflected in his own conflated Neoplatonism (addressed in Chapter 7), so the Christian Trinity and his distortions of it provided him with a wealth of symbolism which he used to illustrate and enrich every aspect of his philosophy’s Neoplatonic process.

##### 11.3.10.1 God as a symbol for unity *and* difference

Most broadly, as Hodgson wrote

‘Father’ is not a divine person but a symbol designating the immanent Trinity, while ‘Son’ is a symbol designating the economic or worldly Trinity, and ‘Spirit’ is a symbol designating the inclusive or holistic Trinity.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See also 8.5 and 10.3. Exemplifying the significance of ‘sight’ in philosophy, Geary noted that ‘Idea’ comes from the Indo-European root *weid*, meaning ‘to see,’ that ‘intuition’ derives from the Latin *in* (at) and *tuere* (to look) and ‘speculate’ derives from the Latin *speculari* (to watch, examine or observe). Geary, *I Is an Other, The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*, op.cit., 42

<sup>98</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 175; Plotinus wrote ‘The only reasonable explanation of act flowing from it (the Good) lies in the analogy of light from a sun. The entire intellectual order may be figured as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King: but this manifestation is not cast out from it - that would cause us to postulate another light before the light - but the One shines eternally, resting upon the Intellectual Realm; this, not identical with its source...is seeing, self-knowing, the primal knower.’ V.3.12

<sup>99</sup> Hodgson, ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,’ op. cit., 247

For Hegel, God symbolises the unitary source not only of emanation but of difference,<sup>100</sup> Christ whose coming into the world entails the first negation symbolises the merger of the infinite Word with the plurality of the created, finite world and the Holy Spirit, actualised in the negation of that negation through the ‘death of God,’ the reunification of these first two terms. Hegel’s definition of ‘God’ is redolent with Neoplatonism

‘It (God) is also not an inert, abstract universal, however, but rather the absolute womb or the infinite fountainhead out of which everything emerges, into which everything returns, and in which it is eternally maintained. This basic determination is therefore the definition of God as substance.’<sup>101</sup>

#### 11.3.10.2 Christ as a symbol for unity *in* difference

the Son is other than the Father, and this otherness is difference - otherwise it would not be spirit. But the other is [also] God and has the entire fullness of the divine nature within itself.<sup>102</sup>

God, Christ and Holy Spirit all symbolise the unity-in-difference (unity-in-multiplicity) of Neoplatonic dialectics throughout the entire process, from emanation to return.

#### 11.3.10.3 Christ as a symbol for emanation

The kingdom of God - or spirit - is to move from the universal to determinacy, to pass over into actuality. This movement, the process of determining, takes place in the life of Jesus.<sup>103</sup>

#### 11.3.10.4 Christ as a symbol for mystery

Christ was the ‘God-man’<sup>104</sup> - man mysteriously become one with God. Hegel blended Christian mystery with Neoplatonism for greater poetic effect.

#### 11.3.10.5 Christ as a symbol for the unity of divine and human

Christ’s coming to the world signified that the divine and the human are not intrinsically different - he represents the highest stage of the spiritual being of humanity. The kingdom of God is made actual through Christ. Likewise Soul in the *Enneads* is the intermediary between the ‘worlds’ of intellect and sense and the representative of the former in the latter. As our souls return to the One through the thinking of the second hypostasis and for Proclus, as our souls are infused with the

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<sup>100</sup> ‘The Christian God is...the triune God who contains difference within himself’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 44-45

<sup>101</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 374. Cf. ‘The Good...is the Fountain at once and Principle of Beauty: the Primal Good and the Primal Beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus, always, Beauty’s seat is There.’ Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.6.9

<sup>102</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 311-312

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, Hodgson in note 229, 149

gods, so in Christianity our souls return to unity with God through the 'death of God' and in the coming of a perspectival cultus of Spirit.

#### 11.3.10.6 Christ as a symbol for the unity of infinite and finite

Christ embodied the crucial Neoplatonic relationship between infinitude and the determinacy of finitude. Hegel used Christ to bring the relation between infinite and finite from theoretical abstraction into the lived world. The death of Christ reconciled the two (the finite individual with the infinite Absolute).

#### 11.3.10.7 Christ as a symbol for the unity of eternal and in time

(With Christ) The Neoplatonic timeless Trinity...at once remains timeless and yet actually enters into history.<sup>105</sup>

#### 11.3.10.8 Christ as a symbol for the journey of the soul

The trials and tribulations of Christ are echoed in the trials and tribulations of the soul, exemplified in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

even the whole sharpness and dissonance of the suffering, torture, and agony involved in such an opposition, belong to the nature of spirit itself<sup>106</sup>

#### 11.3.10.9 Christ as a symbol for the process of spirit and self-cognition

what this life of Christ brings to representation for us...[is] this process of the nature of spirit - God in human shape.<sup>107</sup>

With the 'death of God' spirit in humanity is reconciled with itself, thereby attaining true consciousness of itself. The goal of Neoplatonism is achieved.

#### 11.3.10.10 Christ as a symbol for contradiction

God's suffering and death are the expression of his love. In dying (the death of death) he is resurrected into eternal life (the life of Spirit in the cultus, through God's return to and eternal reconciliation with himself).

#### 11.3.10.11 Christ as a symbol for the process of negation

The death of Christ is the affirmative negation of the initial negation, his incarnation.

#### 11.3.10.12 Christ as a symbol for recollection

Because he physically dies, Christ can only live in the memories of the faithful. Plotinus wrote

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<sup>105</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, Indiana University Press, London, 1971, 172

<sup>106</sup> G.W.F.Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, Volume I, Trans. T.M.Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2010, 537

<sup>107</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 132

At any time when we have not been in direct vision of (the Supreme), memory is the source of its activity within us<sup>108</sup>

Recollection, like a mirror, embodies higher 'truth' and since, for the Neoplatonist, it is closely related to love and desire, its activity (thinking or imaging) is the beginning of the soul's ascent. Love for Christ in memory leads to desire for the return of one's soul to union with God.

Relevant to Christ's death and ascension, Plotinus perceptively wrote

Memory, of course, must be understood not merely of what might be called the sense of remembrance, but so as to include a condition induced by the past experience or vision. There is such a thing as possessing more powerfully without consciousness than in full knowledge; with full awareness the possession is of something quite distinct from the self; unconscious possession runs very close to identity<sup>109</sup>

Such a recollection of Christ all the more powerfully illustrates the process of Neoplatonic return.

#### 11.3.10.13 **Christ as a symbol for the means of return and unification**

Hegel wrote that a single historical individual should enable the *activity* of reconciliation through his death and ascension, thereby actualising a universal self-consciousness of community, a unity of members in the Spirit.

#### 11.3.10.14 **The Holy Spirit as a symbol for the return to unity in knowledge**

Reconciliation occurs in the Holy Spirit - the third 'moment' of the Trinity, the unity of 'Father' and 'Son.' God, 'completed,' is now in his community.

*Inspired* by their mysticism, the Neoplatonists have always had a strong interest in the world. Chlup wrote of Proclus' philosophy that while the Soul can never enter the realm of the One, it *can* open up to the gods and be filled with their power - the gods can come to *it*.<sup>110</sup> This was Hegel's intention in his use and distortions of the Christian myth and Trinity.

At every point in his use of the Christian myth and Trinity (comprised of the *allegorical characters* of 'Father,' 'Son' and the reunion of 'Father' and 'Son' - Holy Spirit) and in his distortions of them, Hegel used them to more deeply anchor Neoplatonism in the world - God, needing completion,

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<sup>108</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.4.5

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.4.4

<sup>110</sup> 'Plotinus already saw the highest aim in one's unification with the One, in which the distinction between subject and object melts down entirely. Late Neoplatonists followed suit, though they differed from Plotinus in their understanding of what this unification means and how exactly it is to be reached. Once again (as with the henads), we are approaching an area of Neoplatonism where philosophy passes into the realm of religion. ...For Proclus, to unify with the One does not mean to leave one's ontological station and ascend from the level of soul to that of the First Principle. (The late Neoplatonists believed that) the boundaries between levels of reality are penetrable in one direction only (- from higher to lower. So) while human Soul can never really enter the realm of the One, it can open up to the gods and act in unison with them, becoming their extension, as it were, and being filled with their power.' Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 163

comes to the world, he finds and therefore *we* find (because *we* are God) completion through his participation in it, in *us* - 'salvation' lies in a *philosophical* community.

Hegel also used the Christian myth and Trinity and his distortions of them to poetically flavour and enrich his Neoplatonic philosophy - myth and Trinity are always present in his conceptual development, however abstract - myth, Trinity and Neoplatonic process flow out and return interlaced, but always the last sustains the other two.

#### 11.3.10.15 **The rose and the owl face each other**

In the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel wrote of 'the rose of reason,'<sup>111</sup> a mystical metaphor he acknowledged he had used of the Rosicrucians to unintentionally point beyond 'reason' itself - the concept he had laid claim to - and which metaphor he used again in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*<sup>112</sup> and of the flight of the owl of Minerva at dusk, as it philosophically reviews the course of human events.<sup>113</sup>

#### 11.3.11 **The Phenomenology of Spirit and the Logic unite in the Enneads**

Epitomising the centrality of 'seeing' to mysticism, Hegel believed that philosophy unites in a 'simple spiritual vision' raised to 'self-conscious thought' the visual immediacy and poetry of art with the 'mental' pictures of religion. As Lauer noted, what in Hegel's view is of supreme interest and importance to the human spirit is expressed in art, religion and philosophy *together*, not in philosophy alone -

we are speaking of interrelation wherein none is all that it is without the others<sup>114</sup>

This coming together in a 'simple spiritual vision' embodying the *three* manifestations of Hegel's Absolute Spirit - the artistically sensuous, the religiously pictorial and the union of them in the

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<sup>111</sup> 'To comprehend what is, this is the task of philosophy, because what is, is reason. ...To recognise reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to enjoy the present, this is the rational insight which reconciles us to the actual, the reconciliation which philosophy affords to those in whom there has once arisen an inner voice bidding them to comprehend,' G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Trans. T.M.Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, 11-12

<sup>112</sup> 'In the 1824 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the same metaphor occurs: "in order to pluck reason, the rose in the cross of the present, one must take up the cross itself." Most commentators agree that Hegel is making a reference to the imagery of the Rosicrucians, whose symbol was a rose blooming from the centre of a cross. Hegel himself makes it clear that he was referring to the Rosicrucians, in a review essay published in 1829. ...In the Preface, prior to the "rose in the cross" image, Hegel refers to the reason inherent in nature as *der Stein der Weisen*, or, as it is usually translated into English, "the philosopher's stone." These are equivalent metaphors in the Preface: both the rose in the cross and the philosopher's stone represent, for Hegel, reason, which he is calling upon his readers to discern in the present day. Given that the Rosicrucians were widely known as alchemists, Hegel could not have been ignorant of the connection between these two metaphors' Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 263

<sup>113</sup> 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., 13. Verene wrote that this has practically become the emblem and seal of Hegel's thought. Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 26

<sup>114</sup> Lauer, 'Hegel as Poet' op. cit., 12



philosophically conceptual<sup>115</sup> - was given expression by Plotinus in his resonant metaphor of a sculptor (quoted at 6.4) perfecting his soul by shaping it to become vision of the Good.<sup>116</sup>

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Logic* function as the two elements of a *unit*, detailing the process of this Neoplatonic shaping of consciousness, of ‘reason,’ of self.<sup>117</sup> As I have previously argued, Hegel pulled apart the philosophical strands in the *Enneads* for detailed treatment in different texts - where the *Phenomenology* is a study of consciousness, the *Logic* is a metaphysics and an ontology - a study of Being and its product, being.

But the metaphor of ‘shaping’ sustains both - from the development of the ‘shapes’ of consciousness in the former to that of the ‘shapes’ of the categories in the latter, culminating in that of Absolute Idea, ‘defined’ by the entirety of the argument in the *Logic*.<sup>118</sup>

The Neoplatonic process of return to unity is begun in the *Phenomenology* with the rise from sense-certainty, and the development within the stage covered by the *Phenomenology* concludes with ‘absolute knowing’. This movement is the equivalent of Soul’s return to the level of the second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle - a higher level of being than that of the third hypostasis, Soul (All-Soul, Universal Soul, Soul of the All).<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> ‘This science is the unity of Art and Religion. Whereas the vision-method of Art, external in point of form, is but subjective production and shivers the substantial content into many separate shapes, and whereas Religion, with its separation into parts, opens it out in mental picture, and mediates what is thus opened out; Philosophy not merely keeps them together to make a totality, but even unifies them into the simple spiritual vision, and then in that raises them to self-conscious thought. Such consciousness is thus the intelligible unity (cognised by thought) of art and religion, in which the diverse elements in the content are cognised as necessary, and this necessary as free.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 302

<sup>116</sup> Cusanus wrote ‘suppose that a slab of wax were conceived of as being in-formed with a mind. In that case, the mind existing within the wax would configure the wax to every shape presented to that mind—even as the mind of an artisan endeavours to do now, when mind is applied from outside the object.’ Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’), op. cit., 557, 101

<sup>117</sup> ‘we must strike for those Firsts, rising from things of sense which are the lasts. ...we must ascend to the Principle within ourselves; from many, we must become one...We shape ourselves into Intellectual-Principle; we make over our soul in trust to Intellectual-Principle and set it firmly in That; thus what That sees the soul will waken to see: it is through the Intellectual-Principle that we have this vision of The Unity’ Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI. 9.3

<sup>118</sup> Hegel employed the Neoplatonic metaphor of ‘shape’ in both his *Phenomenology* and *Logic*, in which he applied it to his overarching category ‘Absolute Idea’: ‘the absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*. It is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy. Since it contains *all* determinateness within it, and its essential nature is to return to itself through its self-determination or particularisation, *it has various shapes, and the business of philosophy is to cognise it in these*. (my italics) Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 824

<sup>119</sup> ‘First, consciousness has to enter into itself, it has to become concrete, become what it is in itself; hence it starts from immediacy, and through the sublation of this immediacy it elevates itself to thinking. This means that its true nature is to abandon its immediacy, to treat it as a state in which it ought not to be’ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 201-202

The *Logic* then takes over, detailing the development within what was for Plotinus Intellectual-Principle, the realm of unity-in-multiplicity, which development concludes with the attainment of Absolute Idea - the unity of subjectivity and objectivity.<sup>120</sup>

Negation drives the process, giving us in turn the development both in the processes of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and in the processes of the 'mind' of God in the *Logic*. 'Crises' in the former become 'inadequacies' in the latter. Where 'events' unfold dialectically in the attempt to make the content determinate in the *Phenomenology* (determinations of consciousness), concepts unfold likewise dialectically in the *Logic* (determinations of logic).<sup>121</sup> 'Shapes' gain more precise definition.

As the *Phenomenology* gives us the 'lived content' of 'reality' through a series of metaphors, the *Logic* gives us the 'formal structure' of that 'reality'. First, reason as consciousness in the *Phenomenology* rises to an initial unity of subject and object - 'absolute knowing' - now as 'pure reason' in the *Logic* it engages with a multiplicity in that unity, with all that is. Soul having attained 'absolute knowing' becomes the *activity* of 'pure knowing' in the pursuit of unity.

Based on recollection, the enmeshed philosophical strands in the guided ascent to the philosopher's God that is the *Enneads* was reproduced, expanded on and very substantially developed by Hegel in two parts - the *Phenomenology* followed by the *Logic*.<sup>122</sup> Self-knowing, incomplete in the former becomes complete in the latter. For Plotinus and Hegel, just as Soul is the principle of Life, Divine Mind is the principle of Idea.<sup>123</sup>

### 11.3.11.1 The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Enneads*

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<sup>120</sup> 'For the soul when looking at things posterior to herself, beholds the shadows and images of beings, but when she converts herself to herself she evolves her own essence, and the reasons which she contains. And at first indeed, she only as it were beholds herself; but when she penetrates more profoundly into the knowledge of herself, she finds in herself both intellect, and the orders of beings. When however, she proceeds into her interior recesses, and into the adytum as it were of the soul, she perceives with her eye closed, the genus of the Gods, and the unities of beings. For all things are in us psychically, and through this we are naturally capable of knowing all things, by exciting the powers and the images of wholes which we contain.' Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. I, Ch. III; 'For whereas reason descends unto the senses, the senses return unto reason. And in this regard notice the stages-of-return: the senses return unto reason; reason returns unto intelligence; intelligence returns unto God, where Beginning and Consummation exist in perfect reciprocity,' Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., 36, 180

<sup>121</sup> 'Just the same dialectic that we have first seen operative among shapes of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and among categories or thought-determinations in the *Logic* can be observed,' Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, op. cit.; 'The soul... a traveller, re-ascends through the power of dialectic' Henry, 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,' op. cit., li; 'dialectic analysis...orders the soul and prepares it for the influx of intellective light from above. In this way, the structures of being that dialectic has traced discursively may come alive within us and be transformed into one complex vision of intelligible reality.' Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 160-161

<sup>122</sup> To think that the *Logic*, with Hegel's claim of its rigorous conceptual reason is where he does 'proper' philosophy is erroneous and is the ideological, *academic* position. '*The Phenomenology of Spirit* was conceived as an introduction or propaedeutic to the tripartite system of Logic-Nature-Spirit.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 244-245; 'absolute knowing is the standpoint to which Hegel has hoped to bring the reader in this complex work. This is the standpoint of *science*, the standpoint from which *philosophy proper* (my italics) commences, and it commences in Hegel's next book, the *Science of Logic*.' Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, op. cit. To recognise that the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* form a developmental whole is the *philosophical* position - but to hold that would first require acknowledging Hegel's Neoplatonism.

<sup>123</sup> 'As in Soul (principle of Life) so in Divine Mind (principle of Idea) there is this infinitude of recurring generative powers; the Beings there are unfailing.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.7.3

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* describes the experience of Soul in its ascent from sense-certainty - 'the first and most primitive form of consciousness'<sup>124</sup> - through what was for Plotinus the third hypostasis (All-Soul, Universal Soul, Soul of the All) to what was for him the second, Intellectual-Principle - the site of Hegel's conflated 'reason-world'. An ascent from the finite to an infinity of *creativity*, in itself though immeasurable but still an image of the infinity of the One and the Good which infinity is addressed in the *Logic* as it details the 'mind' of God.<sup>125</sup>

As I have argued, the *Phenomenology* describes *not* a propaedeutic, a purificatory *preparation*<sup>126</sup> for 'proper' philosophy, but the *dialectical development* of consciousness within an essential, *philosophical* stage of self-knowing in the Neoplatonic process of return to the source. In it, consciousness (Soul) both rises and goes within through a series of Neoplatonic 'shapes' to attain the point of 'absolute knowing.' Throughout, Spirit crafts itself, *continuing* that crafting in the *Logic*.

Having shaped our souls into Intellectual-Principle (Hegel's 'reason-world'), 'we make over our souls in trust to it,'<sup>127</sup> so that from there, our reason now 'pure' and active in the realm of unity-in-diversity, we may *continue* in the dialectical advance to the knowledge of God.

Plotinus believed that philosophy is for the few and that the development of consciousness to the attainment of the complete unity of subject and object requires great effort, the soul repeatedly falling back to the realm of sensory experience

The soul or mind reaching towards the formless finds itself incompetent to grasp where nothing bounds it or to take impression where the impinging reality is diffuse; in sheer dread of holding to nothingness, it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest as on solid ground<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 166. It is necessary to begin with sense-certainty not only because sensory experience is the basis for contemplation: 'when in seeing what is perceptible I understand that it exists from a higher power (since it is finite, and a finite thing cannot exist from itself; for how could what is finite have set its own limit?), then I can only regard as invisible and eternal [this] Power from which it exists.' *De Possess*, 915, 3, it is also the basis of conceptualisation: 'the power of the mind—a power that grasps things and is conceptual—cannot succeed in its operations unless it is stimulated by perceptible objects' *Idiota de Mente*, 545, 77

<sup>125</sup> The infinity of Intellectual-Principle is not that of the One: 'This unity-in-diversity is the most perfect possible image of the absolute unity of the One, whom Intellect in its ordinary contemplation cannot apprehend as He is in His absolute simplicity. It represents His infinity as best it can in the plurality of Forms. Intellect is itself *infinite in power* (my italics) and immeasurable, because it has no extension and there is no external standard by which it could be measured, *but finite* (my italics) because it is a complete whole composed of an actually existing number (all that can possibly exist) of Forms, which are themselves definite, limited realities.' Armstrong in Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. I, xxi. Thus the lines of Schiller's Neoplatonic paean to infinite *creativity* that Hegel adapted to conclude the *Phenomenology* with are entirely apt, signalling Soul's arrival at what was for Plotinus the second hypostasis.

<sup>126</sup> 'Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents, in the Hegelian system, an initial stage of purification in which the would-be philosopher is purged of false intellectual standpoints so that he might receive the true doctrine of Absolute Knowing,' Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 14. Magee argues that his interpretation of this aspect of the *Phenomenology* exemplifies Hegel's Hermeticism.

<sup>127</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.3

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

Anchoring the same thoughts in the world with a more complex prose poetry, Hegel set out the process through a sequence of metaphors themselves described metaphorically - the Stations of the Cross echoed in the tribulations of a pilgrim's progress

because it has only phenomenal knowledge for its object...it can be regarded as the path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge; or as the way of the Soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were the stations appointed for it by its own nature, so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit...The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair.<sup>129</sup>

On descent to the sensory world, Soul loses its knowledge of unity with the One, with God and recollection is the means for its recovery. For Hegel and the Neoplatonists, Soul's recollection of whence it came is a timeless and partless activity (distinct from the understanding's memory which is the retrieval of things that have been introduced - of time, part and space<sup>130</sup>) essential not only to that recovery but to speculative philosophy and the developmental progress of consciousness which Hegel *begins* in his *Phenomenology*. When we fail to recollect we inevitably return to the world of sense.<sup>131</sup>

Recollection conveys not only the thought of the higher realm but also the emotional condition in which that thought was experienced. Thus imagination is the core of recollection and dialectic

Recollection proceeds through metaphors, ingenuities, and images...To recollect is not to form a proposition, but to form an image<sup>132</sup>

Plotinus wrote that recollection resides in the imagination or 'image-making faculty' and that words can act as a bridge between what is to be recollected ('the concept') and the 'image-making faculty.' Foreshadowing Cusanus' use of both metaphors and concepts, followed by Hegel, Plotinus held that the 'verbal formula' can exhibit the indivisible 'mental' conception as in a mirror

the verbal formula - the revealer, the bridge between the concept and the image-taking faculty - exhibits the concept as in a mirror; the apprehension by the image-taking faculty would thus constitute the enduring presence of the concept, would be our memory of it.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 49; 'Hegel's own philosophical point of view is shot through with Christian images, to such an extent that his system would be difficult to describe without making reference to these symbols.' Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 133

<sup>130</sup> 'Now a memory has to do with something brought into ken from without, something learned or something experienced; the Memory-Principle, therefore, cannot belong to such things as are immune from experience and from time.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.3.25

<sup>131</sup> 'When we forget we return to the world. We think in a present and when we do this, no self-knowing is possible. ...We risk becoming merely a *person* again and not a philosopher.' Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 75

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 3; 'Without images, concepts become dry and abstract. Hegel's own thinking is famously replete with images, metaphors, and analogies. ...it is evident that thought continues to be fructified by the imagistic materials thrown up by representation,' Hodgson, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' op. cit., 239

<sup>133</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.3.30

The *Phenomenology* is built on this theorising.<sup>134</sup>

Rather than using these ‘metaphors, ingenuities and images’ as mere illustrations or even as a means of circumventing ‘the unsayable,’ Hegel, consistent with the other Neoplatonists, used them as *essential* elements to condition the thinking of the readers of his *Phenomenology* to a *non-discursive way of reasoning*, of grasping ‘reality.’<sup>135</sup>

the metaphors or images in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are not just any metaphors but the metaphors of consciousness itself, *those by which it accomplishes the turning...of its being* (my italics) at any given moment. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a philosophical speech in which all the powers of language, its imagistic and its conceptual powers, are brought forth so that the reader may recollect.<sup>136</sup>

Recollection is *self*-recollection - an inner vision of the ‘truth’ we unconsciously possess, of our spiritual core, giving it expression in philosophy.<sup>137</sup> Magee wrote that the *Phenomenology* ‘is a “recollection” of the different forms in which Spirit has displayed itself and continues to display itself’.<sup>138</sup> He discussed Hegel’s use of the concept ‘recollection’ (*Erinnerung*) in the final section of the *Phenomenology*, ‘absolute knowing’

At one point (Hegel) hyphenates the German word as *Er-Innerung*, suggesting an interpretation of ‘recollection’ as a ‘going within’ of the subject (*inner* has the same meaning in German as in English, and *Innerung* has the sense of ‘innering’ or ‘inwardising’). The *Phenomenology* is, in fact,

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<sup>134</sup> In the *Phenomenology* Hegel employed the ‘verbal formula’ of development through metaphor, in the *Logic*, he used the ‘verbal formula’ of development through concepts. Cusanus, whose example Hegel followed and developed on and to whom Hegel was profoundly indebted, also used both.

<sup>135</sup> ‘The vivid images and metaphors used by (Plotinus) apparently did not just act as illustrations of mental concepts, but served rather to attune the mind to nondiscursive modes of grasping reality.’ Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 180; ‘This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 492; ‘all things are in us psychically, and through this we are naturally capable of knowing all things, by exciting the powers and the images of wholes which we contain.’ Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. I, Ch. III

<sup>136</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 25; ‘(The author argues that) the philosophic meaning of this work depends as much on Hegel’s use of metaphor and image as it does on Hegel’s dialectical and discursive descriptions of various stages of consciousness.’ Ibid; Verene quoting Carl Vaught in *The Quest for Wholeness*: ‘the stages generated by Hegel’s philosophical quest for completeness can be regarded as a sequence of metaphors which are held together by analogical connections.’ Ibid., 118; ‘(Quentin Lauer argued that the most poetic of Hegel’s works is the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and) goes on to suggest that imagery, symbol, and metaphor are necessary not just for the comprehension of Hegel’s text (i.e. the *Phenomenology*) but for the comprehension of Hegel’s subject itself - the speculative understanding of history, reality, and spirit. I could not agree more.’ Ibid., xiii; Verene made excellent points with regard to Hegel’s use of *irony* ‘Hegel uses irony to exclude other positions. It is his principal weapon, for example, when he speaks against other doctrines of the absolute (“the night in which all cows are black”), or against phrenologists, or against ethical views (“the law of the heart and the frenzy of self-conceit”). He makes them into jokes. ...Irony is a trope close to dialectic in that the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used. ...In the end, irony as well as metaphor and recollection, is the key to Hegel’s system,’ Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 22, 31, 118

<sup>137</sup> ‘Vision of the Ideas through recollection is an inner vision...Plotinus is the ultimate inspiration for this focus on inner vision.’ Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 5

<sup>138</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 167

a recollection of Spirit's development by Spirit itself. It is Spirit going within itself, recollecting itself, and writing its autobiography - not in the sense of a literal history, but instead the *natural* history of its manifestations.<sup>139</sup>

Both the *Enneads* and the *Phenomenology* conclude with the cancellation of otherness and a withdrawal into self<sup>140</sup> but where the conclusion of the *Enneads* is the end of the entire process addressed through the *Enneads*, from the sensory world to unity with the Supreme,<sup>141</sup> that of the *Phenomenology* is only the degree of self-development, of spiritual unity necessary for the *continuation* of the process at a higher stage of consciousness, of being, in the *Logic*,<sup>142</sup> indicated by the closing words - again, not of discursive reason but a poetic and religious image of infinite Neoplatonic vitalism

from the chalice of this realm of spirits  
foams forth for Him his own infinitude<sup>143</sup>

They *invoke* the *Logic*.

### 11.3.11.2 The *Phenomenology of Spirit*: theatre of the 'mind'

The *Phenomenology* is a theatre of the 'mind.' Centre stage is the *dramatis persona*, 'consciousness.' The readers are the audience. At the side of the stage Hegel stands at a lectern

pointing out to us aspects of the action, highlighting features we may have otherwise missed, directing our attention.<sup>144</sup>

As Redding wrote

Our ability to follow the progress of the character is dependent on our ability to empathise with his experience and ambition... But at the same time we retain the external point of view *onto* the character on stage. The doubleness of consciousness demanded of the dramatic persona of the *Phenomenology* is demanded of the spectator as well.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>140</sup> '(Spirit's) withdrawal into itself, in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection.' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 492

<sup>141</sup> 'This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.9.11

<sup>142</sup> 'In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, *in so far as* (my italics) this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness [i.e. of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome.' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 490

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 493; 'Hegel ends his whole work (the *Phenomenology*) with an image, an image of the inability of the divine to bring its own creation and its own being to a point of rest.' Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 7

<sup>144</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 80

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 82

He asks, in regard to this perspectival, recognitive unity-in-diversity

Might it be...that the review of the whole drama constitutes *our anagnorisis*? This, it seems to me, is something like what is supposed to happen here: there is meant to be some strong sense of recognition of the self on our, the readers' part.<sup>146</sup>

The *Phenomenology* is a great work of art. Hegel employed a range of literary devices, particularly metaphor, to draw his readers in to his philosophical theatre and, by putting *all of us* on centre stage through the development of his *dramatis persona* 'consciousness,' applied his Neoplatonic philosophy. It is because of *this*, that it is so clearly a work of art, that academics cannot accept that it is philosophy at the highest level - that they believe, as Redding does, that 'philosophy proper' is to be found in the text that followed this, which completed what Hegel began in his *Phenomenology* - the rise of consciousness from the sensory world to the knowledge of God.

### 11.3.11.3 The *Science of Logic* and Neoplatonism

The *Science of Logic*, rather than being as Magee thinks the *core* of Hegel's philosophy,<sup>147</sup> is the point of *overlap* for the influence on it of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Proclus.

Reflecting the development in the *Enneads* through Intellectual-Principle to its highest point before the first hypostasis, its conclusion in its final category Absolute Idea is the furthest attainment of the course initiated in the *Phenomenology* with the rise of consciousness from 'sense-certainty,' itself echoing the rise of Plotinus' soul from the sensory world, through Soul, to Intellectual-Principle.

Again, reflecting the influence of *Proclus*, the *Logic*<sup>148</sup> is also the *first* element in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (in order - the *Logic*, the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit*).

Beginning with the act of thinking in the sphere of 'absolute knowing,' the process *here* has its completion not in Absolute Idea but in Hegel's discussion of religion and philosophy in Absolute Spirit at the end of his *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit*

The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.<sup>149</sup>

As I have argued (11.3.7), the *Encyclopaedia* is *not* based on the Christian Trinity but on Proclus' triad in the second hypostasis Intellect - Being/Life/Intelligence. In this, as I will argue in my discussion of the relations between Hegel and Cusanus, Hegel also followed the broad structure of the three books in Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia*, the subjects of which are in turn God, the universe and Christ. Where Cusanus concluded the last book with a cultus of the Church, Plotinus concluded

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>147</sup> 'one may argue that the *Logic* is the core of Hegel's philosophy,' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 244

<sup>148</sup> Unless referring specifically to the *Encyclopaedia*, I will discuss the ('lesser', abbreviated) *Logic* and the *Science of Logic* as though they are the same.

<sup>149</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 315

his system with a cultus of souls and Hegel his with a cultus of Spirit - each cultus, importantly, one of *individuals*.<sup>150</sup>

Hegel criticised Plotinus' hypostases, finding them inadequate for his dialectical interests<sup>151</sup> but found in Proclus' triad - a triad of triunities<sup>152</sup> - the complexity, the potential, the 'real trinity' he sought (11.3.6). To creatively intensify this, again as I have argued and will return to, he introduced the *errors* that he made in his discussion of the philosophies of Plotinus and Proclus into his own philosophy by conflating the hypostases into Proclus' triad (Chapter 7).

It is Hegel's adherence to *this* triad and the degree to which he developed it that identifies him as the consummate Neoplatonist.

#### 11.3.11.4 **The Science of Logic is a theology**

Logic for Hegel is the 'scientific,' systematic exposition of the 'formal structure,' the infinite 'mind' of God

logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind.<sup>153</sup>

Plotinus wrote of this 'system of pure reason' and 'realm of pure thought and truth'

(in the Intellectual Cosmos, dialectic) pastures the Soul in the 'Meadows of Truth': it employs the Platonic division to the discernment of the Ideal-Forms, of the Authentic-Existence, and of the First-Kinds (or Categories of Being): it establishes, in the light of Intellection, the affiliations of all that issues from the Firsts, until it has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm...it

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<sup>150</sup> 'God is a trinity of Oneness, Equality-of-Oneness, and the Union thereof,' Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance, A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1990, 1-50, 2; 'DI began with a discussion of the Absolute Maximum, which was shown to be Absolute Oneness. From out of Oneness there arose a oneness in plurality, viz., the created universe, which was discussed in Book Two. Book Three then took as its theme the return of the creation to God through Christ. But in its return the creation is not *re-ensfolded* in God, is not merged with Absolute Oneness, for *each finite thing retains its individuality* (my italics); rather, the creation is *reunited* to God.' Ibid., 49; 'We shall have to consider this idea, this content, in three spheres:/1. the idea in free universality, or the pure essence of God - *the kingdom of the Father*;/2. the inward diremption of the idea, held fast for a moment in its differentiation - *the kingdom of the Son*;/3. the reconciliation of this finite spirit with spirit that has being in and for itself - *the kingdom of the Spirit*.' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 362. To repeat, my contention regarding Hegel is that his philosophy is not Christian but that he used the Christian Trinity to illustrate, ground and disguise his Neoplatonism.

<sup>151</sup> 'in his *Enneads* he frequently reiterates the same general views; we find plenty of adversions to the universal and no convincing progression through the whole, of the sort we have seen in the case of Aristotle. The *logos* or what is thought is not apart from *nous*; the *nous* is what is thought; it envisages only itself, as thinking...' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 337

<sup>152</sup> Proclus wrote of 'essence indeed in the first triad, intelligible life in the second, and intelligible intellect in the third. ...essence is suspended from the first deity...life from the second, and intellect from the third.' Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. IV., Ch. III

<sup>153</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 50



leaves to another science all that coil of premisses and conclusions called the art of reasoning<sup>154</sup>

The truth of logic is God alone, the relationship between religion and philosophy having a long history

Already for the Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists, still situated within the pagan world, the folk deities were not deities of phantasy but had become deities of thought.<sup>155</sup>

Not only is the *Logic*, consistent with Neoplatonic philosophy, both an ontology and a metaphysics

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an account of what it means to be...(and) simultaneously an account of the highest or most complete individual being<sup>156</sup>

- as the exposition of God, again consistent with Neoplatonic philosophy, it is also a theology. Schlitt, who described Hegel's logic as 'speculative theology'<sup>157</sup> wrote

In his 1829 lectures on the proofs for the existence of God, Hegel spoke of logic as metaphysical theology in so far as logic consisted in the elevation of finite thought determinations to the infinite. 'Logic is to that extent, metaphysical theology, which treats of the evolution of the Idea of God in the ether of pure thought...'<sup>158</sup>

Jaeschke and Magee both refer to Hegel's logic as a theology.<sup>159</sup> Jaeschke importantly noted the potential for a 'more detailed interpretation of the *Science of Logic* as speculative theology'<sup>160</sup> and Magee, in identifying the philosophical strands in the *Logic* unknowingly identified the elements of Proclus' triad - Being, Life and Intelligence

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<sup>154</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.3.4. The note added 'This puts Aristotelian and Stoic logic in its place. These logical systems deal with words and propositions and their relationships, and are thus merely preliminary to Platonic dialectic, which deals with the structure of reality.' Of Hegel's 'structure of reality,' Schlitt wrote 'When (Hegel) spoke of "logic," he meant the immanent and consistent self-positing and self-determining movement of pure thought,' Schlitt, *Divine Subjectivity: Understanding Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., 136

<sup>155</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I, op. cit., 152; 'In ordinary moods of mind there is a long way from logic to religion. But almost every page of what Hegel has called Logic is witness to the belief in their ultimate identity.' Bibliographical Notice in Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., xlii

<sup>156</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 148; 'Hegel himself did not hesitate to speak of categorical determinations of pure thought as metaphysical definitions of God. "Being itself and the special sub-categories of it which follow, as well as those of logic in general, may be looked upon as definitions of the Absolute, or metaphysical definitions of God ...For a metaphysical definition of God is the expression of his nature in thoughts as such; and logic embraces all thoughts so long as they continue in the thought form.'" (*Logic* §85)' Dale M. Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1984, 37

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>159</sup> '(Hegel's *Science of Logic*) is not solely a logic in the sense of an ontology but just as much a metaphysical theology.' Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, Trans., J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, 22

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 22

The Logic is simultaneously an account of the *formal structure* of God (the self-knowing Idea), the soul or mind (the living embodiment of Idea), and the Cosmos (the whole whose every part is an approximation to the being of Idea). It is thus at one and the same time a theology, rational psychology and cosmology.<sup>161</sup>

### 11.3.11.5 With what does the *Science of Logic* begin?

My contention is that for philosophical and creative reasons, Hegel conflated the Neoplatonic hypostases with Proclus' triad Being, Life and Intelligence which Proclus 'suspended' from the first hypostasis, the One.

Hegel's *philosophical* motivation for this was that this triad of triads gave him the greatest potential for the development of Neoplatonic dialectics and that, with one stroke, it enabled him to obviate the impossibility of the cognition of the One. Now the entirety of the Neoplatonic system was open to the full development of 'reason'.

Hegel's *creative* motives were that by conflating the hypostases with Proclus' triad and overlying the Christian Trinity across and weaving it into his use of it, every aspect of the Neoplatonic system could be *illustrated* and made more metaphorically rich - divine 'mind' and divine Being were now interchangeable with the Neoplatonic One and Absolute, with the Christian God, Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>162</sup> Hegel used God, Christ and Spirit to symbolise every stage in the process of emanation and return.

By further anchoring Neoplatonism in the world through the coming of Christ and the Christian Spirit to it, Hegel aimed to make this austere, mystical philosophy more relevant to those who were drawn to the cultus he believed necessary for his time. In arguing thus, he also protected his career.

Hegel described the broad flow of his *Science of Logic* in Neoplatonic terms

The essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first.<sup>163</sup>

Despite writing that it must begin without presuppositions, Hegel then emphatically contradicted himself

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<sup>161</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 133

<sup>162</sup> 'it is the abstract God, the supreme being, the Father, who dies in the death of the Son, and who is, as it were, reborn as concrete, world-encompassing Spirit.' Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 53; 'if pure being is to be considered as the unity into which knowing has collapsed at the extreme point of its union with the object, then *knowing itself has vanished in that unity*, (my italics)' Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 73

<sup>163</sup> 'We begin with a knowing that *cancel*s the distinction between subject and object - and we end with Absolute Idea, which is the *unity* of subjectivity and objectivity. ...The end returns to the beginning, though the movement from beginning to end involves the self-specification of Absolute Knowing into the myriad forms of the Logic. The goal of the whole system (and, Hegel thinks, of reality itself) is *implicit* in the beginning *and, in a way, known immediately* (my italics): the sublation of subject and object.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 113

*God* has the absolutely undisputed right that the beginning be made with him<sup>164</sup>

Magee wrote of this

Hegel believed that before Christianity appeared philosophy could not have presented absolute truth in a fully adequate form. This leaves us with a troubling question: how can one square this claim about philosophy's dependence on religion with Hegel's claim that his philosophy is 'presuppositionless'?...the thought that thinks the Logic is the thought of modern man shaped by Christianity, and much else. ...Spirit had to undergo its encounter with Christianity in order to know the whole.<sup>165</sup>

But what did *Hegel* have to say of this beginning of his *Science of Logic*? That it must be made in *pure knowing, without distinction*; that it must be *an absolute*, that

*it cannot contain within itself any determination, any content*; for any such would be a distinguishing and an inter-relationship of distinct moments...The beginning therefore is *pure being*. ...*it is not truly known*<sup>166</sup>

and

that which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something *unanalysable*, taken in its *simple, unfilled immediacy*, and therefore as being, as *the completely empty being*.<sup>167</sup> (all my italics)

These descriptions are *philosophical* not religious<sup>168</sup> and are applicable not to the Christian God but to Plotinus' One when brought into Intellectual-Principle, into the first element of Proclus' triad - Being - and made the equivalent of that Being. Of the One Plotinus wrote

It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it<sup>169</sup>

and Henry

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<sup>164</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 75, 78. Schlitt wrote that 'the entire Hegelian system begins in the *Encyclopaedia* with God.' Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection*, op. cit., 36

<sup>165</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 246-247

<sup>166</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 70-72

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 75; 'this emptiness is therefore simply as such the beginning of philosophy.' Ibid., 78

<sup>168</sup> Plant wrote that Hegel believed that a philosophical reinterpretation of religion would enable the achievement of community and argued that this is ambiguous, asking why religion would be needed by a community that had achieved the philosophical perspective. Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 196-197

<sup>169</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.2.1

The One is the One and nothing else, and even to assert that it 'is' or that it is 'One' is false, since it is beyond being or essence. No 'name' can apply to it; it eludes all definition, all knowledge<sup>170</sup>

While Hegel *did* argue that Christianity is the religion of absolute spirit - volume III of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is sub-titled 'The Consummate Religion' - his *philosophy* identifies the God that has the right that the *Science of Logic* begins with him and the religious basis for the presentation of absolute truth in 'a fully adequate form' as Neoplatonic.<sup>171</sup> What Magee considers a 'troubling question' was, for Hegel - as he correctly wrote - a philosophical requisite.

#### 11.3.11.6 Being, being and nothing

Dillon wrote

One major problem which Plotinus inherited from previous Platonism was a contradiction between the Platonic-Pythagorean doctrine of the first principle as a radical unity - One, or a monad - and the belief, enunciated most notably by Aristotle (but going back to Anaxagoras) that the first principle was an intellect (*nous*), and specifically an intellect thinking itself.<sup>172</sup>

Plotinus' 'solution' (modified by Proclus, Cusanus and Hegel) was to make the One and intellect the first and second hypostases (the latter generated from the first - followed by the third, Soul, created by the second). Dillon continued

That the first principle was both a monad and an intellect was accepted already by Xenocrates in the Old Academy (Frs. 15, 16 Heinze) - though not, we may note, by his predecessor Speusippus - and became the accepted position in Middle Platonism, no contradiction being apparently observed between absolute unity and self-intellection.<sup>173</sup>

Hegel drew on this flexibility, maximising the philosophical and creative potential of *his* first principle by *not only* conflating Plotinus' One with the first element Being in Proclus' triad Being/Life/Intelligence in the second hypostasis Intellect, but *also* by overlying the Christian Trinity across that triad. The first principle could now, with a range of philosophical and religious meanings

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<sup>170</sup> Henry, 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,' op. cit., liii-liv

<sup>171</sup> 'while the object or content of religion is the absolute, religion itself does not entail absolute knowledge of the absolute: that is the role of philosophy. The representational forms of religious expression, even of the Christian religion, must be "sublated" (annulled *and* preserved) in philosophical concepts. ... Whether religion as such is to be superseded by philosophy is another question...' Hogdson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 4

<sup>172</sup> Dillon, 'Plotinus: an Introduction,' *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xcii

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

to use creatively, be known as One, Absolute, Mind, Being and God - forming the first element both in a *single* reality (Hegel's 'reason-world') and in the *stages* in the unfolding of 'reality'.<sup>174</sup>

For Plotinus the activity of Intellectual-Principle is thinking. It is the author of being and Plotinus equated Intellectual-Principle with it.<sup>175</sup> Hegel began his *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopaedia* with this thinking, the first element in Proclus' triad.<sup>176</sup>

Not only is Being thinking,<sup>177</sup> that thinking, as Hegel indicated in a quote in Greek from the *Metaphysics* at the culmination and *close* of his *Encyclopaedia*, is divine, is God<sup>178</sup> which Hegel described using the same expressions - 'essential being' and 'absolute being' - he had used when discussing the One in Plotinus' philosophy (7.1).

Hegel's God and Plotinus' Intellectual-Principle are only truly what they *potentially* are having 'emanated' and returned, and in that process become fulfilled and complete.

Hegel wrote

in our thinking, our *first* thinking, God is only pure being, or even essence, the abstract absolute, but not God as absolute spirit, which alone is the true nature of God.<sup>179</sup>

and Plotinus expressed the result of the same Neoplatonic process thus

It is now Intellectual-Principle since it actually holds its object, and holds it by the act of intellection: before, it was no more than a tendance, an eye blank of impression: it was in motion towards the transcendental; now that it has attained, it has become Intellectual-Principle<sup>180</sup>

The divine activity of thinking requires an object to initiate that process and it finds that object by creating a distinction within itself

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<sup>174</sup> 'Are Being, Life and Intelligence to be regarded as three aspects of a single reality or as three successive stages in the unfolding of the cosmos from the One? Proclus characteristically answers that both views are true: they are aspects, for each of them implies the others as cause or as consequent; they are successive, not coordinate, for each is predominant (though not to the exclusion of the others) at a certain stage of the process.' Dodds' commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 254

<sup>175</sup> 'Intellectual-Principle is Being,' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.16; 'Thus it is true that "Intellection and Being are identical",' Ibid., V.9.5; 'The Being of Intellect...is activity, and there is nothing to which the activity is directed; so it is self-directed.' Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. V, V.3.7

<sup>176</sup> 'the beginning...has the significance and form of *abstract universality*. ...it is...*thinking*,' Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 827

<sup>177</sup> 'the absolute Being is just this being that is *thought*,' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 371

<sup>178</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 315; translation from Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* xii, 7, 1072b, Trans. and Introduction by Hugh Lawson-Tancred, Penguin, London, 2004, 374: 'And God also has life; for the activation of thought is a life, and He is that activation. His intrinsic activation is supreme, eternal life. Accordingly we assert that God is a supreme and eternal living being, so that to God belong life and continuous and eternal duration. For that is what God is.'; 'God, far from being a Being, even the highest, is *the* Being,' Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 164

<sup>179</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 527

<sup>180</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.11

Intellect, to act at all, must inevitably comport difference with identity; otherwise it could not distinguish itself from its object by standing apart from it, nor could it ever be aware of the realm of things whose existence demands otherness, nor could there be so much as a duality.’<sup>181</sup>

Redding identifies that initial object

As the *Logic* is an investigation into the categorial structure of thought, its starting point will be the most immediate thought determination, that presupposed by all others: being, or *das Sein*.<sup>182</sup>

and thinking about that initial object is the basis of all further development

*Being* seems to be *both* immediate and simple, but it will show itself to be, in fact, *only* something in opposition to something else, *nothing*. The point seems to be that while the categories being and nothing seem both absolutely distinct and opposed...they appear identical as no criterion can be invoked which differentiates them. The only way out of this paradox is to posit a third category within which they can coexist as *negated* (*Aufgehoben*) moments. This category is *becoming*, which saves thinking from paralysis because it accommodates both concepts. Becoming contains being and nothing in the sense that when something *becomes* it passes, as it were, from nothingness to being.<sup>183</sup>

The cognition of God is underway, to which process negation is essential

There is...a technical, logical sense in which the second concept or form is the “opposite” or negation of—or is “not”—the first one—though, again, it need not be the “opposite” of the first one in a strict sense.<sup>184</sup>

Theorising the relationship between contradictories, between a concept and its other is fundamental to Neoplatonism. Proclus discussed being, non-being and the negation of being and Cusanus discussed both the relationship between creation, being and nothing and Being, being and not-being. (8.4.5)

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., VI.7.39

<sup>182</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 145

<sup>183</sup> Redding, ‘Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/>, op. cit.

<sup>184</sup> Julie E. Maybee, ‘Hegel’s Dialectics,’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/>

Plotinus described the process whereby Intellectual-Principle comes to know its prior<sup>185</sup> - the same process whereby divine Being comes to cognise *itself* in the *Science of Logic*

Thus the Intellectual-Principle, in the act of knowing the Transcendent, is a manifold. It knows the Transcendent in very essence but, with all its effort to grasp that prior as a pure unity, it goes forth amassing successive impressions, so that, to it, the object becomes multiple: thus in its outgoing to its object it is not (fully realised) Intellectual-Principle; it is an eye that has not yet seen; in its return it is an eye possessed of the multiplicity which it has itself conferred: it sought something of which it found the vague presentment within itself; it returned with something else, the manifold quality with which it has of its own act invested the simplex.

If it had not possessed a previous impression of the Transcendent it could never have grasped it, but this impression, originally of unity, becomes an impression of multiplicity; and the Intellectual-Principle in taking cognisance of that multiplicity knows the Transcendent and so is realised as an eye possessed of its vision.<sup>186</sup>

#### 11.3.11.7 God: conceptual and categorial

As previously observed (11.3.11.4), logic for Hegel is the ‘scientific’ exposition of God - not of the ‘thoughts of God’ as Plant claimed,<sup>187</sup> but of God himself - of a system of ‘pure reason’. That reason is purportedly strictly conceptual<sup>188</sup> and manifested in the dialectical development of Hegel’s categories.

Plotinus wrote

It is because there is something before (Being) that it has an object of intellection; even in its self-intellection it may be said to know its content by its vision of that prior.<sup>189</sup>

Being, in thinking itself, is in a way comprehending what it had from the vision of its prior. This is very similar to Cusanus for whom our ‘minds’ create conceptually as they model the ‘mind’ of God in his creation of the world

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<sup>185</sup> Neoplatonic theory is anything but hard and fast. Plotinus’ position regarding the One’s transcendence is an instance. Dillon wrote ‘(Although Plotinus) emphasises the transcendence and otherness of the One, its superiority to Being and Intellect, and its unknowability by any normal faculty of cognition...in a number of passages...he makes some attempt to explore what sort of apprehension the One might have of itself. For Plotinus, after all, the One is not really a negativity...’ Dillon, ‘Plotinus: an Introduction,’ *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., , xciii-xciv. He then quoted from V. 4.2: ‘The intellectual object (i.e. the One) is self-gathered, and is not deficient as the seeing and knowing principle (i.e. Intellect) must be - deficient, I mean, as needing an object - it is therefore no unconscious thing...it is, itself, that self-intellection which takes place in eternal repose, that is to say, in a mode other than that of the Intellectual-Principle.’ Ibid., xciv

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., V.3.11

<sup>187</sup> ‘Hegel regarded the categorial structure of *The Science of Logic* as the thoughts of God before the foundation of the world.’ Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 236

<sup>188</sup> I have argued, following Magee, that Hegel’s use of concepts is mytho-poetic circumscription (10.6).

<sup>189</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.7.40

The Divine Mind's Conceiving is a producing of things; our mind's conceiving is a conceptualising of things. ...If all things are present in the Divine Mind as in their precise and proper Truth, then all things are present in our mind as in an image, or a likeness, of their proper Truth. That is, they are present conceptually, *for knowledge comes about on the basis of [conceptual] likeness* (my italics).<sup>190</sup>

For Hegel, since there is no prior to divine Being, the exposition of the generation of concepts and the development of categories is the exposition of God himself in his activity of thinking, of producing. It is still no less a recollection of Spirit's source and processes than the activity in Plotinus' second hypostasis.<sup>191</sup> To know the categorial infrastructure of God is to know the 'formal' structure of both reality and of our thought, thus giving knowledge of God the *self*.

Just as the process of Intellectual-Principle describes a circle going from unity through unity-in-multiplicity back to unity

From this Principle, which remains internally unmoved, particular things push forth as from a single root which never itself emerges. They are a branching into part, into multiplicity, each single outgrowth bearings its trace of the common source.<sup>192</sup>

so does the *Logic*

The end returns to the beginning, though the movement from beginning to end involves the self-specification of Absolute Knowing into the myriad forms of the Logic.<sup>193</sup>

the science exhibits itself as a *circle* returning upon itself, the end being wound back into the beginning, the simple ground...logic, too, in the absolute Idea, has withdrawn into that same simple unity which its beginning is; the pure immediacy of being in which at first every determination appears to be extinguished or removed by abstraction<sup>194</sup>

Just as Plotinus expounded, on the basis of an initial impetus from the One, the Platonic doctrine of the categories of the intelligible world - being, rest, motion, same and other<sup>195</sup> - arguing that they operate in thought to produce endless movement, change and variety, so Hegel's *Science of Logic*, begun from an absolute without content and driven by negation is the systematic unfolding of the

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<sup>190</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* ('The Layman on Mind'), 1450, in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 531-589, 72, 543

<sup>191</sup> 'The Hegelian Logic is...a recollection...of the thought-forms which underlie the acts of Spirit. Spirit comes into its own when it consciously appropriates and understands these thought-forms as a system.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 175

<sup>192</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., III.3.7

<sup>193</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 113

<sup>194</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 842

<sup>195</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 254D-257A



final category in the *Science of Logic*, Absolute Idea - all the categories prior to it being provisional 'definitions' of it.

Just as Idea is All in the *Enneads*

...nothing had part in the making but Being and Idea... The Exemplar was the Idea of an All... Thus nothing stood in the way of the Idea, and even now it dominates, despite all the clash of things: the creation is not hindered on its way even now; it stands firm in virtue of being All.<sup>196</sup>

so in the *Science of Logic*

(The Idea is) an eternal creation, eternal vitality, and eternal spirit ... (but) it forever remains reason. The Idea is the dialectic... which brings the diversity back to unity. ...the Idea is the eternal vision of itself in the other<sup>197</sup>

And just as in the attainment of Hegel's Absolute Knowing (of Absolute Idea) - the *telos* of Spirit - there is no difference between knower, knowing and known, between subject and object, so in Plotinus' philosophy

The First... is no duality - or rather, no manifold consisting of itself, its intellectual act distinct from itself, and the inevitable third, the object of intellection. No doubt since knower, knowing, and known are identical, all merges into a unity: but the distinction has existed and, once more, such a unity cannot be the First; we must put away all otherness from the Supreme which can need no such support; anything we add is so much lessening of what lacks nothing.<sup>198</sup>

This concluding unity of knower, knowing and known, of subjectivity and objectivity is 'the First' in Hegel's philosophy, because he conflated Plotinus' One with Being in his use of Proclus' triad Being/Life/Intelligence - a triad comprised of three aspects of a single reality *which are also* three successive stages in the unfolding of reality, finding completion not in *re*-enfolding but in *reunion*.

#### 11.3.11.8 **Metaphor and prose poetry**

Redding acknowledged the function of metaphor and analogy in Hegel's *Science of Logic*

I have argued elsewhere that Hegel's 'being-logic' in fact describes the categorial structure of a type of pre-predicative thought which relies on analogy and metaphor to form its basic statements. In contrast to the categorial structure of the 'essence-logic' of book 2, being-logic lacks the conceptual resources to differentiate any underlying substrate from its properties. The closest it can come to predication is to (metaphorically)

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<sup>196</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.8.7

<sup>197</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 278

<sup>198</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.7.41

identify the different as in the 'passing over' of its categories into their contraries.<sup>199</sup>

But because Hegel's philosophy is *dialectical*, and all the more so because it is *mystical*, the problem faced by his 'being-logic' is fundamentally that faced by his philosophy in its entirety. As I have argued previously (10ff.), Hegel rejected propositional argumentation and the predication of *Verstand* because they separate subject from predicate, and keep 'each determinate content immovable...(and) rigidly *for itself*...' <sup>200</sup>

Metaphor, as I have argued (11.3.1ff.), is not only necessary to 'speculative' philosophy, it is unavoidable - our language is full of metaphors and our mutual understanding depends on them. Hegel's philosophy is *built* no less on metaphor - the metaphor of sculpting and 'shaping' - of consciousness and soul in the *Phenomenology*<sup>201</sup> and of the 'formal structure of reality,' of God the self in the *Science of Logic* - than is Plotinus' (6.4)

Shape here is only an image; so that which underlies it is also only an image. But There the shape is true shape, and what underlies it is true too.<sup>202</sup>

The shaping that is begun in the *Phenomenology* (including a specifically sculptural reference in 'The living work of art'<sup>203</sup>) is completed with Hegel's most developed and comprehensive category in the *Science of Logic* - Absolute Idea - of which he not only wrote of *its* various 'shapes' but further described it, again *necessarily* metaphorically, Neoplatonically

...the absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*. It is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy. Since it contains *all* determinateness within it, and its essential nature is to return to itself through its self-determination or particularisation, it has various shapes, and the business of philosophy is to cognise it in these.<sup>204</sup>

What does the 'shaping,' the 'creating,' is the Notion

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<sup>199</sup> Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 146

<sup>200</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 185

<sup>201</sup> '...by passing through a series of shapes (Spirit must) attain to a knowledge of itself.' Ibid., 265; 'In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, in so far as this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness [i.e. of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome.' Ibid., 490

<sup>202</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H. Armstrong, op. cit., vol. II, II.4.5

<sup>203</sup> 'This undisciplined revelry of the god must bring itself to rest as an *object*, and the enthusiasm which did not attain to consciousness must produce a work that confronts it, as in the previous case the statue confronts the artist; as a work, moreover, that is equally complete, but not, however, as an intrinsically lifeless, but as a *living*, self. ...Man thus puts himself in the place of the statue as the shape that has been raised and fashioned for perfectly free *movement*, just as the statue is perfectly free *repose*. Although each individual knows how to play the part of at least a torch-bearer, one of them comes forward who is the patterned movement, the smooth elaboration and fluent energy of all the participants. He is an inspired and living work of art that matches strength with its beauty; and on him is bestowed, as a reward for his strength, the decoration with which the statue was honoured, and the honour of being, in place of the god in stone, the highest bodily representation among his people of their essence.' Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 438

<sup>204</sup> '...(Absolute Idea) embraces those shapes of real and ideal finitude as well as of infinitude and holiness, and comprehends them and itself.' Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 824

...the Notion...as absolute negativity...is the shaper and creator...<sup>205</sup>

A philosophy professor said to me ‘In the *Science of Logic* there is not a poetic phrase to be found - it is just how one concept is derived from another.’ To show the error of this ideologically motivated assertion that obstructs the full appreciation of both Hegel’s art and his subject, I highly recommend reading a few times aloud and listening to yourself as you do so the following two quotations from the *Science of Logic* - the first on being and nothing, the second on cause and effect.

Without analysing the texts, ask yourself what you have taken from this exercise. Isn’t the first point the rhythm of each? Don’t rhythm and metaphor carry you irresistibly from beginning to end? Isn’t ‘rhythm’ itself a metaphor for movement and the passage of the concepts into their other? And what of how profoundly interwoven *are* the elements of each pair with its other, to the point of their disappearance into it? To convey the nature of dialectics is to convey above all a *feeling* for it, is to *necessarily* employ art. Nothing other than the poetry of dialectics can *reflect* the poetry of reality

in so far as being and nothing, each unseparated from its other, *is*, each is *not*. They *are* therefore in this unity but only as vanishing, sublated moments. They sink from their initially imagined *self-subsistence* to the status of *moments*, which are still *distinct* but at the same time are sublated.<sup>206</sup>

the outcome of the movement of the determinate causal relation is this, that the cause is *not merely extinguished* in the effect and with it the effect, too, as in formal causality, but that the cause *in being extinguished becomes* again in the effect, that the effect *vanishes* in the cause, but equally *becomes* again in it. Each of these determinations *sublates itself in its positing*, and *posits itself in its sublating*; ...Causality...conditions itself.<sup>207</sup>

In pointing to the superiority of poetry and metaphor over the prose of *Verstand* Hegel wrote

If, for instance, we say ‘the sun’ or ‘in the morning’, the meaning is clear to us, although there is no illustration of the sun or dawn. But when the poet says: ‘When in the dawn Aurora rises with rosy-fingers’, the same *thing* is expressed, but the poetic expression gives us *more*, because it adds to the understanding of the object a vision of it, or rather it repudiates bare abstract understanding and substitutes the real specific character of the thing.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 603

<sup>206</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 105

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 565-566. Hegel’s writing on contradiction is comparable with the subtlety of that of Cusanus but he more *vitally* explored contradiction as a *process* of negation than did Cusanus. Here is Cusanus on enfolding and unfolding: ‘...if you consider [the matter] carefully: rest is oneness which enfolds motion, and motion is rest ordered serially. Hence, motion is the unfolding of rest. In like manner, the present, or the now, enfolds time. The past was the present, and the future will become the present. Therefore, nothing except an ordered present is found in time. Hence, the past and the future are the unfolding of the present. The present is the enfolding of all present times; and the present times are the unfolding, serially, of the present; and in the present times only the present is found. Therefore, the present is one enfolding of all times. Indeed, the present is oneness. In like manner, identity is the enfolding of difference; equality [the enfolding] of inequality; and simplicity [the enfolding] of divisions, or distinctions.’ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’), op. cit., II,3,106

<sup>208</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, op. cit., 1002

Prose poetic philosophy and the use of metaphor were central to Hegel's mytho-poetic circumscription in his 'scientific' exposition of 'the real specific character' of Absolute Idea, of God thinking himself.

Verene addressed the flaw both of patriarchal 'reason' and our conditioned worship of it when he wrote of our having lost track of the dimensions of philosophical language

we have so little experience in taking metaphorical speech seriously as a carrier of philosophical meaning that we read right past it. ...we have become so accustomed to the monotone hum of the abstract concept and the category, the fluorescent buzz of the argument, that we have lost track of the dimensions of philosophical language. We have forgotten its secrets and cannot recollect its manner of eating bread and drinking wine.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 34-35

## 12. Hegel and Proclus

### 12.1 Academics on Hegel, Neoplatonism and Proclus

The response of academics to the influence of Proclus the Follower on Hegel is exemplary of that by them to the profound relationship between Hegel and Neoplatonism generally. Despite their *repeated* and *clearest* acknowledgement of that influence and relationship, the former within the latter, their analysis of them, setting out the debt Hegel owed to both Proclus and Neoplatonism and how he further developed Neoplatonism on the basis of that debt is still lacking.

On the pervasive influence of Neoplatonism on the German idealists, Redding wrote, with a gross understatement

It is common within recent accounts of the emergence of German Idealism to find stressed the impact of Spinozism on the generation to which Schelling and Hegel belonged, but *it is less common* (my italics) to find discussion of the neoplatonic aspects of their thought, despite the fact that this was commonly noted in the 19th century. ...Both early Schelling and Hegel were clearly attracted to Plotinian thought, and especially the particular role Plotinus had given to the processes of life.<sup>1</sup>

and

With Proclus (the) dialectic of the one and the many had reached the most developed phase capable of antique thought, but with Fichte, this neoplatonic dialectic was now reproduced at the level of individual, *actual* consciousnesses.<sup>2</sup>

While the direct connection of Neoplatonic dialectic to Fichte is correct, Redding's interpretation of it is erroneous. The Neoplatonic dialectic of the one and the many *always* functioned at the level of individual, actual (whatever that means) consciousness. The individual consciousness and soul is the *focus* of Plotinus' system - Neoplatonic perspectivism is built on this. Fichte is simply one more philosopher who never acknowledged his profound debt to Neoplatonism, who claimed the fruits of Neoplatonic philosophy, which he rebadged, as his own great invention.<sup>3</sup>

Of the influence of Neoplatonism on Hegel specifically

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<sup>1</sup> Redding, 'Mind of God, Point of View of Man, or Spirit of the World? Platonism and Organicism in the Thought of Kant and Hegel', op. cit., 9,10. Also see 1.2

<sup>2</sup> Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 13

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that in a discipline that prides itself on honesty and 'the love of wisdom and truth', that holds honesty and 'the love of wisdom and truth' to be at its *basis*, there is so much dishonesty and pretence.

in contrast to Aristotle, Hegel's 'theology' insists on the 'incarnation' of God in man, symbolised in the divinity of Jesus. Thus Hegel might be said to have been a *Christian* Aristotelianised Platonist, but his is a form of Christianity in which...there is no 'transcendent' place for the God of Augustine.<sup>4</sup>

Findlay correctly wrote of Hegel, in his Foreword to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* no less

Those who are unwilling to see Hegel as an ontologist and First Philosopher, or as a theologian in the sense of Aristotle or Proclus, will never be able to make more than a partial use of his brilliant insights<sup>5</sup>

and Redding noted that Feuerbach described him as 'the German Proclus'<sup>6</sup> writing

Hegel showed clear features of the type of thought found in the Platonism of late antique philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus...Importantly it was these neo-platonist, and especially *Proclean* features, that would be central to Hegel's understanding of Christianity, and especially the doctrine of the trinity<sup>7</sup>

The influence of Proclus on Hegel was *both* direct and indirect. Cusanus, who was also of the greatest importance to Hegel - a direct influence on him that has never been acknowledged by any academic - and whose philosophy bears so many similarities with Hegel's had made a study of the philosophy of Proclus.<sup>8</sup> Most important of all, as I have argued (11.3.4ff.), Proclus' Being/Life/Intelligence triad provided the basic structure of Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia*, recurring in that of Hegel's non-Christian Trinity.

Where is Redding's or any other academic's thorough explication of these 'important', 'clearly observed' features of Neoplatonic and Proclean thought, these *direct influences* so 'central to Hegel's understanding of Christianity, and especially the doctrine of the trinity'?

Yet, with the decline of that stage of capitalist ideology known as 'postmodernism', there has been a small but growing recognition in academia of the immense philosophical and *cultural* importance of Neoplatonism - but even with that recognition, rather than acknowledging and analysing the *direct* influence of Neoplatonism on Hegel (for example), the acknowledgement is understated and the analysis is primarily of the relationships between him and those philosophers to whom he

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<sup>4</sup> Redding, 'The Metaphysical and Theological Commitments of Idealism: Kant, Hegel, Hegelianism', op. cit., 18-19

<sup>5</sup> Findlay in G.W.F.Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., xxvi

<sup>6</sup> 'the Neoplatonic characteristics of Hegel's thought came to be widely acknowledged during the nineteenth century, Feuerbach, for example, describing Hegel as "the German Proclus" (PPF: 47),' Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 137

<sup>7</sup> Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 6

<sup>8</sup> 'The real rediscovery of Proclus started in the Italian Renaissance, mainly thanks to Marsilio Ficino who followed Proclus' influence in his Platonic commentaries and even composed, in imitation of Proclus, a Christian *Platonic Theology* on the immortality of the soul. Before Ficino, Nicolaus Cusanus had already intensively studied Proclus in translations. Proclus continued to enjoy wide interest at the turn of the 18th century. Thomas Taylor (1758-1835) translated all of Proclus' works into English (reprinted by the Prometheus Trust [London]) and tried to reconstruct the lost seventh book of the *Platonic Theology*.' Helmig and Steel, 'Proclus,' op. cit.

responded (particularly Kant, Fichte and Schelling) - all influenced by Neoplatonism - with Neoplatonism contained, like a dangerous philosophical tiger in an academic cage, in a secondary position.

It has been my intention throughout this thesis to argue for the *direct* relationship between Hegel and Neoplatonism and key Neoplatonists and to argue that his philosophy is Neoplatonism's consummate achievement.

## 12.2 Hegel on Neoplatonism and Proclus

For Hegel, Neoplatonism was the 'greatest flowering of philosophy'<sup>9</sup> and the consummation of Greek philosophy, which brought it to a close

So Greek philosophy has the thinking that determines itself within itself. It develops itself into a totality of the idea (the world spirit does nothing by half measures). Its consummation<sup>10</sup> comes in Neoplatonic philosophy, with which the history of Greek philosophy draws to a close.<sup>11</sup>

Again, noting that Neoplatonism incorporated all earlier forms of Greek philosophy, Hegel wrote

The third [epoch of the first] period takes the shape of Alexandrian philosophy (Neoplatonism, but likewise Neo-Aristotelian philosophy too). The consummation of Greek philosophy as such, it established the realm of noumena, the ideal realm. This philosophy therefore incorporated all earlier forms of philosophy within it.<sup>12</sup>

and continued by stating that Proclus was the culmination of this consummation

Plotinus lived in the third century and Proclus in the fifth. By choosing to regard Proclus as the culmination of this philosophy, the entire period of Greek Philosophy then amounts to about one thousand years.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'The revival of the ancient Greek philosophy was tied to the decline of the Roman Empire, which was so vast, wealthy, and splendid, but inwardly dead; the greatest flowering of philosophy, the Alexandrian philosophy, emerged only then.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 69

<sup>10</sup> Hodgson in his Editorial Introduction to volume III of *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* explained Hegel's use of the concept 'consummate', which Hegel also, consistently, applied to his Neoplatonic version of Christianity: 'Christianity is the "consummate" religion in the sense that the concept of religion has been brought to completion or consummation in it; it simply *is* religion in its quintessential expression.' Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 4. In referring to Hegel as the consummate Neoplatonist I use 'consummate' in the same sense - his philosophy brought Neoplatonism to completion and in so doing, is the most developed instance, the highest achievement of it.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 162-163

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

There could not be clearer statements of the superlative regard which Hegel held for Neoplatonism and particularly Proclus.<sup>14</sup>

### 12.3 The philosophies of Hegel and Proclus

In addition to my previous discussions of their Neoplatonism, of their belief that theology (for them, philosophy) is the science of the gods (Proclus) or of the Godhead (Hegel), of their obsession with triadic structures (a late antique Neoplatonic tendency), of the importance to Hegel of Proclus' triad of triads Being/Life/Intelligence and of their perspectivism, there are numerous other points of similarity between the two that amply justify Feuerbach's description of Hegel as 'the German Proclus'.

#### 12.3.1 Neoplatonists are not philosophers

Magee wrote the best first sentence I have read in philosophy - because it is so simple, direct and challenging

Hegel is not a philosopher. He is no lover or seeker of wisdom - he believes he has found it. Hegel writes in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title of 'love of knowing' and be actual knowledge - that is what I have set before me" (Miller, 3; *PG* 3 [sic]).<sup>15</sup>

But he is erroneous in excluding the system and teleology of Neoplatonism from the Greek 'love of wisdom or knowing'. Neoplatonism, as Hegel wrote, was its *consummation* and *culmination*.<sup>16</sup>

Chlup points out that

Eastern Neoplatonism...(attempted) not to capture all things all at once in their complexity, but rather to analyse this complexity into a network of exactly defined relations.<sup>17</sup>

As evidenced particularly in his *Elements of Theology*, Proclus hardened the unsystematic art, fluidity and passion of Plotinus into systematic, almost scholastic law

Proclus' emanational model is similar to that of Plotinus, but differs in being formalised and brought to greater precision. In his thought the cycle of

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<sup>14</sup> Redding wrote in his Stanford Encyclopedia article on Hegel that 'Plato, and especially Aristotle, represent the pinnacle of ancient philosophy', 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel', contradicting this elsewhere, referring to 'what for Hegel was the most developed form of Greek philosophy, late-antique neo-platonism', Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 13; Helmig and Steel wrote 'In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, in the chapter on Alexandrian Philosophy, Hegel said that "in Proclus we have the culminating point of the Neo-Platonic philosophy; this method in philosophy is carried into later times, continuing even through the whole of the Middle Ages. [...] Although the Neo-Platonic school ceased to exist outwardly, ideas of the Neo-Platonists, and specially the philosophy of Proclus, were long maintained and preserved in the Church."', 'Proclus', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 1

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 202

<sup>17</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 21



remaining, procession and reversion becomes a universal pattern working at all levels of reality and helping to explain all relations between (metaphysical) causes and their effects.<sup>18</sup>

In a system in which every intelligence is its own object,<sup>19</sup> in which the true is the whole<sup>20</sup> and the modes of ascent analogy and negation,<sup>21</sup> Proclus' *Elements of Theology* sets out a doctrine of categories and in *On the Theology of Plato*, as in the development in the *Science of Logic* from being and nothing to the culmination in Absolute Idea, the closer a concept stands to the One, the more it embodies multiplicity

In the primal levels of reality multiplicity is present secretly and without separation, while in the secondary levels it is differentiated. The closer a term stands to the One, the more it hides multiplicity within itself (*PT III 9, 39.20-4*)<sup>22</sup>

Proclus meticulously *externalised* his system, with the ultimate aim of achieving harmony between the psychic 'reality' inside and the metaphysical 'reality' outside by a progressive process of cognition

it was no longer accessible by introspection only, but was perceived as objective reality 'out there' to which one needs to attune oneself. The decisive task became to come to know the structure of this reality as precisely as possible. Only in this way could the soul be brought into accord with the order of the universe, linking up with the gods by means of it. Hence the characteristic passion of eastern Neoplatonism for painstaking conceptual distinctions mapping the outer zone lying between man and the One.<sup>23</sup>

The principles Limit (*peras*) and the Unlimited (*apeiria*) work together at the heart of existence

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>19</sup> 'Every intelligence in the act of intellection knows that it knows: the cognitive intelligence is not distinct from that which is conscious of the cognitive act.'

For if it is an intelligence in action and knows itself as indistinguishable from its object (prop. 167), it is aware of itself and sees itself. Further, seeing itself in the act of knowing and knowing itself in the act of seeing, it is aware of itself as an active intelligence: and being aware of this, it knows not merely *what* it knows but also *that* it knows. Thus it is simultaneously aware of the thing known, of itself as the knower, and of itself as the object of its own intellectual act.' Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., Prop. 168

<sup>20</sup> '(Proclus believed that) every single level of reality is divided into sub-layers in a way that mirrors the structure of reality as a whole. Proclus sums this up in one of the most fundamental rules of late Neoplatonist metaphysics: "All things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature."' Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 91

<sup>21</sup> 'In the next place, if *the one* is neither intelligible nor intellectual, nor in short participates of the power of being, let us survey what will be the modes of leading us to it, and through what intellectual conceptions Plato unfolds as far as he is able, to his familiars, the ineffable and unknown transcendency of the first. I say then, that at one time he unfolds it through analogy, and the similitude of secondary natures; but at another time he demonstrates its exempt transcendency, and its separation from the whole of things, through negations.' Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. II, Ch. V

<sup>22</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 91

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 274

For Proclus, Limit and the Unlimited represent a sort of basic ‘interface’ between the One and the lower levels....Limit is always tied to the Unlimited (*PT* III 8, 31.18-32.7)...All that exists needs to depend on these two primal principles: it needs to be limited while possessing an indefinite potency.<sup>24</sup>

Hegel used the Trinity as a metaphor to illustrate his equally fundamental concern for these two principles and how they worked creatively together - most broadly, the infinite (God) required the Son to live in the world (the infinite become incarnate infinite-finite) so that, upon his death and resurrection, the infinite (God) could be ‘reconciled’ with the finite (humanity), thereby finding completion in Spirit’s cultus on earth.<sup>25</sup>

### 12.3.2 The reconciliation of faith and ‘reason’

Neoplatonism, ‘the greatest flowering of philosophy’, emerged from the soil of decay and decline, the environment most conducive to it. Plotinus taught and wrote at the time of the decline of the Roman Empire, Proclus at the time of the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity, Cusanus at the time of the passing of the Middle Ages and scholasticism and Hegel and the German idealists at the time of the decline of absolutism, the rise of science and of the bourgeoisie to domination. Hegel’s owl of Minerva only takes flight at the *end* of a period.

The philosophy that was most sensitive to contradiction and its resultant change, that, in reflecting ‘reality’, has contradiction as *its* engine and that, once ‘righted’ by Marx, enabled materialism to be developed by him and Engels far beyond the mechanical, was itself theorised in *reaction* - not simply to decay and decline - but, more fundamentally, to what decay and decline are the appearance of - the one absolute, change.

Negation, generated from the greatest *activity* in the One is the driver of Plotinus’ system, but this derivative from the merging of the philosophy of Heraclitus with Platonic dialectic and Aristotelian theology is inseparable from the greatest *stillness*, sourced in the *stasis* of Platonism. This *greatest contradiction* - the more the activity, the more the stillness (well illustrated by Cusanus in *De*

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<sup>24</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 77-78; ‘Hence it is not wonderful, if that which is primarily being, though it is neither bound nor infinity, subsists from both these, and is mixed, superessential natures themselves not being assumed in the mixture of it, but secondary progressions from them coalescing into the subsistence of essence. Thus therefore being consists of these, as participating of both, possessing indeed the uniform from bound, but the generative, and in short, occult multitude from infinity.’ Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk III, Ch. IX

<sup>25</sup> ‘the truth is the *unity* - the implicit unity - of divine and human nature, of infinite and finite.’; ‘Because the concept of religion entails the *unity* of subjective consciousness and its object, namely God as absolute essence or spirit, when the concept of religion becomes objective to itself, this unity of finite and infinite consciousness comes fully to expression. For this reason, Christianity is the “consummate” or “absolute” religion.’; ‘the understanding persists in finitude. Indeed, even in the case of the infinite, it has the infinite on one side and finitude on the other. But the truth of the matter is that neither the finite nor the infinite standing over against it has any truth; rather both are merely transitional.’ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, Hodgson, 30, 163 and Hegel, 281

*possest* with a spinning top) - is the beginning and end of a profound philosophy in which the attainment of 'stillness' is meant to *overcome* 'the horror of the contingent'.<sup>26</sup>

Proclus, with his commitment to Neoplatonism

set up his elaborate *Platonic Theology* in an attempt to rationally justify a pagan religious tradition whose existence was threatened by the upcoming Christian civilisation<sup>27</sup>

Hegel, too, was particularly opposed to Christianity in its Deist, Enlightenment form, with its 'fossilised and untrue religion of a segregated, hypocritical and power-hungry priesthood'<sup>28</sup> who held that God (truth) cannot be cognised, thus obstructing, as Hegel believed he achieved in his philosophy, the reconciliation of religion and reason

the Enlightenment and its Deism gives out that God is unknowable and so lays on man the supreme renunciation, the renunciation of knowing nothing of God, of not comprehending him.<sup>29</sup>

Hegel thought of Deism and the Enlightenment as working together, against philosophy

The Enlightenment - that vanity of understanding - is the most vehement opponent of philosophy.<sup>30</sup>

He held this view in a broader context - that of what he thought was the fragmentation the of modern bourgeois world and particularly, the decline of community.

As Neoplatonists,<sup>31</sup> Proclus and Hegel wanted to 'reintegrate' people and they thought that, since *both* philosophy and religion were necessary to this purpose and to the development of

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<sup>26</sup> 'This horror of the contingent, as it might be called, is at the root a metaphysico-religious sentiment.' Charles O. Nussbaum, *The Musical Representation, Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, 259. Writing of the idealists 'horror of the contingent', Nussbaum discussed 'the seldom-noted fascination of (the) arch rationalist (Kant) with a brand of Neoplatonic mysticism.' He wrote 'Toward the end of the *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, Kant concludes, with characteristic resignation, that "human reason was not given strong enough wings to part clouds so high above us, clouds which withhold from our eyes the secrets of the other world".' Ibid., 297. The Google book review states: 'Most Kant scholars regard the work as a skeptical attack on Swedenborg's mysticism. Other critics, however, believe that Kant regarded Swedenborg as a serious philosopher and visionary, and that *Dreams* both reveals Kant's profound debt to Swedenborg and conceals that debt behind the mask of irony.' [https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Kant\\_on\\_Swedenborg.html?id=QTwQAQAIAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Kant_on_Swedenborg.html?id=QTwQAQAIAAJ&redir_esc=y)

<sup>27</sup> Helmig and Steel, 'Proclus', op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought*, op. cit., 67

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, op. cit., 508. Hodgson stated the difference between the philosophy of *Vernunft* and the religion of *Verstand* most simply of all: 'Speculative philosophy finds itself opposed by both the church and the Enlightenment', in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 35. Speculative philosophy is comprised of "what the Enlightenment has called 'mystical teachings'...Philosophy vindicates the more profound teachings, these religious mysteries, namely, the speculative doctrines, the doctrines of reason. Enlightenment reconciliation, which puts everything on the same level, proves satisfactory neither to the depths of religiosity nor to the depths of thinking reason." Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 279

<sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 246-247

<sup>31</sup> See 2. 'The criticism by Hegel and Plotinus of their societies'

community,<sup>32</sup> the merging of their metaphysics with theology and divine power was the means to go about it.<sup>33</sup> Faith (*pistis*), for both, mediates between us and the One.<sup>34</sup>

In his early writing Hegel pursued the ideal of a non-transcendent folk religion that gave philosophical knowledge based on the experience of an immanent 'absolute' which is subject to negation - a religion in which God was to be apprehended as spirit in its cohesive, political community.

The religion he theorised would be

a vital, integrative, ethically transformative force in not only the personal life of individuals but also the cultural, social, and political life of a people (*Volk*)<sup>35</sup>

but although an idealised reading of Greek public or folk religion (*Volksreligion*) was his model,<sup>36</sup> he believed that its *ethos* could not be revived in the modern world. Rather, he would find what was needed by

releasing the transformative power of Christianity from its dogmatic and rationalist encrustations.<sup>37</sup>

With this done, the entire community - now a *church* founded on divine-human unity and reconciliation - which generates the principles of political and civil life from itself<sup>38</sup> would be the

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<sup>32</sup> One of the most important uses of Christianity to Hegel was that it gave him the specifically religious element. 'The Neoplatonists believed that philosophy is necessary to the development of community which in turn is the vehicle to virtue', Dominic O'Meara on Neoplatonism, [http://www.historyofphilosophy.net/ Episode 96](http://www.historyofphilosophy.net/Episode%2096); 'Proclus thought that religious teachings are necessary for us - our souls are permanently connected to the divine.', Ibid., Peter Adamson, 'Proclus', Episode 94

<sup>33</sup> The passage of philosophy into religion and vice versa was a marker of late antique Eastern Neoplatonism.

<sup>34</sup> 'modern philosophy includes a different, immediate element that is not carried out by thinking, namely, a beholding in revelation, a faith, a longing for another world. Behind appearance stands something that is true although not known.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 236. Hegel, as I stated and quoted previously, repeatedly referred to God as 'the One': 'God is One, in the first instance, the universal./God is love and remains One, [subsisting] more as unity, as immediate identity, than as negative reflection into self./God is spirit, the One as infinite subjectivity, the One in the infinite subjectivity of distinction.', Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 78

<sup>35</sup> Hodgson, Ed., in *G.W.F.Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 39

<sup>36</sup> 'A characteristic of the Greeks was their *Heimatlichkeit* - their collective feeling of being *at home* in the world as they were each at home in their bodies. Modern subjectivity is thereby purchased as the expense of a sense of *abstraction* and *alienation* from the actual world and from the self...In the writings he had produced in the 1790s Hegel had shown a clear attraction to the type of folk art-religions of ancient Greece in contrast to Christianity, whose other-worldly doctrines did not reflect the kind of *Heimatlichkeit* he valued in the ancient world...Philosophy proper only thrives under conditions of at-homeness in the world', Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel', op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> 'it is within a social whole - in my relation to others - that I am led to rise above a narrow concern with the satisfaction of my personal impulses and desires and to become aware of higher duties and obligations.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 182

*universal* divine human being in whose knowledge of him God achieved self-consciousness and self-knowledge - hence completion.<sup>39</sup> Hegel's kingdom of God was on earth.

### 12.3.3 The retreat into a philosophy of subjectivity - 'ancient' becomes 'modern'

'Cogito ergo sum' summarised for Hegel the most important current in philosophy<sup>40</sup> - a current in which thought thinks itself, a philosophy of subjectivity that he believed ran from the antique Neoplatonists (particularly Proclus) who drew on Aristotle's notion of *noesis noeseos*, through Christianity, overleapt the Middle Ages and was revived by Descartes, who Hegel considered the first 'modern' philosopher

Now we come for the first time to what is properly the philosophy of the modern world, and we begin it with Descartes. Here, we may say, we are at home and, like the sailor after a long voyage, we can at last shout 'Land ho'. Descartes made a fresh start in every respect. ...The principle in this new era is thinking, the thinking that proceeds from itself. We have exhibited this inwardness above all with respect to Christianity; it is pre-eminently the Protestant principle. ...it is now thinking, thinking on its own account, that is the purest pinnacle of this inwardness, the inmost core of inwardness - thinking is what now establishes itself on its own account. This period begins with Descartes.<sup>41</sup>

Because of its importance to my argument, I quote most of the note at the bottom of the page on which the above text was printed. Hegel was perfectly clear in tying together, in the same current, Neoplatonism, Christianity and 'modern' philosophy (of which he thought *his* to be the final word) which, together, uphold a 'pinnacle of inwardness'

With the reference to a 'pinnacle' of inwardness Hegel establishes a connection between, on the one hand, the philosophy of Descartes and modern philosophy as a whole and, on the other, Christianity and Neoplatonism, for in discussing Neoplatonism he used the phrase 'pinnacle of actual being' (*Spitze des Seyenden*) to render Proclus's (in Greek) 'pinnacle of actual being'. This pinnacle of actual being is further defined, in W. 15:84 (Ms?), as 'what is centred on self [*das Selbstische*] what has being-for-self, the subjective, the point of individual unity'. Hegel also sees (in W. 15:114-15) a parallel development in Christianity: 'For human beings there has dawned in their consciousness of the world the fact that the absolute has attained this (in Greek) 'pinnacle of concreteness' - the pinnacle of immediate actuality; and this is the appearance of Christianity.' ...Hegel regards modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes,

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<sup>39</sup> I have argued previously (11.3.7, 11.3.10.9) that Christ's incarnation for the purpose of God's achieving self-consciousness, self-knowledge and completion is not Christian but Neoplatonic metaphor and symbolism.

<sup>40</sup> 'With Descartes, thinking began to go within itself. 'Cogito ergo sum' are the first words of his system, and these very words constitute the distinctive feature of modern philosophy.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 237

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, 104

as taking up again or resuming the history of philosophy, a history interrupted by the Middle Ages.<sup>42</sup>

Further

This view that modern philosophy follows upon the philosophy of late antiquity is based not only on the scant importance Hegel attached to the Middle Ages as far as the history of philosophy was concerned, as a period ‘which we intend to get through by putting on seven-league boots’, but also on his supposition of an agreement in content between the philosophers of late antiquity and those of modern times regarding the concept of the self-thinking thought; see, for example, W.15:13: ‘The fundamental idea of this Neopythagorean - also Neoplatonic or Alexandrian - philosophy was the thinking that thinks itself, the *nous*, which has itself for object.’ This theme also links these two periods to Aristotelian metaphysics and to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>43</sup>

My argument has been that not only was the Christian doctrine of the Trinity ‘closely linked’ with Neoplatonism (F.A.G.Tholuck, with whom Hegel corresponded, thought so [11.3.4]), Dodds wrote that the Christian Neoplatonists used the Neoplatonic concept of unity-in-distinction to explain the doctrine of the Trinity [11.3.4] and Redding that Neoplatonism, especially Proclus’ was central to Hegel’s understanding of Christianity and the doctrine of the Trinity [1.2]), and most probably sourced in both Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism,<sup>44</sup> *this* Trinity is *not* the Trinity of Hegel which was based *and remained based* on Proclus’ *philosophical* triad Being/Life/Intelligence to which Hegel, following Cusanus, gave a Christian overlay - yet still obvious in its differences from the *Christian* Trinity<sup>45</sup> - so that he could use it as the religious component he needed for his ‘speculative’ system *and* to metaphorically and symbolically illustrate and anchor in *this* world the Neoplatonic processes he set out and refined.

As Proclus used the henads to ‘reconcile’ ‘reason’ with faith, Neoplatonism with religion

as participated unities they bridge the gap between the transcendent One and everything that comes after it. The doctrine of the henads can thus be seen

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Note, 104

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Note, 105

<sup>44</sup> ‘Another influence may have been the Neoplatonist Plotinus’ (204–70 CE) triad of the One, Intellect, and Soul, in which the latter two mysteriously emanate from the One, and “are the One and not the One; they are the one because they are from it; they are not the One, because it endowed them with what they have while remaining by itself” (Plotinus *Enneads*, 85). Plotinus even describes them as three *hypostases*, and describes their sameness using *homoousios* (Freeman 2003, 189). Augustine tells us that he and other Christian intellectuals of his day believed that the Neoplatonists had some awareness of the persons of the Trinity (*Confessions* VIII.3; *City* X.23). Many thinkers influential in the development of trinitarian doctrines were steeped in the thought not only of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism...’ Dale Tuggy, ‘History of Trinitarian Doctrines,’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<sup>45</sup> Discussed at 11.3.7 ff.; Hodgson wrote that Hegel ‘adjusted’ his original inner ‘*philosophical triad*’ (my italics - which clearly reflects the structure of Proclus’ triad Being/Life/Intelligence) ‘drawn from the three branches of philosophy - the logical idea, nature, and (finite) spirit...It has *the peculiar result* (my italics) that the “Son”...occupies the third moment of the triad rather than the second. The third trinitarian moment, the “Spirit,” becomes a kind of appendage, treated under Sec. C of the outer triad, “Community, Cultus.”’ Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 12-13. As I have argued previously (11.3.7), I disagree - Hegel’s triad *remained*, beneath the Christian overlay, *philosophical* and Proclean.

as a way of integrating the traditional gods of Greek polytheistic religion into the Neoplatonic metaphysics of the One.<sup>46</sup>

Hegel used *his* Neoplatonic ‘Trinity’ for the same purpose. Both intended that this merging would provide the means for the healing of what *all* the Neoplatonists perceived to be our spiritual, intellectual and social fragmentation. The application of ‘reason,’ together with faith and divine power would result in an ethical, perspectival cultus.

Further parallels between Proclus and Hegel are that, not only, contrary to the common perception that mysticism must be built around a mystical union with the Source, did Proclus make *no* explicit reference in his highly structured *Elements of Theology* to such a union with the One,<sup>47</sup> Gods or God, in response to prayer, must come to *us*, we cannot go to *them* or *him*.<sup>48</sup> What Chlup wrote, linking the gods of the Eastern Neoplatonists to their community and cultus applies *equally* to the Trinity, community and cultus of Hegel. These cults in which communities worship are *tokens* of the relationship between them and their gods or God.<sup>49</sup>

Proclus and Hegel equally recognised the use to their mystical purpose of inspired theological poetry (for the former, it was part of his theurgy<sup>50</sup>) - the very *inadequacy* of words being *a plus* such that, when expressed poetically, they function as *symbols* inspiring one to go beyond them to the unity of knower, knowing and known. Just as the text of *Hegel’s Lectures on Fine Arts* concludes with a long section on poetry - for him, the most spiritual and perfect of the arts - so he concluded and almost concluded, in turn, his *Phenomenology* and tripartite *Encyclopaedia* with similar paeans in verse to Neoplatonic vitalism and mystical union

from the chalice of this realm of spirits  
foams forth for Him his own infinitude.<sup>51</sup>

I looked into the heart, a waste of worlds, a sea, -  
I saw a thousand dreams, - yet One amid all dreaming.  
And earth, air, water, fire, when thy decree is given,  
Are molten into One: against thee none hath striven.  
There is no living heart but beats unfailingly

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<sup>46</sup> Helmig and Steel, ‘Proclus,’ op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Prop. 123. ‘Pr.’s teaching here differs from that of Plotinus (*a*) in the absence of any explicit reference to *unio mystica* (the possibility of it is not, however, excluded); (*b*) in excluding the One from the possibility of being known by analogy.’ Dodds’ commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 265

<sup>48</sup> ‘(The late Neoplatonists believed that) the boundaries between levels of reality are penetrable in one direction only (- from higher to lower. So) while human Soul can never really enter the realm of the One, it can open up to the gods and act in unison with them, becoming their extension, as it were, and being filled with their power.’ Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 163

<sup>49</sup> ‘Thanks to the gods (the world) is a place...where human communities may worship the gods in cults that have been revealed to them as tokens of...bonds between them and their divine patrons.’ Ibid., 136

<sup>50</sup> ‘inspired theological poetry...in late Neoplatonic circles was incorporated into the large complex of theurgic activities and whose philosophical exegesis seems to have performed an important part in the soul’s ascent to the gods.’ Ibid, 168

<sup>51</sup> Adaptation of Schiller’s *Die Freundschaft*, Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 493

In the one song of praise to thee, from earth and heaven...<sup>52</sup>

Hegel advocated that philosophers be what Proclus was - priests and theologians (Cusanus was all three).<sup>53</sup> In his maturity, in direct relation to the criticisms he had of his society, Hegel expressed a far more limited and gloomy view of what comprised a community both philosophical and religious - in which religion found not reconciliation *with* but *refuge in* philosophy<sup>54</sup> from a people whose best times were past and from decay,<sup>55</sup> in which 'nobler natures'<sup>56</sup> engaged in self-thinking thought and that reflected the closing words of the *Enneads*<sup>57</sup> - than he had done in his much more idealistic youth. Hodgson encapsulated this

Our age is like that of the Roman Empire in its abandonment of the question of truth, its smug conviction that no cognitive knowledge of God can be had, its reduction of everything to merely historical questions, its privatism, subjectivism, and moralism, and the failure of its teachers and clergy to lead the people. It is indeed an apocalyptic time, but the world must be left largely to its own devices in solving its problems. Philosophy can resolve this discord only in a manner appropriate to itself, by zealously guarding the truth, but it must recognise that its resolution is only partial. The community of Spirit as such is not passing away, but it does seem to be passing over from the ecclesiastical priesthood to the philosophical; if so, the truth of religion will live on in the philosophical community, in which it must now seek refuge.<sup>58</sup>

Echoing Nussbaum's words regarding the 'metaphysico-religious' 'horror of the contingent,'<sup>59</sup> one of the greatest dialecticians wrote

Religion must take refuge in philosophy. For the theologians of the present day, the world is a passing away into subjective reflection because it has as its form merely the externality of contingent occurrence. But philosophy, as we have said, is also partial: it forms an isolated order of priests – a sanctuary – who are untroubled about how it goes with the world, who need

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<sup>52</sup> Hegel introduced these words and page-long excerpts from a poem by Jelaledin-Rumi with '*In order to give a clearer impression of it, (the unity of the soul with the One, my italics) I cannot refrain from quoting a few passages...*' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 308-309

<sup>53</sup> 2., Note and 9.8

<sup>54</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 161-162

<sup>55</sup> '(When a people's) best times are past and decay sets in...satisfaction resides then in the ideal realm.' Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 272-273

<sup>56</sup> 'periods must occur in which the spirit of nobler natures is forced to flee from the present into ideal regions, and to find in them that reconciliation with itself which it can no longer enjoy in an internally divided reality' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 143

<sup>57</sup> 'This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.' Plotinus, *The Enneads (Abridged)*, op. cit., VI.9.11

<sup>58</sup> Hodgson in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 23

<sup>59</sup> Nussbaum, *The Musical Representation, Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*, op. cit., 259



not mix with it, and whose work is to preserve this possession of truth. How things turn out in the world is not our affair.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 161-162

## 13. Hegel and Nicholas of Cusa

### 13.1 The use of Neoplatonism

Nothing could more clearly exemplify the dishonesty that permeates modern Western philosophy, a dishonesty motivated by a careerist pandering to the requirements of the dominant ideology, than the relationship between Neoplatonism and the philosophy of the German idealists, particularly Hegel.

The reason of the former - fluid, poetic and 'speculative' - always eager to acknowledge meaning *beyond* the constraint of concepts and literal argument and to explore ways of conveying it was appropriated to the reason of the latter, and *not* acknowledged.

Where Neoplatonism's vitality and dynamism, necessary to lifting philosophy out of scholasticism was retained, its reason was either weakened or forced into supposedly '*definitional*' structures, this done with greatest determination by Hegel, the self-appointed master of the 'scientific' philosophising of the 'concrete'<sup>1</sup>.

Yet that very determination, together with his *orientation* to Neoplatonism and his sensitivity to creativity resulted in him taking Neoplatonism to its highest point of development. Cusanus, following on Proclus, was instrumental to Hegel in this regard.

### 13.2 Philosophers who didn't acknowledge those who influenced them

German philosophy of the period is emblematic of Western philosophy under capitalism in its failure to deal honestly and openly with Neoplatonism and with philosophers considered to be 'suspect' or disapproved of in relation to the dominant paradigm of 'reason' - an activity still little understood. Redding said of Spinoza

there was an underground distribution of his works and they were very influential in Germany in the eighteenth century. Jacobi blows the lid on this by saying that Lessing had told him that he was a Spinozist on his death-

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<sup>1</sup> 'Schelling...gave to his Spinozism a *neo-platonic* twist, and the philosophy of Schelling and, especially, after him, Hegel, showed clear features of the type of thought found in the Platonism of late antique philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus (Beierwaltes 2004; Vieillard-Baron 1979). ...The neoplatonistic thought of Plotinus and Proclus had been a recurring feature of German religious and philosophical thought since the late middle ages, having appeared in influential thinkers like Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa and, later, Leibniz and Jacob Böhme. In the 1780s and 90s, there seems to have been a revival of Platonist and Neoplatonist thought in the German states, and this would come to be especially influential on early "romanticism". During the 1790s, the poet-philosopher Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801) had even claimed to find similarities between the views of Plotinus on the one hand, and Kant and Fichte on the other (Beierwaltes 2004: 87-8). In retrospect, this does not seem too fanciful.' Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 6

bed, resulting in many coming out saying that they had read Spinoza. Spinoza took off like a bomb. Teenagers began reading Spinoza.<sup>2</sup>

Magee wrote of the 'highly probable' influence of the Swabian mystical theologian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger on Hegel

Hegel never mentions Oetinger, but then neither does Schelling, even though we know from independent sources that Oetinger was important to him. The reason for this silence is very clear. Academics and clergymen who referred to Oetinger or expressed sympathy for his ideas were generally ridiculed and even sometimes dismissed from their posts.<sup>3</sup>

and similarly of Hegel's interest in Böhme

the only reference to Boehme in Hegel's published writings up until the Berlin period is in the 1817 *Encyclopedia*, where a brief reference occurs in paragraph 472 of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. Perhaps Hegel felt it prudent not to advertise his interest in Boehme in his published writings. By the Berlin period, however, he felt secure from academic persecution, and so decided to openly acknowledge his interest in print. Hence, not only does a reference to Boehme appear in the 1832 *Doctrine of Being*, but also, as mentioned, in the preface to the 1827 *Encyclopedia*.<sup>4</sup>

The motives of a fear of disapproval and of the termination of a career in not acknowledging a philosophical influence or interest could also merge with ambition. Küng wrote that Hegel and Schelling, though never acknowledging him, were

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<sup>2</sup> Lecture, University of Sydney, 13.09.10. 'Lessing, who had died in the year in which the *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, had posthumously introduced the ideas of Spinoza to the intellectual *avant-garde*. His enlightened friends in Berlin were deeply shocked when, four years after his death, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi reported a private conversation he had had with Lessing shortly before his demise (*On the teaching of Spinoza in letters to Mr Moses Mendelssohn*, 1785). In 1780 he was supposed, according to his own words, to have abandoned the orthodox ideas of God; appealing to Spinoza, he had rejected the notion of God as personal cause of the world and come to conceive of him as a kind of soul of the universe embracing the world as one and all. Thus Jacobi accused Lessing not only of pantheism, but also of determinism, fatalism and atheism.' Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought*, op. cit., 103

<sup>3</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism' in Beiser, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, op. cit., 276

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 264. His further understated words should be noted 'This, plus the encounter with Baader, makes it exceedingly difficult for scholars to dismiss Hegel's interest in mysticism as a mere "aberration of youth."' 'In the 1840's, Schelling publicly accused Hegel of having simply borrowed much of his philosophy from Jakob Böhme.' Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 2

greatly in Fichte's debt both for the development of the monism of Spirit and for the development of dialectic<sup>5</sup>

Magee wrote that Hegel's 'true infinite' 'would seem to owe something to Spinoza's theology.'<sup>6</sup> In fact all three notions - the monism of Spirit, dialectic and Hegel's 'true infinite'<sup>7</sup> were staples of Neoplatonism.

Again, the motive could simply have been egotism

Hegel's treatment of Böhme is fundamentally no different from his treatment of any number of other figures in the history of ideas: he sees him as in certain ways approaching the ideas that only he, Hegel, fully and adequately articulates.<sup>8</sup>

Other examples of German philosophers who concealed their interest in or debt to the writing and philosophies of others include Schelling with regard to Swedenborg<sup>9</sup>, Nietzsche with regard to

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<sup>5</sup> Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought*, op. cit., 151. 'Fichte made the two "discoveries" which were to remain fundamental for post-Kantian Idealism. These were subsequently taken over and remodelled by the two younger men (i.e. Schelling and Hegel), without showing too much gratitude to Fichte! a) *The monism of Spirit*. ...This was the "I" or the subjective reason, which proves to be a creative force and a productive power or, to use another name, *Spirit*. b) *Dialectic*. ...the "I" exists in conflict with the "not-I". Thus the structures and forms of the world arise out of the creative reason. The latter posits itself, continually confronting and overcoming the antithesis afresh. Hence, the genesis of Spirit occurs in the threefold act of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, or, to use another word, in *dialectic*.' Ibid., 151-152. Plotinus was accused by his colleagues in Greece of having plagiarised Numenius of Apamea, Paul Henry 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought' in Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., lxix

<sup>6</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 225

<sup>7</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., See Props., 91 and 102. The relationship between 'infinite' and 'finite' is Cusanus' fundamental philosophical concern: 'Your Concept is most simple eternity itself. Now, *posterior* to most simple eternity no thing can possibly be made. Therefore, infinite duration, which is eternity itself, encompasses all succession. Therefore, everything which appears to us in a succession is not at all posterior to Your Concept, which is eternity. For Your one Concept, which is also Your Word, enfolds each and every thing.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 10, 43, 699

<sup>8</sup> Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 544

<sup>9</sup> 'There is not a single passage in the works of Schelling published during his lifetime that explicitly indicates that the author was engaged with Swedenborg, as were so many of the leading spirits of the time who in one way or another reacted against Enlightenment rationalism... (Schelling made only one reference to Swedenborg in his dialogue 'On the Connection of Nature with the Spiritual World [Clara]') but even here he is referred to only as "the Swedish spirit-seer" or "the Northern spirit-seer." Even more astonishing, there is not a single direct reference to Swedenborg in Schelling's letters. ...as far as the available sources indicate Schelling never wrote the name "Swedenborg"... This once again confirms Ernst Benz's assertion that the official academic judgement passed on Swedenborg was so potent "that Swedenborg was rarely mentioned by name even by his covert adherents." Still, the references to Swedenborg in *Clara* demonstrate that Schelling regarded him as a true seer.' Friedmann Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism*, Trans., George F. Dole, Swedenborg Foundation, Pennsylvania, 1997, 27. Horn quoted Kant 'in the future - I don't know where or when - it will be proved that even in this life the human soul is in an insoluble community with all the immaterial natures of the world of spirits, and that it reciprocally influences it and receives impressions from it, of which, however, the soul is unconscious as long as everything is fine' (p. 149 in *Kants populäre Schriften*, ed. Paul Menzer (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911) 169

Stirner<sup>10</sup> and, of most interest to me, Hegel with regard to Cusanus - on which I will now begin to expand.

### 13.3 'Cusa's direct influence on Modern thought is small; an immediate common-bond is scarcely confirmable.'

Jasper Hopkins, who has specialised in the writing and thought of Cusanus wrote

Just as Nicholas does not anticipate, prefigure, foreshadow, etc., Kant, so also he does not anticipate Copernicus or Spinoza or Leibniz or Berkeley or Hegel. ...Nicholas is *not* the first Modern thinker. For his 'Modern themes' are not sufficiently developed for him to warrant this title. ...Nicholas must be regarded as a transitional figure some of whose ideas (1) were *suggestive* of new ways of thinking but (2) were not such as to conduct him far enough away from the medieval outlook for him truly to be called a Modern thinker. ...Emerich Coreth's judgment remains cogent: 'Cusa's direct influence on Modern thought is small; an immediate common-bond is scarcely confirmable.'

Nicholas's intellectual influence on his own generation and on subsequent generations remained meagre. ...Looking back on Cusa, we find in his corpus of writings certain ideas that were developed by his Modern successors, without his having directly influenced most of those successors through his own writings, of which they had scarcely any firsthand knowledge. ...(Cusa) does not help 'legitimate' the Modern Age... Instead, the reverse is true: the Modern Age helped 'legitimate' certain of his ideas...<sup>11</sup>

He quoted Jaspers

Karl Jaspers assesses the historical influence of Nicholas's thought as minimal: 'Through the contents of his philosophy Cusa also exercised no influence except upon a few monks. On the pathways of the Occident - the Reformation, the New Catholicism, Absolutism, the Enlightenment, the modern scientific disciplines - Cusa was nowhere to be found.'<sup>12</sup>

Beck wrote

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<sup>10</sup> Safranski wrote that, wanting to read the writing of Max Stirner (Johann Caspar Schmidt – Marx and Engels referred to him in *The German Ideology* as 'Saint Max'), Nietzsche sent one of his students (Adolf Baumgartner) to the Basel library in 1874 to get it. On another occasion, Safranski reports, he was quoted by his friend Ida Overbeck as saying that she would not let on that he was familiar with Stirner's writing. Nietzsche was accused of not only having been influenced by Stirner but of having plagiarised him. Safranski quotes one contemporary of Nietzsche's having written that Nietzsche would have been 'permanently discredited in any educated milieu if he had demonstrated even the least bit of sympathy for Stirner'. Rudiger Safranski, *Nietzsche, A Philosophical Biography*, Trans., Shelley Frisch, Granata Books, London, 2002, 126

<sup>11</sup> Jasper Hopkins, 'Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?', *Renaissance and Early Modern Philosophy*, Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 26 (2002), 13-29, 28-29

<sup>12</sup> Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1983, 3-4

If any stream of thought can be traced, even intermittently, back to Nicholas it was that of the philosophy of nature, theosophy, and Protestant mysticism; and this stream did not lead to the most significant work in philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

On the possibility of Cusanus having directly influenced Hegel, Hopkins quoted Hans Gerhard Senger

let there be no unclarity about the fact that we are no longer dealing with the question of Cusanus' direct historical influence. On the contrary, we must always remain conscious of the fact that with such a comparison (e.g. between Cusanus and Hegel) we are reconstructing a narrative of Cusanus' discernible historical influence - a narrative that cannot with historical accuracy be characterised in just that way.<sup>14</sup>

Michael Inwood wrote 'Nicholas of Cusa (whom Hegel surprisingly never mentions)...'<sup>15</sup>, Glenn Alexander Magee wrote 'Hegel never mentions Cusa anywhere in his published writings or in his lectures.' and in the footnote Magee expressed a standard view 'David Walsh notes that although there is no evidence that Hegel ever read Cusa, he was indirectly influenced by him through J.G.Hamann and Giordano Bruno.'<sup>16</sup>

It would seem my contention that Hegel knew of Cusanus - and in detail - has been smashed and sunk without trace. How could the experts be wrong?

#### **13.4 A Neoplatonist must never be acknowledged as the initiator of modern Western philosophy**

In regard to a 1652 Dutch study of skepticism in which Cusanus was named, Richard Popkin referred to him as a 'modern skeptic' and unintentionally stated the primary reason for why Cusanus must be denied the recognition due to him as the initiator of modern Western philosophy, for introducing to the modern era the philosophy of Neoplatonic subjectivity, of Neoplatonic thought that thinks itself

Prior to the period I shall deal with, there are some indications of a sceptical motif, principally among the antirational theologians, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian. This theological movement, culminating in the West in the work of Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century, employed many of the sceptical arguments in order to undermine confidence in the rational approach to religious knowledge and truth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, The Belknap Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969, 71

<sup>14</sup> Jasper Hopkins, 'Nicholas of Cusa's Intellectual Relationship to Anselm of Canterbury' in Peter J. Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2006, 54-73, 55

<sup>15</sup> Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 140

<sup>16</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 28

<sup>17</sup> Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, xix

Cusanus' 'coincidence of opposites' and the dialectic of Neoplatonism undermines confidence in the 'rational approach' not only of religious and patriarchal philosophical knowledge (a knowledge premised on defined, bounded concepts and therefore primary tools for control)<sup>18</sup> but of both capitalist ideology and white, Western supremacism (see Introduction and 1.1). Even in its idealist form, it is a philosophy that exposes and rejects the lies of limit and permanence.

The ideological reality concerning the influence of Neoplatonism is one of systematic, deliberate downplaying and denial, a conspiracy of silence and the most determined ignorance. The sharpest manifestation of this in philosophy concerns the relationship between Cusanus,<sup>19</sup> a *recognised* Neoplatonist and Hegel who, as the author of the *Science of Logic*, laid claim to being, and is held in capitalist ideology as, the master of the West's greatest justification for the domination of others - its conceptual reason. As such, his own position could not be more contradictory.

Hopkins summarised Cusanus' most important ideas

his notion of learned ignorance, his notion of the infinite disproportion between the finite and the infinite, his notion of the coincidence of opposites in God, his notion of the mobility of the earth, and his notion of the earth's being privatively infinite (i.e., its being finite but unbounded).<sup>20</sup>

and wrote

But though he is the first modern philosopher, he is not the Father of modern philosophy, a title rightly reserved for Descartes; for he does not break with the past, as does Descartes. Yet, he is the first to propose ideas whose implications, had they been further developed by his contemporaries or his successors, would have required a conceptual break with the past.<sup>21</sup>

Hopkins is splitting hairs - 'the first modern philosopher' but 'not the *Father* of modern philosophy'... To *simply put forward* the ideas Cusanus did was to break *conceptually and decisively* with scholasticism and those ideas included significant developments in Neoplatonism such that Hegel, recognising their worth *and coherence*, used them to develop Neoplatonism to its highest degree. And Cusanus *did* philosophise about those ideas - at length and repeatedly.

Of Cusanus' impact in philosophy, Hopkins wrote

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<sup>18</sup> 'I experience the necessity for me to enter into obscuring mist and to admit the coincidence of opposites, beyond all capacity of reason, and to seek truth where impossibility appears.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 9, 38, 697

<sup>19</sup> In 1514 an edition of Cusanus' *Opera* was published in Paris, edited by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. Buhle wrote that Cusanus' writing was published in Basel in 1565 in three folio volumes. Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, in 6 vols., Johann Georg Rosenbusch, Göttingen, 1800, vol. 2, 342-343. Camille La Bossière wrote that Montaigne owned a copy of the 1576 edition of *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus' single most important treatise. Camille R. La Bossière, 'The World Revolves Upon an I: Montaigne's Unknown God and Melville's Confidence-Man' ([https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63291/dalrev\\_vol77\\_iss3\\_pp339\\_354.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/63291/dalrev_vol77_iss3_pp339_354.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)). There was a German translation of his most important writing by F.A. Scharpf in Freiburg in 1862, Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, Trans., Frank Thilly, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1907, 264

<sup>20</sup> Hopkins, 'Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?', op. cit., 29

<sup>21</sup> Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, op. cit., 109

Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel never mention him, although Kepler, Descartes, and Leibniz do. His ideas were given a boost by the printing of his collected works (Paris, 1514) by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. They were given a further boost by Giordano Bruno's appropriating some of them.<sup>22</sup>

You can see the pattern: 'never mention...given a boost...given a further boost...appropriating some of them'...

Bruno regarded Cusanus and Copernicus as the greatest German thinkers<sup>23</sup> and referred to Cusanus, in both *Cause, Principle and Unity* (published in 1584-5 in London and in which Cusanus was his guide) and *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (also published in 1584-5 in London) as 'divine'<sup>24</sup>. In discussing Cusanus' metaphor of a circle and a line to excellently convey the relation between Maximum and Minimum (a metaphor of Cusanus' so important to Kepler) Bruno wrote

Let us look at signs first: tell me what is more unlike a straight line than the circle? Is there anything more opposite to a straight line than a curve? And yet, they coincide in the principle and the minimum, since (as the Cusan, the inventor of geometry's most beautiful secrets, divinely pointed out) what difference could you find between the minimum arc and the minimum chord? Furthermore, in the maximum, what difference could you find between the infinite circle and the straight line?<sup>25</sup>

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel wrote that Bruno

travelled widely in most European countries. ...He also spent time in London and in numerous German universities; he taught in Wittenberg and in Prague.<sup>26</sup>

It is entirely reasonable to think that Bruno proselytised for Cusanus' ideas everywhere he went.

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<sup>22</sup> Hopkins, 'Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?', op. cit., 28

<sup>23</sup> 'in 1565 in Wittenberg (Bruno) chided the Germans for neglecting (Cusa and Copernicus), who were, he said, their greatest thinkers.' Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 170. Of Copernicus, who began his study of astronomy in Italy in about 1490, Beck wrote 'There he came under the influence of two modes of thought that had not previously played any great role in recent astronomical theory. One was Pythagoreanism, the other was Neoplatonism', Ibid., 166

<sup>24</sup> From the Third Dialogue in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*: 'Teofilo: But in truth it signified little for the Nolan (i.e. Bruno, who was born in Nola, part of the Kingdom of Naples) that the aforesaid [motion] (of the earth) had been stated, taught, and confirmed before him by Copernicus, Niceta Syracusus the Pythagorean, Philolaus, Heraclitus of Pontus, Hecphantus the Pythagorean, Plato in his *Timaeus* (where the author states this theory timidly and inconstantly, since he held it more by faith than by knowledge), and the divine Cusanus in the second book of his *On Learned Ignorance*, and others in all sorts of first-rate discourses. Smith: I remember having seen that Cusanus, of whose judgement I know you do not disapprove, would have it that the sun has dissimilar parts just as do the moon and the earth. ...Teofilo.: By him divinely said and understood...' Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (La Cena de le Ceneri), Ed. and Trans., Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995, 139-151

<sup>25</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity* (De la causa, principio e uno), Trans. and Ed., Robert de Lucca and *Essays on Magic*, Trans. and Ed., Richard J. Blackwell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, 96-97

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 61-62



Kepler, strongly influenced by both Platonism and Neoplatonism<sup>27</sup> also referred to Cusanus as 'divine'<sup>28</sup> in his *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (published in 1596 and 1621)

The fullest expression of Nicolaus of Cusa's mathematical thoughts on the infinite and the infinitesimal, however, are found in the work of Johannes Kepler, who was strongly influenced by the cardinal's ideas...and who was likewise deeply imbued with Platonic and Pythagorean mysticism. It was probably the imaginative use by Cusa of the concept of infinity which led Kepler to his principle of continuity.<sup>29</sup>

Of Leibniz, Redding said

Leibniz was influenced by a type of philosophy that goes back to Plato and Neoplatonism, who and which influenced the early Christians. The idea of every part of the world being connected to everything else is Neoplatonist.<sup>30</sup>

Another, related, aspect of Neoplatonism - perspectivism - is obvious in the following from Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*

Now, first of all, it is very evident that created substances depend upon God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, just as we produce our thoughts. For God, so to speak, turns on

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<sup>27</sup> 'Kepler was imbued with the spirit of Platonism and in a marginal note to a passage from Proclus quoted in his *Harmonices mundi*, he described the *Timaeus* as a commentary on the book of Genesis, transforming it into Pythagorean philosophy. The general idea of the world as the visible image of God, which we find at the end of the *Timaeus*, was one that Kepler made his own. Having raised the question why God had first created bodies, he found the key to the solution in the comparison of God with the 'curved' and created nature with the 'straight,' a comparison that had been made by Nikolaus von Kues (Cusanus) and others. Kepler saw the harmony between the things at rest, in the order sun, sphere of fixed stars, and intervening space, as a symbol of the Three Persons of the Trinity. It was God's intention, Kepler believed, that we should discover the plan of creation by sharing in His thoughts. It seemed to Kepler that the distinction between the curved and the straight was such a useful idea, that it could not have arisen by accident but must have been contrived in the beginning by God. Then in order that the world should be the best and most beautiful and reveal His image, Kepler supposed that God had created magnitudes and designed quantities whose nature was locked in the distinction between the curved and the straight, and to bring these quantities into being, He created bodies before all other things. ...For Kepler, as for Plato, God was a geometer.' Johannes Kepler, *The Harmony of the World*, (1619) trans. and Introduction by E.J.Aiton, A.M.Duncan, J.V.Field, xi-xxxix, xiii-xiv; Of the influence on Kepler of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of light: 'In his Trinitarian allegories he called the sun God the Father. ...the sun was not merely the geometrical centre of the solar system, as for Copernicus; it was also the dynamical centre, the primum mobile of the great wheels of the planets.', Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 170

<sup>28</sup> '...divinus mihi Cusanus...' Johannes Kepler *Gesammelte Werke Band I, Mysterium Cosmographicum de Stella Nova*, C.H.Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung München MCMXXXVIII, Caput II, 23

<sup>29</sup> C. Boyer, *The History of the Calculus and its Conceptual Development*, Dover Publications, New York 1949, 93 quoted in Kundan Misra, 'Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the humanist agenda and the scientific method', MA thesis, University of NSW, 2012. Misra added 'It was Cusa, says Boyer...who led Kepler to include normal and limiting forms of curves under a single definition of continuity encompassing conic sections as a single family of curves.' The note for this is 'Boyer quotes from Kepler's *Opera omnia* II 595, translated from the quoted Latin by this author, "we find that a straight line is an hyperbola obtuse in the extreme. And from Cusanus we learn that a circle is an infinite linear thing. They are several things simultaneously, not discrete alternatives, whose different faces are turned to light by the use of analogy." '86; 'Especially where Kepler deals with the geometrical structure of the cosmos, he always returns to his Platonic and Neoplatonic framework of thought.' Daniel A. Di Liscia, 'Johannes Kepler', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<sup>30</sup> Lecture, University of Sydney, 02.08.10

all sides and in all ways the general system of phenomena which he finds it good to produce in order to manifest his glory, and he views all the faces of the world in all ways possible, since there is no relation that escapes his omniscience. The result of each view of the universe, as seen from a certain position, is a substance which expresses the universe in conformity with this view, should God see fit to render his thought actual and to produce this substance.<sup>31</sup>

Cusanus' words in *De visione Dei* with which he discussed an 'Icon of God' he was sending to the Benedictines at the monastery at Tegernsee for them to hang, stand around and observe as a philosophical and religious lesson, are almost exactly the same

In the first place, I think we must presuppose the following: whatever is *apparent* with regard to the icon-of-God's sight is *truer* with regard to God's true sight. For, indeed, God, who is the summit of all perfection and who is greater than can be thought, is called '*theos*' by virtue of the fact that He observes all things. Therefore, if in the image the depicted gaze can appear to be beholding each and every thing at once, then since this [capability] belongs to sight's perfection, it cannot truly befit the Truth less than it apparently befits the icon, or appearance.<sup>32</sup>

The 'problem' with giving Cusanus the recognition that is his due, the reason he will never get it under class domination is *not* that he didn't beat Kepler or Leibniz to their discoveries, it is that he was a Neoplatonist, and his philosophy is a threat to that domination.

Like the Neoplatonists, Kant argued that the attainment of knowledge is dependent on the 'mind's' activity. His transcendental unity of apperception, a 'pure original unchangeable consciousness'<sup>33</sup>, models the German idealists concern for Neoplatonic unity. His view of the world was, again, perspectival - a person can only grasp appearances according to a view, they can't know the world in itself.

## Schelling

developed Kant's hints about a type of Neoplatonic unity of the world of things-in-themselves by identifying this world with the totality of things in their interconnection. He identifies the world of appearances with this totality, as it were, grasped from within<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> G.W.Leibniz, 'Discourse on Metaphysics' in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, Eds. and Trans., Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1991, 1-41, 15

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., I, 6, 682

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans., Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan, London, 1987, A 107, 136

<sup>34</sup> Redding, lecture, University of Sydney, 04.10.10

and wrote ‘the universe is, like the absolute, utterly One, indivisible, since it is the absolute itself...’ and ‘This is the means by which the universe is populated; according to this law life flows out into the world from the absolute as from that which is without qualification *one*’<sup>35</sup>...

That the profound and pervasive influence of Neoplatonism was and is downplayed, denied and passed over by academics is excellently exemplified with their treatment of Schelling. I quoted Beck and Magee above to illustrate how they both downplayed the influence of Cusanus (13.3) yet both - astonishingly - wrote, Magee quoting Beck (and this *on the same page* he distanced Cusanus from Hegel by quoting Walsh!), that Schelling, ‘we know’, read and was influenced by him!

(Cusanus’) theory of the polarity but unity of man, God, and nature is elaborated by Schelling (who, we know, was actually influenced by reading Nicholas).<sup>36</sup>

Schelling...we know, was actually influenced by reading Nicholas.<sup>37</sup>

Their writing this is astonishing not only because it is the first (though bare) assertion by any academics of a direct connection between Cusanus and *any* of the German idealists, but all the more so given Schelling’s significance - he had been best friends with Hegel, on whom he had had such a strong influence in their youth that Hegel was widely regarded as his follower, he had lived twice with Hegel - when they were students in the Tübingen seminary and again, at Schelling’s invitation, in Jena which was at the centre of philosophical life in Germany, where Schelling had a chair in philosophy and where they had worked together. Yet, having made such a significant statement, Beck and Magee provided not the slightest development on it. Simply, ‘we know’...

Also, Redding wrote

In Hegel’s case, Spinozistic and Cusan elements, reflected through the speculative thought of Schelling, would play a crucial role in his development from around 1800 up until the publication of his first major work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1807.<sup>38</sup>

*When* Schelling began reading Cusanus and *which* of his texts he read obviously is of the greatest importance, not only with regard to the philosophies of Schelling and Hegel, but, given Schelling’s status and relationships, to German idealism and beyond.

#### 13.4.1 Hegel knew of Cusanus, in detail

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<sup>35</sup> F.W.J.Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, Ed. and Trans., D.W.Stott, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, 33, 37; Magee noted that Schelling’s use of ‘Absolute’ was ‘remarkably similar to Cusanus’, Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 18. It’s even more similar to Plotinus who, as previously stated, was the first to use it as a noun.

<sup>36</sup> Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 71

<sup>37</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 28. He continued ‘Beck also makes the claim that the *Naturphilosophie* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as theosophy and Protestant mysticism, have their roots in Cusa.’

<sup>38</sup> Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 31-32

No direct connection has ever been established between Hegel and Nicholas of Cusa. It has been accepted by academics that Hegel did not know of him. In fact, there is *the clearest evidence* that he knew of him, and *in detail*.

Not only did Bruno, who Hodgson wrote Hegel was familiar with,<sup>39</sup> refer to Cusanus in both *The Ash Wednesday Supper* and *Cause, Principle and Unity* as ‘divine’, cite *De docta ignorantia*,<sup>40</sup> Cusanus’ most important work and raise key aspects of Cusanus’ philosophy in them, the histories of philosophy by Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (*Geschichte der Philosophie*, 11 vols., Leipzig, 1798-1819 [*Geschichte*]) and Johann Gottlieb Buhle (*Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, 6 vols., Göttingen, 1800-1804 [*Geschichte*])<sup>41</sup> and *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie und einer kritischen Literatur derselben*, 8 vols., Göttingen, 1796-1804 [*Lehrbuch*]) which Hegel used for his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* show the extent to which Hegel was aware of Cusanus.

*Why* did Hegel never even *name* him, in *any* of his writing<sup>42</sup> – a man who was far more philosophical, and in the ‘Hegelian manner,’ than either Eckhart and particularly Böhme, of whom Hegel wrote that his articulation was ‘unmistakably barbarous’ and that he ‘grasps the antitheses in the harshest, crudest fashion’?<sup>43</sup>

Hegel never named Cusanus, not only because he was so indebted to one who was and is *known* as a Neoplatonist (I have identified more than sixty parallels between Cusanus and Hegel and their philosophies<sup>44</sup> [see 13.6] several of which I will discuss in this thesis), but because to do so would immediately open to question the nature of *Hegel’s* philosophy, of his concepts and of the ‘reason’ he is held in capitalist ideology to be the master of. It would be the first step in *exposing* the pinnacle of Western conceptual reason as the pinnacle of Western mysticism,<sup>45</sup> in *exposing* the most gross failure in social and intellectual responsibility by generations of academic ideologues in maintaining this lie and thereby in *exposing* the workings of the dominant ideology.

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Hegel was familiar with Bruno through Schelling’s work as well as that of J.G.Buhle and F.H.Jacobi’, Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 274

<sup>40</sup> *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, Third Dialogue

<sup>41</sup> This history was translated into French and Italian by 1816, which places further emphasis on the need to question the silence of Hegel *and* the German idealists regarding first-hand knowledge Cusanus.

<sup>42</sup> The following quotes from Hegel may be in reference to Cusanus, particularly the first: ‘In the Middle Ages, for example, there were plenty of naïve chroniclers, but they were monks rather than statesmen. Admittedly, there were learned bishops among them who had been at the centre of affairs and were familiar with the business of state, and who [were therefore] themselves statesmen...’ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 15; ‘Philosophy was revived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the spirit of the peoples was no longer satisfied in the way it had been previously’, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 248; ‘Speculative philosophy has...been more in evidence in the Catholic Church than in the Protestant’, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 132

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6* vol. III, op. cit., 103; ‘...Jacob Boehme, whose philosophy goes deep, but into a turbid depth’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 114

<sup>44</sup> One example: ‘Hegel’s own chief interest is in the principle of the unity of the universe as a ‘coincidence of opposites’ (which, incidentally, is a key theme in the thought of Nicholas Cusanus - 1401-64 - a predecessor of Bruno and a major figure in his own right, whom Hegel does not discuss in these lectures).’ Brown in Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 66, Note 117

<sup>45</sup> Hegel was accused of mysticism during his lifetime

Of the three histories I refer to that Hegel used,<sup>46</sup> in his review of the literature for his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he only named two of them - Tennemann's *Geschichte* and Buhle's *Lehrbuch* - but Cusanus is discussed and repeatedly named in all three. *Of particular note*, the most thorough discussion of Cusanus is in Buhle's *Geschichte* to which, as can be seen from Brown's Notes in vol. III of *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-1826* (see xvii and n.66 in this chapter), Hegel paid close attention in his writing on Bruno.

In vol. 2.1,<sup>47</sup> he is discussed between pages 80-81

pp. 80-81

Another ardent anti-scholastic was Nicholas from Cusel [Cusa in Latin], a village in the district of Trier (Treves), where he was born in the early fifteenth century. He so distinguished himself by his brilliance, erudition and taste that he was made a doctor of theology, bishop of Brixen, and also a cardinal. In his *De docta ignorantia praecisionis veritatis inattingibilis* (On learned ignorance of the unattainability of exact truth) he attacked in particular the craze of the scholastics for debating any subject even if it utterly transcended the bounds of human reason.<sup>48</sup> In his own philosophising he was closer to a skeptical attitude. In another work, *De coniecturis* (On speculation), he declared that any human proposition with real content was no more than a probable assumption. He also dealt with more particular metaphysical questions in other works.

This section is repeated in Buhle's *Lehrbuch*, vol. 6.<sup>49</sup> between pages 255-256.

The longest discussion of Cusanus' philosophy by Buhle is between pages 341-353 in vol. 2.1.

pp. 341-353

The history of the Platonists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as described up to now, contains far more that is worthy of note than that of those of their contemporaries who were true Aristotelians. The latter were for the most part mere Latin translators of and commentators on Aristotle's writings. What was particular to them, such as George of Trebizond, Gennadius Georgius Scholarius etc. in their dispute with the Platonists, has already been mentioned in the historical discussion of this dispute, where I also touched on the most important circumstances of their lives.

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<sup>46</sup> The specific volumes which I cite are referred to repeatedly in the notes by the Editor Robert F. Brown as having been used by Hegel

<sup>47</sup> Vol. 2 of the *Geschichte* was published in 1800

<sup>48</sup> 'Humanists since the days of Petrarch had rhetorically railed against the *ventosa sophistica* (windy/vain sophistry) and Cusanus echoes their complaint when, in the *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, he attacks the *garrula logica* (babbling logicians). But the humanists were not generally prepared to couch their objections to the scholastics in philosophical terms or to provide systematically argued alternatives. Cusanus was prepared to take on the scholastics on philosophical grounds and to establish new grounds and forms for speculation..' Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 225

<sup>49</sup> Vol. 6 of the *Lehrbuch* was published in 1800

More attention is due to Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, not so much as a true Aristotelian, but as an original writer who had educated himself by the methods of Aristotelian philosophy. He had primarily occupied himself with the study of mathematics and hence applied his mathematical concepts to metaphysical subjects, in particular theology. But his mathematical concepts are just as incomprehensible in themselves as is his metaphysical application of them, and for this reason Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy, insofar as it is original, might be termed a kind of mathematical mysticism. Apart from writings specifically devoted to mathematics and theology, his most important philosophical works are the following: *De docta ignorantia liber I* (On learned ignorance [three books]); *Apologia doctae ignorantiae liber I* (Defence of learned ignorance [one book]); *De coniecturis libri duo* (On speculation [two books]); *De sapientia libri III* (On wisdom [three books]).<sup>50</sup> The contents of the first of these are quite different from what one would expect from its title. A metaphysic is constructed on the idea of the absolute maximum, which is simultaneously absolute oneness, from which Nicholas ultimately seeks to explain also the positive dogmatics of religion and the mysteries of the Trinity and the Redemption. The *docta ignorantia* (learned ignorance) consists in the recognition that the absolute maximum or absolute oneness is unknowable *per se*, because all knowledge must be mediated through a number, yet this maximum is greater than any number. Hence the result of this recognition is a learned ignorance.<sup>51</sup> Nicholas does not here undertake to investigate how we attain to the idea of the maximum or absolute oneness; he merely assumes that it is presupposed by all men and is the end of their rational endeavour. Only an imperfect, symbolic knowledge of the maximum is possible; the symbol is drawn from mathematics. The maximum is absolute oneness and thus coincides with the minimum; it is absolutely necessary, eternal, and the eternal foundation of the world.<sup>52</sup> It passes first into the Trinity. The maximum as absolute Oneness is God; this oneness repeats itself or begets equality with itself (the divine Son), and the union of oneness with its equality constitutes the third person of the divinity (the Holy Spirit). *Ab unitate gignitur unitatis*

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<sup>50</sup> Besides the above-mentioned edition of the works of Nicholaus of Cusa (Basel 1565, 3 folio volumes), two other editions exist. The first was published in Germany, probably at Basel, and is lacking several of Nicholas' works. See Hamberger's *Nachrichten von den vornehmsten Schriftstellern*, vol. IV, P. 768. The second is more complete. As the dedicatory letter shows, it was prepared by Jacob Faber of Estaples. Its description reads: Haec accurata recognitio trium voluminum operum clarissimi P. Nicolai Cusae Card. ex officina Ascensiana recenter emissa est; cuius universalem indicem proxime sequens pagina monstrat. Vaenundantur cum caeteris eius operibus in aedibus Ascensianis; III Voll. fol. (This careful revision of three volumes of the works of the famous Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, was recently issued by the Ascensian Press, of which a complete catalogue appears on the next page. They are available together with the rest of his works from the Ascensian Publishing House; Three folio volumes), with no indication of the year and place of printing. At the end of *De mathematica perfectione* (On mathematical perfection) in volume 3 there is a note that the entire collection was printed at Paris in 1514. To this work in volume 3 is appended the *De concordantia catholica* (On Catholic concordance). This edition is the one I have before me.

<sup>51</sup> Nicol(aus) Cus(a), *De docta ignor(antia)*, Book 1, ch. 1–3, Vol. 1, fol. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* Book I, ch. 4–8.

*aequalitas; connexio* vero ab *unitate* procedit et ab *unitatis aequalitate*.<sup>53</sup> (*Equality of oneness* is begotten from *oneness*, but *union* proceeds from *oneness* and from *equality of oneness*.) The world is maximality contracted or made finite, and the diversity of things arises from the differing kinds and degrees of contraction of maximality.<sup>54</sup> However, in order to understand the maximum in its relation to the world, we must first, as Nicholas expresses it, have purged our understanding of all concepts of circles and spheres. It will then be found that it is not the most perfect body, like the sphere; nor a plane figure, like the circle or triangle; nor a straight line; but is raised above all of these, as it is above everything that can be comprehended by the senses, the imagination and the reason with material attributes. The maximum is the simplest and most abstract understanding; it contains all things and one; the line is at once triangle, circle and sphere; oneness is trinity and conversely; accident is substance; the body is mind; motion is rest etc. But unless we realise that the oneness of God must necessarily be a trinity as well, we have not yet completely purged our understanding of concepts of mathematical figures. Nicholas demonstrates this by an example borrowed from human understanding. The oneness of human understanding is nothing else than that which understands, that which is understandable, and the act of understanding. If we wish to ascend from that which understands to the maximum (that which understands infinitely), without adding that this is at once also the highest understandable and the highest act of understanding, we will not have a correct concept of the greatest and most perfect

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<sup>53</sup> Nicholas also expresses this as follows: *Quemadmodum generatio unitatis ab unitate est una unitatis repetitio; ita processio ab utroque est repetitionis illius unitatis, sive mavis dicere, unitatis et aequalitatis unitatis ipsius unitio*. Ibid. Book II, ch. 6. Vol. I fol. 4. (Just as generation of oneness is one repetition of oneness, so the procession from both is oneness of the repetition of this oneness—or, if you prefer the expression - is oneness of oneness and of the equality of this oneness. [Trans. The reference is incorrect, which is the reason I was at first unable to identify this quote: the source is *De docta ignorantia*, Book I, ch. 9])

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Book II, ch. 6. Vol. 1 fol. 16.

oneness.<sup>55</sup> Nicholas applies the concept of the trinity of the primal maximum to the world as well, which as an image of that maximum must also express a threeness. This threeness of the universe manifests itself (1) in the mere possibility thereof or the primal material, (2) in the form, and (3) in the world soul or world spirit, which inheres in all things as well as in the whole. The primal maximum also expresses the contracted maximum; creator and creation are one.<sup>56</sup> Nicholas believed (missing words in German text - I am drawing attention to the fact that the German sentence is incomplete: its construction does not ‘add up’. The intended meaning is something like ‘N. believed *one/he could find* in the contracted maximum...the principal kinds of worldly creatures...’ Trans.) in the contracted maximum and its relation to the divine the principal kinds of worldly creatures, which differ in their degree of perfection, as Ficino had assumed. He too placed man on the intermediate level, as a link between the lower, lifeless organic and animal world on the one hand and the world of the angels and the divine on the other. But in these premises he also found—as Ficino had not—the explanation of the mystery of the incarnation of god as man. God wished to raise his work, the essence of creation, to perfection, and this could only be done by himself becoming a creature (created thing). As this creature he chose man, because man occupies the middle position in the order of worldly beings and is therefore the bond of his connection with the whole. God, who exists omnipresent in all things, assumed physical

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Book I, ch. 10. Oportet philosophiam, ad *trinitatis* notitiam ascendere volentem, *circulos et sphaeras evomuisse*. Ostensum est in prioribus unicum simplicissimum maximum; et quod ipsum tale non fit nec perfectissima figura corporalis, ut est sphaera, aut superficialis, ut est circulus, aut rectilinealis, ut est triangulus, aut simplicis rectitudinis, ut est linea. Sed ipsum super omnia illa est. Itaque illa, quae aut per *sensum*, aut *imaginationem* aut *rationem* cum naturalibus appendiciis attinguntur, necessario *evomere* oportet, ut ad simplicissimam et abstractissimam intelligentiam perveniamus, ubi omnia sunt unum; ubi linea sit triangulus, circulus, et sphaera; ubi unitas sit trinitas, et e converso; ubi accidens sit substantia; ubi corpus sit spiritus; motus fit quies et caetera huiusmodi. Et tunc intelligitur, quando quodlibet in ipso uno intelligitur unum, et ipsum unum omnia, Et per consequens quodlibet in ipso omnia. Et *non recte evomuisti* spheram, circulum, et huiusmodi, si non intelligis, *ipsum unitatem maximam necessario esse trinam*. Maxima enim nequaquam recte intelligi poterit, si non intelligatur trina. Ut exemplis at hoc utamur convenientibus: Videmus *unitatem intellectus* non aliud esse, quam *Intelligens, Intelligibile et Intelligere*. Si igitur ab eo, quod est *Intelligens*, velis te ad *maximum* transferre et dicere, *maximum* esse *maxime Intelligens*, et non adicias, ipsum etiam esse *maxime Intelligibile et maxime Intelligere*; non recte de unitate maxima et perfectissima concipis. (Philosophy, desiring to ascend unto a knowledge of this Trinity, must leave behind circles and spheres. In the preceding I have shown the sole and very simple Maximum. And I have shown that the following are not this Maximum: the most perfect corporeal figure (viz., the sphere), the most perfect surface figure (viz., the triangle), the most perfect figure of simple straightness (viz., the line). Rather, the Maximum itself is beyond all these things. Consequently, we must leave behind the things which, together with their material associations, are attained through the senses, through the imagination, or through reason—so that we may arrive at the most simple and most abstract understanding, where all things are one, where a line is a triangle, a circle, and a sphere, where oneness is threeness (and conversely) where accident is substances, where body is mind, where motion is rest, and other such things. Now, there is understanding when (1) anything whatsoever in the One is understood to be the One, and the One (is understood to be) all things, and consequently, (2) anything whatsoever in the One (is understood to be) all things. And you have not rightly left behind the sphere, the circle, and the like, unless you understand that maximal Oneness is necessarily trine—since maximal Oneness cannot at all be rightly understood unless it is understood to be trine. To use examples suitable to the foregoing point: We see that oneness of understanding is not anything other than that which understands, that which is understandable, and the act of understanding. So suppose you want to transfer your reflection from that which understands to the Maximum and to say that the Maximum is, most greatly, that which understands; but suppose you do not add that the Maximum is also, most greatly, that which is understandable, together with being the greatest actual understanding. In that case, you do not rightly conceive of the greatest and most perfect Oneness.)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Book II, chh. 7–10, Vol. 1, fol. 17–20.



humanity and could do so without coming into contradiction with his own being; for considered absolutely, creator and creation are in any case one.<sup>57</sup>

Nicholas of Cusa's system is once again a pantheism which was at the same time intended as a theism, and thereby destroys itself. It betrays a bizarre mixture of mathematical and logical concepts. The divinity to Nicholas, as to Ficino, was really the logical concept of the highest order, conceived through the mathematical concept of the absolute (not relative) maximum, which precisely because it excluded all plurality therefore coincided with the concept of the absolute minimum, the absolutely simple and, insofar as it must include the highest being, absolute perfection; yet it was no more and no less than a purely logical concept, to which nothing objective corresponded. Hence the concern that Nicholas expresses that we may not understand his concept of the maximum in sufficiently pure and abstract terms; hence too his advice first to purge ourselves of all circles and spheres, that is, of all material attributes. He must surely have suspected that notwithstanding all his purges, the understanding yet cannot conceive the maximum bereft of material attributes as something real, for without them the concept dissolves into nothingness. But for Nicholas this suspicion did not really crystallise in a clear form. As long as he expresses his concept of God and his identity with the world in mathematical terms, his theology sounds even more pantheistic than Ficino's; in essence, his and Ficino's system are the same, as one can see from the relation in which he places God to the world—an equally theistical one. Thus the same errors underlie his system and Ficino's.

Nicholas' ideas as presented here also dominate the other works mentioned above. Some clarifications of them can be found in the *Apologia doctae ignorantiae discipuli ad discipulum* (Defence of learned ignorance by a student to a student), appended to Nicholas' *De docta ignorantia* (On learned ignorance).<sup>58</sup> It is addressed by a student of Nicholas to a fellow-student, against a work published by Wenck under the title *Ignota literatura* (Unknown learning), which argued with great passion against the nature of Nicholas' conceptions. We may regard it as a production of Nicholas himself, as the author merely relates to his fellow-student Nicholas' reaction to *Ignota literatura* and his judgements on the objections it contains. Possibly it is in fact Nicholas' work, in which case it is the form in which he chose to defend himself.

*De coniecturis*, in two books, is not, as one might expect, concerned with speculations or with probabilities and their bases, but contains a theory of the human cognitive faculty in general, considered from the viewpoint which Nicholas adopted, appropriate to his metaphysical system. Absolute truth is unattainable to man; *praecisio veritatis inattingibilis*, as Nicholas puts it; thus all human knowledge is merely probable, a speculation; and an

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Book III, ch. 2f. Vol. 1. fol. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Nic. Cus., *Opera* (Works), Vol. 1, p. 35.

investigation of the principle of speculation in the human mind is therefore an investigation of the cognitive faculty in general. Here too Nicholas' philosophical language is the same mathematical–mystic language as in *De docta ignorantia*. In my opinion his idea of the human cognitive faculty can be best grasped from the following passage, which I quote here in his own words: *Coniecturas a mente nostra, uti realis mundus a divina infinita ratione, prodire oportet. Dum enim humana mens, alta Dei similitudo, fecunditatem creatricis naturae ut potest participat, ex se ipsa, ut imagine omnipotentis formae, in realium entium similitudinem rationalia exerit. Coniecturalis itaque mundi humana mens forma existit, uti realis divina.— Ut autem mentem coniecturarum principium recipias, advertas oportet, quomodo ut primum omnium rerum atque nostrae mentis principium unitrinum ostensum est, ut multitudinis, inaequalitatis, atque divisionis rerum unum sit principium, a cuius unitate absoluta multitudo, ab aequalitate inaequalitas, et a connexione divisio effluat; ita mens nostra, quae non nisi intellectualem naturam creatricem concipit, se unitrinum facit principium rationalis suae fabricae. Sola enim ratio multitudinis, magnitudinis ac compositionis mensura est; ita ut ipsa sublata nihil horum subsistat. — Quapropter unitas mentis omnem in se complicat multitudinem; eiusque aequalitas omnem magnitudinem; sicut et connexio compositionem. Mens igitur unitrinum principium; primo ex vi complicativae unitatis multitudinem explicat; multitudo vero inaequalitatis atque magnitudinis generativa est. Quapropter in ipsa primordiali multitudine ut in primo exemplari magnitudines et perfectiones integritatum, et varias et inaequales, venatur; deinde ex utrisque ad compositionem progreditur. Est igitur mens nostra distinctivum, proportionativum, atque compositivum principium. — Rationalis fabricae naturale quoddam pullulans principium numerus est. Mente enim carentes, uti bruta, non numerant. Nec est aliud numerus, quam ratio explicata.*<sup>59</sup> (It must be the case that speculations originate from our minds, even as the real world originates from Infinite Divine Reason. For when, as best it can, the human mind [which is a lofty likeness of God] partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities, which are made in the likeness of real entities. Consequently, the human mind is the form of a speculated rational world, just as the Divine Mind is the Form of the real world. ...In order that you may recognise that the mind is the beginning of speculations, take note of the following: just as the First Beginning of all things, including our minds, is shown to be triune (so that of the multitude, the inequality, and the division of things there is one Beginning, from whose Absolute Oneness multitude flows forth, from whose Absolute Equality inequality flows forth, and from whose Absolute Union division flows forth), so our mind (which conceives only an intellectual nature to be creative) makes itself to be a triune beginning of its own rational products. For only reason is the measure of multitude, of magnitude, and of composition. Thus, if reason is removed, none of these will remain. ...Therefore, the mind's oneness enfolds within

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<sup>59</sup> Nic. Cus. *de coniect.* Book I, ch. 3.4, Works Vol. I, fol. 42

itself all multitude, and its equality enfolds all magnitude, even as its union enfolds all composition. Therefore, mind, which is a triune beginning, first of all unfolds multitude from the power of its enfolding-oneness. But multitude begets inequality and magnitude. Therefore, in and through the primal multitude, as in and through a first exemplar-multitude, the mind seeks the diverse and unequal magnitudes, or perfections, of each thing as a whole; and thereafter it progresses to a combining of both multitude and magnitude. Therefore, our mind is a distinguishing, a proportioning, and a combining beginning. ...Number is a certain natural, originated beginning that is of reason's making; for those creatures that lack a mind, e.g. brute animals, do not number. Nor is number anything other than reason unfolded.) — We see here the reason why Nicholas chose to describe his philosophical system in mathematical terms: he found in numbers and numerical relations the principles of the cognitive faculty itself. It would take up too much space here to detail the manner in which he developed these principles. In doing so, too, Nicholas often loses himself so deeply in his mathematical mysticism that his theory, at least to me, becomes quite incomprehensible. However, anyone who wishes to study Nicholas' system in its full internal detail and relations must regard *De coniecturis* as preparatory to it, even though Nicholas himself places it after his metaphysics and to some extent bases it on the latter.

*De sapientia*, a work in three books, is a commentary on *De coniecturis*. It is in dialogue form, an imitation of the similarly titled dialogue of Petrarch.<sup>60</sup> A Layman and an Orator (professor of rhetoric) meet in the Roman Forum; the former scoffs at scholastic learning, the latter defends it. The author makes a third person, describing the external setting of the dialogue. In the third book a fourth person makes his appearance, a renowned philosopher from outside Rome, present there for the Jubilee, whom the Orator meets by chance. Nicholas, speaking in the person of the Layman, presents in a popular form his theory of the numbers as the beginnings of knowledge. He begins with the observation that the people in the Roman Forum are counting money, weighing goods, measuring out

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<sup>60</sup> The opening of the dialogue is just like Petrarch's, except that the Layman and the Orator, as the author notes, go to a barber shop to continue their philosophical discussion undisturbed (Vol. 1, fol. 75). I would draw attention to the following passage of the dialogue: ORATOR. Quomodo ductus esse potes ad scientiam ignorantiae tuae, cum sis Idiota? IDIOTA. Non ex tuis, sed Dei libris. O. Qui sunt illi? I. Quos suo digito scripsit. O. Ubi reperiuntur? I. Ubique. O. Igitur et in hoc foro. I. Immo etiam dixi, quod sapientia clamat in plateis. O. Optarem audire quomodo? I. Si te absque curiosa inquisitione affectum conspicerem, magna tibi panderem. O. Potesne hoc brevi tempore efficere, ut qui(d) velis degustem? (ORATOR: Since you are a Layman, how are you able to be led to a knowledge of your ignorance? LAYMAN: Not from your books but from God's books. O.: Which books are they? L.: Those that He wrote with his finger. O.: Where are they found? L.: Everywhere. O.: Therefore, even in this Forum? L.: Yes, indeed! I have already said that wisdom proclaims itself in the streets. O.: I would like to hear how it does so. L.: If I saw that you were not motivated by idle curiosity, I would disclose to you important matters. O. Can you at this moment bring it about that I sense what you mean?) — We see that the Layman speaks as the scholar ought to speak, and the scholar as the Layman ought to. In Petrarch the converse is the case. In the second book or dialogue the Rhetorician goes looking for the Layman, finds him circa templum aeternitatis (near the Temple of Eternity), and the conversation resumes. In the third dialogue the Rhetorician meets the Philosopher, a stranger, on a bridge over the Tiber and takes him to the Layman, who is carving wooden spoons in the basement of a house. The Layman is of the opinion that if the stranger is a true philosopher he will not despise his occupation. The Philosopher replies that Plato too is said to have painted now and then.—Nicholas appends to each dialogue the time it took to complete. The first was written in one day in July 1465, the second in two days in early August, and the third and longest near the end of August.

commodities. How are they able to do this, he asks the Orator. And he proceeds to expound his philosophical system of numbers in its application to God, the world, and the soul. These dialogues demonstrate once again that the gift of setting out philosophical concepts in a comprehensible, popular manner was one utterly denied to Nicholas. Before long the Layman is speaking in such mathematically mystical terms that the Orator would be fully justified in throwing back at him the rebukes he himself suffered for his scholastic learning at the beginning of the dialogue. How much more appropriate and interesting is the Petrarchian dialogue that Nicholas is seeking to imitate! That Nicholas gives himself the role of the Layman is not so much due to contempt for scholastic learning, which Petrarch indeed shared, but to Nicholas' desire to present his philosophy as one of non-knowing, as merely the outcome of speculation, as he called it, and thus opposed to the supposititious knowledge of the rhetoricians and philosophers of his time; for the renowned foreign philosopher too is brought by the Orator to the Layman and has to submit to his teaching.

Nicholas deals in particular with the numbers as the most appropriate signs of the nature of objects in a treatise of which the compendium has been transcribed;<sup>61</sup> as he further expounds his theology in the treatises *De visione Dei* (On the vision of God), *De Dato Patris luminum* (On the gift of the Father of lights), *De quaerendo Deum* (On seeking God), *De venatione sapientiae* (On seeking for wisdom), and *De apice theoriae* (On the Summit of Contemplation).<sup>62</sup> These last treatises differ from the aforementioned in being even more thickly interwoven with Alexandrine mysticism; in them Nicholas adopts much of the mystical theological enthusiasm of Dionysius the Areopagite, one of his favourite authors (as he is of most philosophers of the Middle Ages as well as of Nicholas' own day), whom he follows almost without reserve. Nicholas further shows himself a fiery zealot on behalf of Christian Catholicism against the Muslims and the Bohemian Hussites. In a separate work he undertakes a comparison of Christianity with the religion of Mohammed,<sup>63</sup> proves the Koran a forgery, and defends Christianity against the reproaches of the Moorish philosophers, in some cases from passages of the Koran itself. The Bohemians or Hussites are the target of four Epistles. His remaining works are concerned with mathematics, astronomy and physics.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Vol. I, fol. 169.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. fol. 99, fol. 193, fol. 197, fol. 201, fol. 219.

<sup>63</sup> *Cribrationes Alchorani libb. III* (A Scrutiny of the Koran) (3 books)], Vol. I, fol. 126ff.

<sup>64</sup> Nic. Cus., *Epistolae contra Bohemos* (Epistles against the Bohemians), Works, Vol. III, fol. 5.

Cusanus is also named in the section of vol. 2.2, pages 703-856 in which Buhle discusses Bruno, which section Brown referred to<sup>65</sup> and Hegel used.<sup>66</sup> Buhle also named Bruno's *Cause, Principle and Unity* and *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, to which I have referred, on 768 and 769 respectively.

pp. 753-755

The first of these, *de Lampade combinatoria Lulliana* [On the lamp of combinations according to Lull] is dedicated to the Academic Senate of Wittenberg. As well as a eulogy of Raymond Lull and his art, through the study of which Nicolas of Cusa, Theophrastus Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and others had trained themselves as outstanding philosophers, the lengthy dedicatory epistle includes a series of acknowledgements to the Senate and all its members, listed individually by name, for the kindness with which B. had been received and favoured by them....

In his *Lehrbuch* vol. 6.1, Buhle set out the contents on p. 101 of Cusanus' three folio *Opera* published in Basel in 1565

p. 101

Works of Nicolas of Cusa, Basel, 1565 fol. Three volumes. The first volume contains: *De docta ignorantia* praecisionis veritatis inattingibilis ad Iulium Cardinalem libb. III cum *Apologia* [On learned ignorance of the unattainability of exact truth, [dedicated] to Cardinal Julius, in three books, with a Defence]; *de conjecturis*, sive omnem humanam veri positivam assertionem esse conjecturam, libb. II. [On surmises, or, that any positive human statement of the truth is a surmise]; *dialogorum* libri IV [Dialogues, in four books] (in the first two books, *de sapientia* [on wisdom]; in the third, *de mentis natura* [on the nature of mind]); *Compendium* sive directio speculandae veritatis [Compendium, or a guide to the search for truth]; *dialogus de possibilitate* sive materia universi [Dialogue on possibility, or the substance of the universe]; *de venatione sapientiae* [On the pursuit of truth]. Nicolas' other works are more concerned with theology, natural science, and mathematics.

#### 13.4.2 Some more writing on Cusanus that Hegel read

Of the nine sources for his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that Hegel cited in his Introduction in Volume I<sup>67</sup>, seven of them name and discuss Cusanus.

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<sup>65</sup> Brown in Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 62, Note 108

<sup>66</sup> Hegel wrote 'The fullest information about him is to be found in Buhle's history of philosophy', *Ibid.*, 62. Examples of the close attention Hegel paid to Buhle (notes by Brown): 61, Note 102 'For this quotation, see Buhle (*Lehrbuch* 6, pt. 1: 364-5; *Geschichte* 2: 859-60). Hegel's abridged version follows both Buhle's choice of words and his erroneous attribution (p. 858) of the passage to the autobiography...'; 61, Note 104 'Bruno was born in 1548. The following somewhat incomplete account of his life follows very closely that of Buhle (*Geschichte* 2, pt. 2: 704-12)...'; 69, Note 126, '...More likely Hegel has in mind a passage in Buhle (*Geschichte* 2, pt. 2:734)...'; 71, Note 129, 'These last five sentences are taken almost word for word from Buhle (*Geschichte* 2, pt. 2: 731-2)...', *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 99-101

The two that didn't are Thomas Stanley's, *Historia philosophiae vitas opiniones resque gestas et dicta philosophorum sectae cuiusuis complexa...* (Leipzig, 1711) (Latin translation from English) of which Hegel wrote

Its dominant viewpoint is that there are only ancient philosophies, and the era of philosophy was cut short by Christianity...this treatise only contains the ancient schools'<sup>68</sup>

and Dieterich Tiedemann's *Dialogorum Platonis argumenta*, expounded and illustrated (Zweibrücken, 1786) which is a study of the Platonic dialogues.

Cusanus is named in the Contents of both Tennemann's *Grundriss*<sup>69</sup> and *Geschichte*<sup>70</sup>. He is discussed by Brucker in his *Historia*<sup>71</sup>, by Tiedemann in his *Geist*<sup>72</sup>, by Ast in his *Grundriss*<sup>73</sup>, by Rixner in his *Handbuch*<sup>74</sup> and, as quoted in the previous section, by Buhle in his *Lehrbuch*<sup>75</sup> and *Geschichte*<sup>76</sup> which contains an extended discussion of Cusanus and is a history which Hegel used but *did not name* - in the Index of vol. 6 Cusanus was given a comprehensive entry, after that for Newton.

In his *Grundriss* Tennemann wrote

Among the first of those who bade adieu to the Scholastic creed was the *Cardinal Nicolas Cusanus*<sup>77</sup>; a man of rare sagacity and an able mathematician; who arranged and republished the Neoplatonic System, to which he was much inclined, in a very original manner, by the aid of his Mathematical knowledge. He ventured upon some philosophical explanations of the mystery of the Trinity not easy to be understood nor defended, but of which so much may be stated, that he presumed the Almighty to be Unity, and the Father of Equality, and of that which associates and unites Equality to Unity; (by which he dared to signify the Son and the Holy Ghost). According to him, it is impossible to know directly and immediately this Absolute Unity (the Divinity); because we can make approaches to the knowledge of Him only by the means of Number or Plurality. Consequently he allows us only the possession of very imperfect

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 99

<sup>69</sup> Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie für den akademischen Unterricht*, 3rd edn., Ed. Amadeus Wendt (Leipzig, 1820)

<sup>70</sup> Tennemann, *Geschichte*, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Jacob Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1742-4). (Hegel owned the 1756 edn.)

<sup>72</sup> Dieterich Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* 6 vols. (Marburg, 1791-7). (Hegel owned vols. i-iii)

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Ast, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Landshut, 1807)

<sup>74</sup> Thaddä Anselm Rixner, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen*, 3 vols. (Sulzbach, 1822-3)

<sup>75</sup> Buhle, *Lehrbuch*, op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Buhle, *Geschichte*, op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> Nicolaus Chryppfs of Kuss or Kusel (hence called Cusanus) in the archbishopric of Treves; born 1401, died 1464.

notions of God, and those by the aid of Mathematical symbols. Absurd and worse than absurd as many of these ideas are, and inconsistent as he is both in other particulars, and inasmuch as he appears to have fallen into the grievous error and sin of identifying, in his theory of the Universe, the Creator and the Created; - obscure as he also is in his manner of stating these reveries, they contain nevertheless<sup>78</sup>, several profound observations imperfectly expressed, respecting the faculties of the understanding for the attainment of knowledge. For instance, he observes, that the principles of knowledge possible to us are contained in our ideas of Number (*ratio explicata*) and their several relations; that absolute knowledge is unattainable to us (*praecisio veritatis inatingibilis*, which he styled *docta ignorantia*), and that all which is attainable to us is a probable knowledge (*conjectura*). With such opinions he expressed a sovereign contempt for the Dogmatism of the Schools.<sup>79</sup>

and in his *Geschichte* he wrote

Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa was born in 1401 in the village of Cuss in Trier (Treves), gained renown and worldwide recognition through his exceptional knowledge of languages and his insights into mathematics, and died in 1464 after attaining the dignity of Cardinal. He deserves mention here because he was not merely dissatisfied with scholastic philosophy but actually set up his own system of theology, a blend of the enthusiastic ideas of Dionysius the Areopagite with mathematical concepts. He had come to the realisation that scholastic theology was based on empty imaginings, not so much through a purposeful investigation of the limits of human knowledge as through his own inclination to mysticism, which he had gained from the writings of the Alexandrians. The idea of the *Absolute Maximum*, which is simultaneously *Absolute Oneness* and as such the *Absolute Minimum*, presented itself to his penetrating mind as the most worthy conception of God, which all men recognise and regard as the goal of their rational endeavour. This absolute oneness is not an object of understanding; for number is that through which all understanding is mediated, and the maximum is greater than any number. The recognition of the *unattainability* and *unknowability* of these ideas is *docta ignorantia*. Only an *imperfect symbolic understanding* of the maximum is possible. Mathematics supplies the *symbol* for this purpose. Yet this thinker could not hold fast to this thought, inasmuch as he imagined he could provide an understanding of God and of His relation to Himself and the world; for this he needed the mathematical construction, yet, again due to the inadequacy of the idea, called for complete abstraction from all mathematical concepts in order to

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<sup>78</sup> NICOLAI CUSANI Opera, Paris. 1514, 3 vols. fol.; Basil, 1565, 3 vols. fol. De Docta Ignorantia, tom. III. Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae lib. I. De Conjecturis libb. II. De Sapientia libb. III.

<sup>79</sup> Tennemann, *Grundriss*, op. cit., 235-236, in Arthur Johnson, Trans., *A Manual of the History of Philosophy*, Translated from the German of Tennemann, Oxford, D.A. Talboys, 1832, 266-267

attain to the understanding of this Being, after which nothing is left but the concept of an empty logical object.<sup>80</sup>

The *maximum* is absolutely necessary, unitary, and the eternal foundation of the world. It passes first into the *Trinity*. The maximum as absolute oneness is God. This oneness repeats itself and begets *equality with itself* (the divine Son); the union of *oneness* with *its equality*, which can also be thought of as an outcome of both, makes the third person of the divinity (the Holy Spirit).<sup>81</sup> The world is the maximum *contracted* or *made finite*. The *diversity of things* arises from the differing kinds and degrees of the *contraction* of the maximum. The maximum is the simplest and most abstract (absolute) understanding, wherein all opposites are abolished, *all* is *oneness* and *oneness* is *all*, to which we attain by the abstraction of all the conceptions of the senses, the imagination and the reason, even of mathematical concepts. (We must, in his coarse expression, *evomere* [spew out] all these conceptions.) That the oneness of God is a threeness we can see from human understanding: *that which understands*, *that which is understandable*, and *the act of understanding* are likewise one. The threeness of the maximum also comes to expression in the world as contracted maximum through *possibility* or *primal material*, the *form* and the *world soul* or *world spirit*, which is present in all things as well as in the whole. The *Creator* and the

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<sup>80</sup> *Nic. Cusanus de docta ignorantia*, 1. I. c.1–3.

<sup>81</sup> *Nic. Cusan.* ib. c. 4–8 l. II c. 6. Ab unitate gignitur unitatis aequalitas; connexio vero ab unitate procedit et ab unitatis aequalitate.—Quemadmodum generatio unitatis ab unitate est una unitatis repetitio; ita processio ab utroque est repetitionis illius unitatis, sive mavis dicere, unitatis et aequalitatis unitatis ipsius unitio. [Equality of oneness is begotten from oneness, but union proceeds from oneness and from equality of oneness.—Just as generation of oneness is one repetition of oneness, so the procession from both is oneness of the repetition of this oneness—or (if you prefer the expression) is oneness of oneness and of the equality of this oneness.]



*creation* are one.<sup>82</sup> Man occupies an intermediate level in the world, by which the world of the inanimate, the organic and the animal is united with the world of the angels and the divine. He found in this an explanation of the mystery of the incarnation of God as man. God wished to raise his work, the essence of creation, to perfection, which could only be done by *Himself becoming a created being*. He chose man for this purpose because man occupies the intermediate position in the order of beings and is thus the bond connecting all beings with the whole. So God, who is omnipresent in all things, assumed physical humanity, which he could do without contradicting his own nature, since the Creator and creation, considered absolutely, are one.<sup>83</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, or one of his followers, wrote an apologia (defence) of this treatise, which had been attacked by Wenck in a work entitled *Ignota literatura* [Unknown learning].

Nicholas of Cusa expounded his view of human understanding in another work entitled *de conjecturis* [on surmises], which also offers a clearer insight into his metaphysical system. However, rather than his system of metaphysics being based on his theory of understanding, as one would naturally expect, his theory of understanding depends on his metaphysical system, and hence the latter is more extensive than the theory warrants.—The human spirit, as the highest image of the divine, participates in the fruitfulness of the creative nature. As the real world arises from the infinite mind of God, so the ideal world springs from the human mind in

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<sup>82</sup> *Nic. Cusan. ib. l. c. 10.* Oportet philosophiam ad trinitatis notitiam ascendere volentem, circulos et sphaeras evomuisse. Ostensum est in prioribus unicum simplicissimum maximum; et quod ipsum tale non sit nec perfectissima figura corporalis, ut est sphaera, aut superficialis, ut est circulus, aut rectilinealis, ut est triangulus, aut simplicis rectitudinis, ut est linea. Sed ipsum super omnia illa est. Itaque illa, quae aut per sensum, aut imaginationem, aut rationem cum naturalibus appendiciis, attingantur, necessario evomere oportet, ut ad simplicissimam et abstractissimam intelligentiam perveniamus, ubi omnia sunt unum; ubi linea sit triangulus, circulus et sphaera; ubi unitas sit trinitas et e converso; ubi accidens sit substantia; ubi corpus sit spiritus, motus sit quies et cetera huiusmodi. Et tunc intelligitur, quando quodlibet in ipso uno intelligitur, unum, et ipsum unum omnia et per consequens quodlibet in ipso omnia. Et non recte evomuisti sphaeram, circum et huiusmodi, si non intelligis ipsam unitatem maximam necessario esse trinam. Maxima enim nequaquam recte intelligi poterit, si non intelligatur trina. Ut exemplis ad hoc utamur convenientibus: videmus unitatem intellectus non aliud esse, quam intelligens, intelligibile et intelligere. Si igitur ab eo, quod est intelligens, velis te ad maximum transferre et dicere, maximum esse maxime intelligens, et non adicias, ipsum etiam esse maxime intelligibile et maxime intelligere; non recte de unitate maxima et perfectissima concipis. I. II. c. 7–10. [Philosophy, desiring to ascend unto a knowledge of this Trinity, must leave behind circles and spheres. In the preceding I have shown the sole and very simple Maximum. And I have shown that the following are not this Maximum: the most perfect corporeal figure (viz., the sphere), the most perfect surface figure (viz., the triangle), the most perfect figure of simple straightness (viz., the line). Rather, the Maximum itself is beyond all these things. Consequently, we must leave behind the things which, together with their material associations, are attained through the senses, through the imagination, or through reason—so that we may arrive at the most simple and most abstract understanding, where all things are one, where a line is a triangle, a circle, and a sphere, where oneness is threeness (and conversely), where accident is substance, where body is mind, where motion is rest, and other such things. Now, there is understanding when (1) anything whatsoever in the One is understood to be the One, and the One [is understood to be] all things, and consequently, (2) anything whatsoever in the One [is understood to be] all things. And you have not rightly left behind the sphere, the circle, and the like, unless you understand that maximal Oneness is necessarily trine—since maximal Oneness cannot at all be rightly understood unless it is understood to be trine. To use examples suitable to the foregoing point: We see that oneness of understanding is not anything other than that which understands, that which is understandable, and the act of understanding. So suppose you want to transfer your reflection from that which understands to the Maximum and to say that the Maximum is, most greatly, that which understands; but suppose you do not add that the Maximum is also, most greatly, what which is understandable, together with being the greatest actual understanding. In that case, you do not rightly conceive of the greatest and most perfect Oneness.]

<sup>83</sup> *Nic. Cusanus ibid. l. III. c. s.*

conceptions which cannot attain to absolute truth (*praecisio veritatis inattingibilis*) and which hence can only approach it, are merely *surmises*. The *human mind is the form of the ideal* (conjecturalis) *world, the divine mind that of the real world*. As the triune principle is the foundation of all multitude, inequality and division, so that multitude arises from absolute oneness, inequality from absolute equality, and division from absolute union, so the human mind is the triune principle of its rational system and *the sole measure of multitude, of magnitude and of composition*, so that if it were abolished, none of these would continue to exist. The oneness of mind comprehends within itself all multitude, its equality all magnitude, its union all composition, and it is the principle through which difference, proportion and composition are possible. The natural principle of this system is *number, or reason unfolded*. Hence the beasts, lacking mind, do not number.<sup>84</sup> It will be seen that the philosophy of not-knowing (*docta ignorantia* or *scientia ignorantiae*), which elsewhere, particularly in the work *de sapientia*, he opposed to the prevailing scholastic wisdom, is nothing other than a philosophical numbering system, which leads into mysticism and only appears as the result of knowledge of the absolute. Cusanus did not possess the gift of setting forth this system with clarity, indeed its nature would probably have precluded this. However, amid his mystical conceptions and the play of his hair-splitting wit we find some

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<sup>84</sup> *Nic. Cusanus de conjecturis* I. I. c. 3.4. Coniecturas a mente nostra, uti realis mundus a divina infinita ratione prodire oportet. Dum enim humana mens, alta Dei similitudo, fecunditatem creatricis naturae, ut potest, participat, ex se ipsa, ut imagine omnipotentis formae, in realium entium similitudinem rationalia exerit. Coniecturalis itaque mundi humana mens forma existit, uti realis divina. — Ut autem mentem coniecturarum principium recipias, advertas oportet, quo modo ut primum omnium rerum atque nostrae mentis *principium unitrinum* ostensum est, ut multitudinis, inaequalitatis atque divisionis rerum unum sit principium, a cuius unitate absoluta multitudo, ab aequalitate inaequalitas et a connexione divisio effluit; ita mens nostra, quae non nisi intellectualem naturam creatricem concipit, *se unitrinum facit principium rationalis suas fabricas: sola enim ratio multitudinis, magnitudinis ac compositionis mensura est, ita ut, ipsa sublata, nihil horum subsistat*. — Quapropter unitas mentis omnem in se complicat multitudinem, eiusque aequalitas unitatis multitudinem explicat, multitudo vero inaequalitatis atque magnitudinis generativa est. Quapropter in ipsa primordiali multitudine ut in primo exemplari magnitudines et perfectiones integritatum, et varias et inaequales veratur; deinde ex utrisque ad compositionem progreditur. Est igitur mens nostra *distinctivum, proportionativum, atque compositivum principium*. — Rationalis fabricae *naturale quoddam pullulans principium numerus* est. Mente etiam carentes, ut bruta, non numerant. Nec est aliud numerus, quam *ratio explicata*. [It must be the case that surmises originate from our minds, even as the real world originates from Infinite Divine Reason. For when, as best it can, the human mind (which is a lofty likeness of God) partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities, which are made in the likeness of real entities. Consequently, the human mind is the form of a surmised rational world, just as the Divine Mind is the Form of the real world. ... In order that you may recognise that the mind is the beginning of surmises, take note of the following: just as the First Beginning of all things, including our minds, is shown to be triune (so that of the multitude, the inequality, and the division of things there is one Beginning, from whose Absolute Oneness multitude flows forth, from whose Absolute Equality inequality flows forth, and from whose Absolute Union division flows forth), so our mind (which conceives only an intellectual nature to be creative) *makes itself to be a triune beginning of its own rational products. For only reason is the measure of multitude, of magnitude, and of composition. Thus, if reason is removed, none of these will remain*. ... Therefore, the mind's oneness enfolds within itself all multitude, and its equality enfolds all magnitude, even as its union enfolds all composition. Therefore, mind, which is a triune beginning, first of all unfolds multitude from the power of its enfolding-oneness. But multitude begets inequality and magnitude. Therefore, in and through the primordial multitude, as in and through a first exemplar-multitude, the mind seeks the diverse and unequal magnitudes, or perfections, of each thing as a whole; and thereafter it progresses to a combining of both multitude and magnitude. Therefore, our mind is a *distinguishing, a proportioning, and a combining beginning*. ... *Number is a certain natural, originated beginning that is of reason's making; for those creatures that lack a mind, e.g. brute animals, do not number. Nor is number anything other than reason unfolded.*]

flashes of insight into the conditions of human understanding; in particular, his view of the principle of number, one-sided as it is, merits attention.<sup>85</sup>

### 13.5 What the academics refuse to recognise in Hegel they also refuse to recognise in Cusanus

Nicholas of Cusa is almost unanimously recognised by academics as a Neoplatonist - a 'Christian Neoplatonist' - yet the errors they make when discussing his philosophy reveal both their ignorance of and hostility to Neoplatonism. Beck *rejected* that Cusanus was a mystic, writing

If he were, one would not expect learned ignorance to be man's final stance before God; and one would expect something more ecstatic than the somewhat modest language of the *devotio moderna*.<sup>86</sup>

Beck's error is fundamental. Neoplatonism is a complex and subtle philosophy not a prescription for self-abandonment. Rather than advocating a mystical relinquishment of self, Cusanus argued for and developed on a philosophy of self-knowledge and self-realisation as the method for attaining God. This is the method of the *Enneads* - and of the more philosophically developed system of Hegel.

Man's creative (introspective) activity is an image of God's. Neoplatonism enabled its proponents to argue for the contradictoriness, dynamism, complexity and *poetry* of the world - for them, that of consciousness. The academics' refusal to countenance Hegel as a Neoplatonic mystic is premised on the same grounds Beck used with regard to Cusanus - he was a philosopher, his philosophy is not ecstatic.

Moffitt Watts wrote

Cusanus was one of the earliest thinkers to understand deeply and develop comprehensively the intellectual, spiritual, and cultural implications of the idea that the human mind is its own world...Cusanus' conception of mind represents an important step on the road to Cartesianism.<sup>87</sup>

Again, fundamental errors. More than a *millennium* before Cusanus lived, *Plotinus* founded the school of philosophy to which he subscribed and which *Plotinus* 'developed comprehensively' in his *Enneads*. The 'conception of mind (representing) an important step on the road to Cartesianism' was the achievement of *Plotinus*, not Cusanus, who advanced it.

When it comes to the recognition of the influence of Plato and Aristotle on subsequent philosophers, academics (those who repeatedly emphasise the importance of correct attribution to their students) don't have a problem, but when the name of *Plotinus* is put forward, who was *at least* the equal of Plato and Aristotle and who drew on both, the problems arise and persist in abundance.

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<sup>85</sup> Tennemann, *Geschichte*, op. cit., vol. 9 (1814), 133-138

<sup>86</sup> Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 58

<sup>87</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 225

Hopkins identified a number of themes in Cusanus that he thinks have a ‘peculiarly Modern ring’<sup>88</sup> to them including:

- a part is not known unless the whole is known (*De mente*)
- when the part is wholly known, then the whole is known and vice versa (*De mente*)
- man is the measure of all things (*De Beryllo*)
- Cusanus’ distinction between *ratio* (reason) and *intellectus* (understanding) - the principle of non-contradiction applies only at the level of *ratio* - that which distinguishes/analyses
- ‘Nicholas, under the influence of Leon Batista Alberti, emphasises that human knowledge is perspectival’
- the infinite is manifest through the finite
- since the divine mind is reflected in and through the human mind, all knowledge of God is metaphorical
- human minds are like living mirrors that mirror each other - Leibniz adopted this comparison
- Mind ‘performs all (its operations) in order to know itself’ (*De mente* 9)
- the earth moves (break with Ptolemaic theory)
- the earth for those on it *appears* to be at the centre of the universe as would another body for those standing on it
- the universe is as perfect as it can be

Having identified these points, Hopkins then refuses Cusanus recognition as the ‘father’ of modern philosophy, granting that accolade to a non-Neoplatonist who had ‘mentioned’ him (see 13.4). More importantly, every one of these points are Neoplatonic staples - they are all addressed in the *Enneads*.

*Plotinus* set out the mystical relationship between part and whole and the knowledge of both. While he *didn’t* write that ‘man is the measure of all things’, God, the measure of all that is, is within.<sup>89</sup> To attain God is to rise from the sensory world to reach our true self. Plotinus distinguished between the ‘two’ reasons - contemplative and discursive. His philosophy is perspectival. For him the infinite is manifest through the finite, the human ‘mind’ is the product of divine ‘mind’ (the second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle) and knowledge of God is metaphorical - the primary metaphor, resonant through Western history, being that of the sculptor chiselling his soul.

*Plotinus* employed the metaphor of mirroring, equivalent with that of ‘seeing’ (see 8.5). For him, ‘mind’ performs its operations in order to know itself (true knowledge progresses from the second to the first hypostasis). For Plotinus, all that is moves, driven by degrees of desire, most weak in the material realm, around the Good which, in its infinite power, is stationary - the divine light of

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<sup>88</sup> Hopkins, ‘Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?’, op. cit., 14-17. In the entire article, ‘Plotinus’ and ‘Neoplatonism’ occur once each.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Protagoras, then, rightly stated that man is the measure of things. Because man knows—by reference to the nature of his perceptual [cognition]—that perceptible objects exist for the sake of that cognition, he measures perceptible objects in order to be able to apprehend, perceptually, the glory of the Divine Intellect. Similarly, with regard to things intelligible when we refer them to intellectual cognition: at length, from that same consideration, man reflects upon the fact that the intellectual nature is immortal—[doing so] in order that the Divine Intellect, in its immortality, can manifest itself to him.’ Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* (‘On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses’), op. cit., 69, 825. ‘Nicholas’s appropriation of Protagoras’s doctrine of *homo mensura* differs widely from Protagoras’s own understanding of it; for, ultimately, according to Nicholas, God is the Measure of all things’ Hopkins’ note 18, *Ibid.*, 831

Copernicus was at the centre *long* before Cusanus.<sup>90</sup> The *appearance* of centrality depending on position can be traced, again, to the second hypostasis where there is no centre and all the Forms comprise a totality of unity-in-diversity.

It was *Plotinus* who, in arguing for the beauty and worth of the earth and everything on it (see 11.3.7, n.78) set the basis for the Neoplatonists' interest in the world, which Cusanus exemplified brilliantly in Book II of *De docta ignorantia* and which, later, Hegel exemplified in the second book of his *Encyclopaedia*.

On the universe being as perfect as it can be, Armstrong wrote

The material universe for Plotinus is a living, organic whole, the best possible image of the living unity-in-diversity of the World of Forms in Intellect. It is held together in every part by a universal sympathy and harmony, in which external evil and suffering take their place as necessary elements in the great pattern, the great dance of the universe...Matter then is responsible for the evil and imperfection of the material world; but that world is good and necessary, the best possible image of the world of spirit on the material level, where it is necessary that it should express itself for the completion of the whole. It has not the goodness of its archetype, but it has the goodness of the best possible image.<sup>91</sup>

Cassirer made the same basic errors as Beck, Moffitt Watts and Hopkins

Cusanus arrives at the essential principles of a new cosmology...the earth may no longer be considered something base...the new orientation in astronomy...a totally new intellectual orientation...<sup>92</sup>

Cusanus explored and brought out through clarification and metaphysical application what was already in Neoplatonic theory. In doing so he made very important contributions to its development *and* to later science. These contributions were crucial to Hegel's *furthest* development of Neoplatonism but they were, more than anything else, clarifications and metaphysical applications of what *Plotinus* had set out in his unsystematic presentation of his vast system in his *Enneads* and had been passed on by his successors.

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<sup>90</sup> 'Time in its ceaseless onward sliding produces parted interval; Eternity stands in identity, pre-eminent, vaster by unending power than Time with all the vastness of its seeming progress; Time is like a radial line running out apparently to infinity but dependent upon that, its centre, which is the pivot of all its movement; as it goes it tells of that centre, but *the centre itself is the unmoving principle of all the movement* (my italics).' Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.5.11

<sup>91</sup> Armstrong in Plotinus, *Enneads*, op. cit., vol. I, xxiv

<sup>92</sup> 'From these methodological premises Cusanus arrives at the essential principles of a new cosmology. ...the earth may no longer be considered something base or detestable within nature. Rather, it is a noble star...we can see clearly why, from Cusanus' viewpoint, the new orientation in astronomy that led to the supersession of the geocentric vision of the world was only the result and the expression of a totally new intellectual orientation. This intimate connection between the two was already visible in the formulation of his basic cosmological ideas in *De docta ignorantia*. It is useless to seek a *physical* central point for the world. Just as it has no sharply delineated geometric form but rather extends spatially into the indeterminate, so it also has no locally determined centre. Thus, if the question of its central point can be asked at all, it can no longer be answered by physics but by metaphysics.' Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, Trans., Mario Domandi, Barnes and Noble, New York, 1963, 27

The profound failure in social and intellectual responsibility by academics in refusing to recognise and to acknowledge the immense impact of *Plotinus* on Western culture is not accidental. It is driven by the requirements, as I have argued, of ideology and Western supremacism.

### 13.6 Parallels between Hegel and Cusanus

Below in point form and in no particular order are some of the parallels between Hegel and Cusanus I have identified, some of which I will address in this thesis:

- both were Neoplatonists who philosophised within a Proclean triadic framework
- both their enquiries tie philosophy to Christian faith
- both made the Trinity central
- both addressed the two ‘reasons’ (what Hegel referred to as *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, Cusanus referred to as *ratio* and *intellectus*)
- the philosophies of both are very complex
- God is the beginning and end of all things/God is a creative force
- God is not transcendent but immanent
- God is a logical concept
- how God can be known
- the mysticism of both is intellectual
- the systems of both were an attempt to address a perceived challenge to unity
- both used prose poetic devices: metaphor, etc.
- subject/object: the unity of knower/knowing/known, seer/seeing/seen
- Christ become man is the link between God and world
- what knowledge is/all knowledge is ‘speculative’
- for both, Being (God) is primary to being and non-being
- both sought to reconstruct the grounds of philosophy and theology and the relationship between them
- both thought their philosophies represented a break from previous philosophy
- for both, philosophy *is* theology
- both believed we are estranged from God
- self-knowledge is at the core of our experience
- God cannot be predicated
- the world originates in (divine) Mind
- our ‘minds’ are models of ‘the mind’ of God – what his ‘mind’ does is replicated by ours conceptually
- God is the greatest activity in the greatest stillness
- same concepts
  - absolute (as a noun)
  - being and nothing
  - coincidence (*coincidentia oppositorum*)
  - contraction
  - contradiction
  - emanation and return (from the One to the many and return)
  - enfolding/unfolding
  - finite/infinite
  - modes of apprehending
  - modes of being

- magnitude (maximum/minimum)
- rational ground
- *posse* (possibility)
- not other
- the hidden God
- cause and effect
- necessity and contingency
- eternity and time
- identity and difference
- quality and quantity
- Plotinus' sculptor is the metaphor that summarises their philosophies
- truth/Absolute truth
- their humanism
- Cusanus was far more philosophical than either Eckhart or Böhme
- 'science' for both
- their metaphysical understanding of the world
- the eye that sees its other etc.
- the importance of 'community' in their philosophies
- their views on language
- on sense experience
- the world is change
- Catholicism as a vehicle for mysticism

### 13.6.1 Both Hegel and Cusanus sought to reconstruct the grounds of philosophy and theology and the relationship between them

What Hopkins wrote of the bishop and cardinal Cusanus could equally be applied to Hegel

Cusa was primarily a metaphysician - a theologically oriented metaphysician, to be sure.<sup>93</sup>

- in his *Philosophy of Nature* (a text by him that is discreetly downplayed by the academics) Hegel rejected evolution, Newton's theory of colour, subscribed to the four elements and wrote that the sun is 'the Notion existing as a particular body'<sup>94</sup>.

Both believed we are estranged from God - a marker of Neoplatonism. Moffitt Watts maintains her blindness in this regard, too

Cusanus, striving to overcome the disjunctions that estrange man from God and creation, comes to see that the new problems of knowledge and faith are better expressed in less formal and systematic ways. Knowledge and faith evolve through the unique movement of each individual's interior mental and spiritual life.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations: volume two*, op. cit., 3

<sup>94</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 223

<sup>95</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 229

Hegel and Cusanus located the divine in human rationality and both were committed to creating what they thought of as a healing bond between Christian faith, theology, philosophy (metaphysics, ontology and epistemology) and community.

For both, as Jaspers wrote of Cusanus, ‘*speculative* (my italics) philosophical thinking and the Christian faith merge into one’<sup>96</sup> and, again what he wrote of Cusanus applies equally to Hegel

It never occurs to Cusanus that his philosophical ideas and his theological ideas might conflict. To him philosophy was not a rational substructure supporting the higher, the mystery. Reflection on the mystery of revelation was itself philosophy.<sup>97</sup>

Further, the theological is not separated from the physical - knowledge of the world leads to knowledge of God. Hegel illustrated this Neoplatonic precept throughout his *Philosophy of Nature*

Nature is the bride which Spirit weds.<sup>98</sup>

Nature is Spirit estranged from itself; in Nature, Spirit lets itself go, a Bacchic god unrestrained and unmindful of itself<sup>99</sup>

God is subjectivity, activity, infinite actuality, in which otherness has only a transient being<sup>100</sup>

The two forms under which the serial progression of nature is conceived are *evolution* and *emanation*. ...though (evolution) is of all theories the easiest to understand, it does not really explain anything at all.<sup>101</sup>

Each of these forms (emanation and evolution) taken separately is one-sided, but they exist together; the eternal divine process is a flowing in two opposite directions which meet and permeate each other in what is simply and solely *one*.<sup>102</sup>

The concluding sentence of the book is

The aim of these lectures has been...to see in Nature a free reflex of spirit; to know God, not in the contemplation of him as spirit, but in this his immediate existence.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 145

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 148-149

<sup>98</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 13

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 445



For both, 'science' is indistinguishable from the cognition of self and self-knowledge is the core of our religious experience. Both committed themselves to Neoplatonism in reaction, in turn, against scholasticism<sup>104</sup> and Enlightenment rationalism - Cusanus, in doing so, *overleapt* the Enlightenment.<sup>105</sup>

Both sought, on the basis of Neoplatonism, to develop a new method for doing philosophy and theology. To illustrate the *extent* of sameness in their identification of the 'problems' and their solution, I quote Moffitt Watts

Cusanus is led increasingly to believe that the central problems of theology and philosophy revolve around the dimensions of human nature and its individual and communal capacities and potentialities.<sup>106</sup>

Cusanus himself indicates in both the *De docta ignorantia* and the *De coniecturis* that he is in fact attempting to establish a new framework for philosophising and theologising...His basic critique is levelled against what he considers to be the vanity and the hollowness of the scholastic mode of logical discourse...Cusanus *was* prepared to take on the scholastics on philosophical grounds and to establish new grounds and forms for speculation.<sup>107</sup>

As Cusanus attempted 'to establish a new framework for philosophising and theologising' in the *Proclean* triad God/universe/Christ of his *De docta ignorantia* (to which I will soon return) and in his *De coniecturis*, Hegel aimed to do the same in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Proclean* triad of his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit* (see 11.3.7).

Where Cusanus' 'basic critique is levelled against what he considers to be the vanity and the hollowness of the scholastic mode of logical discourse', Hegel's basic critique was levelled against what he considered to be the vanity of the priests and the hollowness of Enlightenment Deism and 'subjective feeling'.

That Cusanus opposed scholasticism on the basis of the attainability of its goals - 'the rational analysis and understanding of the essences of created things and of God'<sup>108</sup> where Hegel opposed Enlightenment rationalism which held that God *cannot* be cognised *appears* to be a major

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<sup>104</sup> Hegel and Cusanus criticised scholasticism from the same perspective: Buhle wrote of Cusanus 'he attacked in particular the craze of the scholastics for debating any subject even if it utterly transcended the bounds of human reason.' Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, vol. 2, Johann Georg Rosenbusch, Göttingen, 1800, 80-81; Brown wrote in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* "Hegel contrasts the increase in dialectical hairsplitting on the part of the Scholastics by the use of Aristotelian logic, with 'the properly speculative element in Aristotle' that the Scholastics had forgotten." In Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, Note 162, 232

<sup>105</sup> 'Cusanus was not a precursor of the Enlightenment. He was interested...in speculative thinking', Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 248; 'Shallow rationalism loses sight of the intellect by raising discursive reason to the level of an absolute and by exalting sensory experience. It believes in progress, rejects speculative philosophy along with theology...Cusanus was the very opposite of all this.' *Ibid.*, 249

<sup>106</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 30

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 225

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

difference between the two, but it is not - the solution to this apparent dilemma lies in Neoplatonic theory, to which point I will also soon return.

Hodgson wrote that where Lessing and others had critiqued the authority of scripture as the basis for Christianity and Hume had undercut Enlightenment rationalism as a basis for Christianity, either a new philosophical theology had to be developed for the continued justification of Christianity or religion would have to be considered as a purely human expression. He added that Hegel set out to develop a speculative theology for Christianity. I disagree with the last sentence - in my view Hegel set out to develop a speculative theology (Neoplatonism) - *using* Christianity for its potential - both as metaphor and, in so doing, to further anchor Neoplatonism in the lived world.

Just as Magee wrote that Hegel's system

is an attempt to 're-enchant' the world, to re-invest nature with the experience of the numinous lost with the death of the mythical consciousness<sup>109</sup>

so Nietzsche's Übermensch and Weber's Berufsmensch were equally Neoplatonically inspired 'heroic' *individuals* of their time, shapers of their spiritual selves in the face of the dissolution of spiritual unity by the rising tide of late nineteenth century capitalist consumerism. Two readings of the individual as God that all-conquering *capitalism* has thoroughly made one - 'You are thoughtful, creative and beautiful - buy this!'

### 13.6.2. Hegel followed Cusanus in structuring his Neoplatonism on Proclus' triad of triads

#### 13.6.2.1 Further discussion of Proclus' triad

I have discussed Proclus' triad, particularly in relation to Hegel, from 11.3.3 to 11.3.8 inclusively, but some points warrant restatement. The triad Being, Life and Intelligence, within the second hypostasis Intellect or Intellectual-Principle, is suspended from the (first hypostasis, the) One which forms no part of it - Hegel, as discussed, was importantly and indicatively incorrect when he wrote of 'One' in this regard.<sup>110</sup> In procession outward, one Being becomes Life which becomes Intelligence (or the 'mixture' of one Being and Life) in the developmental reversion to the one Being.

There must be Being to create Life ('reality', the multiplicity of what is) and Life for there to be Intelligence (*nous*). Each element mirrors or implies the other two in its own triadic structure. The principles are not hypostases but aspects of a single reality predominating at a certain stage in the process of emanation and return.

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<sup>109</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 97

<sup>110</sup> Proclus was emphatic on this point and made it numerous times. See 7.2: 'For the one being does not abide purely in an hyparxis void of multitude and possessing the form of one. But *the one itself* is exempt from every addition. For by whatever you may add to it, you will diminish its supreme and ineffable union. Hence it is necessary to arrange *the one* prior to the one being, and to suspend the one being from that which is one alone. For if *the one* and the one being were the same, and it made no difference to say one and being (since if they differed, *the one* would again be changed from the one being,) if therefore *the one* differs in no respect from the one being, all things will be one, and there will not be multitude in beings, nor will it be possible to denominate things, lest there should be two things, the thing and the name. ...*the one* and the one being are not the same.' Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. XX

Proclus discussed this triad in Proposition 101 of his *Elements of Theology* and in Book III of *On the Theology of Plato*. He called these principles posterior to the One by different names - Being he also called 'bound' and 'father', life he also called 'infinite' and 'power' and he denominated Intelligence 'limit' or 'the mixed'. As Dodds wrote, this unity-in-distinction was used by the Christian Neoplatonists, including Cusanus, to explain the doctrine of the Trinity.

Proclus described the first triad bound, infinite and the mixed in Book III, Chapter XII of *On the Theology of Plato*

Such therefore, is the first triad of intelligibles, according to Socrates in the *Philebus*, viz. bound, infinite, and that which is mixed from these. And of these, bound indeed is a God proceeding to the intelligible summit, from the imparticipable and first God, measuring and defining all things, and giving subsistence to every paternal, connective, and undefiled genus of Gods. But infinite is the never-failing power of this God, unfolding into light all the generative orders, and all infinity, both that which is prior to essence, and that which is essential, and also that which proceeds as far as to the last matter. And that which is mixed, is the first and highest order of the Gods, comprehending all things occultly, deriving its completion indeed through the intelligible connective triad<sup>111</sup>

He described the second triad in Chapter XIII

(There is a second triad proceeding from this.) That which is first...in this second triad, may be called bound; that which is second in it, infinity; and that which is the third, life.

(The first triad proceeds) intelligibly and unically, (the second triad proceeds) vitally, and...according to the form of infinity (and the third triad proceeds according to the fact) that it is mixed<sup>112</sup>

and the third triad in Chapter XIV

As the first unity therefore, after the exempt cause of all things, unfolds into light intelligible being, and the second unity, intelligible life, thus also the third constitutes about itself, intelligible intellect, and fills it with divine union, constituting power as the medium between itself and being, through which it gives completion to this being, and converts it to itself. In this therefore, every intelligible multitude shines forth to the view. ...the first being is most similar to *the one*; the second, is parturient with multitude, and is the origin of separation; but the third, is now all-perfect, and unfolds into light in itself, intelligible multitude and form.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. XII

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Ch. XIII

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Ch. XIV

These three triads, ‘expressing an intrinsic and essential relation between successive levels of being’<sup>114</sup>, define the whole of the intelligible order for Proclus, and when dressed as the Christian Trinity, for Cusanus and Hegel. They comprise, for all three ‘the underlying principle of all triadic structures’.<sup>115</sup>

Proclus’ discussion of the triad of triads in Chapters XXIV-XXVI is also significant with regard to the organisation of the three books in both Cusanus’ *De docta ignorantia* and Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*

Of the first triad

*the father is the father of intellect, and that intellect is the intellect of the father* (my italics)...For deity is the father of the triad, and being is the intellect of this deity. ...The first triad therefore is called one being...The first triad...is...unfolded to us<sup>116</sup>

Of the second triad which derives its completion from parts (multiplicity), whereas the first triad is a wholeness *prior* to parts

the second triad proceeds, being characterised by the first intelligible power...For all things being united and without distinction in the first triad, distinction and separation shine forth in this triad. Being also and power are more divided from each other.<sup>117</sup>

And of the third triad

all intelligible multitude shines forth...a wholeness consisting of many parts.<sup>118</sup>

The first triad is a union, the second is a separation and the third is a combination of perspectival parts in unity, power and being. In the third triad, the one and being are multiplied through an infinite multitude of collective power which is the same as the all-perfect. This infinity is *both* of power and multitude.

I have referred to Hegel’s praise in the superlative for Proclus’ ‘more precise definition of the idea in its three forms,’<sup>119</sup> giving a real trinity, which Hegel noted is set out in his *Platonic Theology*, and his description of it (11.3.6).

### 13.6.2.2 Proclus and Cusanus

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<sup>114</sup> Christoph Helmig, Carlos Steel, ‘Proclus,’ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/proclus/>

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Ch. XXIV

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Ch. XXV

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Ch. XXVI

<sup>119</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 342

Moffitt Watts summarised the relations between Cusanus, Platonism and earlier Neoplatonism

The dialectics of unity and plurality, of the one and the many, of the not-other and otherness that (Cusanus) comes to use in his metaphysical discussions must have grown out of his reading of the *Parmenides* itself, as well as out of the works of the great Neoplatonic synthesiser, Proclus, and those of various twelfth century Platonists.<sup>120</sup>

Cusanus discussed Proclus' triad in *De venatione sapientiae* ('On the Pursuit of Wisdom'), noting the same developmental flow Hegel did - from the Creator-Intellect to diversity and that the first requirement for intelligibility is existence.

Proclus...called the cause of beings a second god, viz., the Creator-Intellect. ([This second god is] subsequent to the first God of gods, whom Proclus affirmed to be the singular Good, as I said.) Proclus believed this Creator-Intellect to be Jove, the king and ruler over all things. Proclus also posited celestial gods and mundane gods and various other likewise eternal gods, according as he expressed these matters extensively in his six-book work *The Theology of Plato*. Nevertheless, at the head of all [these other gods] he placed the God-of-gods, the universal Cause of all things. And so, those attributes which we ascribe to our good God—attributes which are different [from one another] only in conception and not in reality—Proclus is seen to assert of different gods, because of differing distinctions among the attributes. [For] he was moved by [the consideration that] nothing is intelligible unless it actually exists, since, necessarily, being is participated in by what is intelligible. And so, everything that is understood, he affirmed to [really] exist.<sup>121</sup>

### 13.6.2.3 Cusanus and Hegel overlaid the Christian Trinity on Proclus' triad, exploring its theological and philosophical potential

As with Hegel's philosophy, Cusanus' *equates* theology and philosophy. Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia* and Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* entail structured philosophical reflection on the Neoplatonic process in its *application* - they consider its working when applied to the world and to religious belief. Christian faith and its ideal practice is to further anchor in the world a philosophy already oriented to it.

Both are studies in Neoplatonic emanation and return applied to the Trinity. Where the former develops from *maximum absolutum* (Book I/God) to *maximum contractum* (Book II/the universe) to *maximum simul contractum et absolutum* (Book III/Christ, concluding with the church of the Spirit), the latter develops from maximum objectivity (*Science of Logic*/God) to the objectivity of finitude (*Philosophy of Nature*/Christ) to maximum objectivity in finite subjectivity (*Philosophy of Spirit*/God present and active in his community).

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<sup>120</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 22

<sup>121</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* ('On the Pursuit of Wisdom'), 1462-3, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations, Six Latin Texts Translated into English*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1998, 1278-1354, 8, 21

Where Cusanus explored the trinity of Oneness, Equality-of-Oneness and their Union in *De docta ignorantia*, he explored the philosophical potential of these relationships in different ways in his other treatises including God as ‘not-other’ in *De li non aliud* and God as ‘actualised possibility’ in *De possest*.

Hegel, following Cusanus, derived from his overlay of the Trinity across Proclus’ triad his logic (the ‘science’ of the Idea in and for itself), the philosophy of nature (the ‘science’ of the Idea in its otherness) and the philosophy of Spirit (the ‘science’ of the Idea come back to itself out of that otherness), his three Kingdoms (the kingdom of the Father, that of the Son [encompassing differentiation, estrangement and reconciliation whereby the world is created, falls into evil and is redeemed] and the kingdom of the Spirit [concerning the formation of the community of faith and its orientation to the perfection of all things in God]) and his three syllogisms of Universal (the logical Idea is the principle of universality), Particular (nature is the principle of particularity) and Individual (finite Spirit is the principle of singularity) - a triadic structure of further triadic and spiritual essences<sup>122</sup>. After §567-§570 on universality, particularity and individuality in his *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit*, Hegel wrote ‘These three syllogisms, constituting the one syllogism of the absolute self-mediation of spirit, are the revelation of that spirit whose life is set out as a cycle of concrete shapes in pictorial thought.’<sup>123</sup>

#### 13.6.2.4 How successful were both in bringing their treatment of the Trinity into sync with Proclus’ triad?

Just as Hegel had two ‘bites of the cherry’ with the Neoplatonic One, exploiting its philosophical and prose poetic potential *both* as the first hypostasis *and* as the one Being in the second, so he used Christ - unconvincingly - in his philosophy - first in his *Philosophy of Nature as Nature*,<sup>124</sup> then in his *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit* as, in death, the means of our reconciliation with (return to) God in the perspectival cultus of Spirit.

Cusanus made Christ the subject of the *third* book of *De docta ignorantia*, assigning the first book to God and the second to the created universe - reflecting the primary philosophical elements and flow of Proclus’ triad. While both *De docta ignorantia* and Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* conclude in a perspectival cultus and the conclusion of Cusanus’ treatise, though fundamentally Neoplatonic, is consistent with Christian belief, Hegel, on the other hand, drops all pretence and steps forward as the *philosopher* he was.

At the very point where Christ *should* have served a most important function in his *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit* (as he did in *De docta ignorantia*), he is nowhere to be seen. Christ has no part in Hegel’s concluding sections. What we see in §§575-577 in the *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit* is the

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<sup>122</sup> ‘the characteristic feature of the Notion and its determinations (is that they are) spiritual essences.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 685. That Hegel rejected formal. propositional argumentation from the ‘reason’ he advocated - that of *Vernunft* - can be seen in his position on the dialectical syllogism ‘Everything is a syllogism, a universal that through particularity is united with individuality; but it is certainly not a whole consisting of three propositions.’ Ibid., 669; ‘It is thus the Notion of the syllogism that declares the imperfection of the formal syllogism in which the middle term is fixedly held, not as unity of the extremes but as a formal, abstract determination qualitatively distinct from them.’ Ibid., 683

<sup>123</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 299-301

<sup>124</sup> Hegel wrote ‘Nature is the son of God, *but not as the Son, but as abiding in otherness*’ (my italics) followed immediately by Neoplatonic vitalism ‘in Nature, Spirit lets itself go, a Bacchic god unrestrained and unmindful of itself; in Nature, the unity of the Notion is concealed.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 14.

overt triad of Proclus<sup>125</sup> now elevated to Logic, Mind (which Hegel wrote in §576 ‘presupposes Nature and couples it with the Logical principle’<sup>126</sup>) and Idea.

Prior to his closing quotation from the *Metaphysics* regarding thought thinking itself *and what Aristotle thought God is*, Hegel’s closing sentence in his *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit* and to his *Encyclopaedia* is

The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.<sup>127</sup>

For Hegel, God is now ‘apprehended as spirit in his community’.<sup>128</sup>

### 13.6.3 Their philosophies are the world-valuing, intellectual mysticism of Neoplatonism

For Cusanus and Hegel, the ascent to God is above all an intellectual process. Moffitt Watts wrote

It is the *intellect*, the seat of learned ignorance, which enables man to transcend the limitations of discursive reasoning and to speculate more accurately concerning the nature of God...Cusanus argues...that man is able, through his intellect, to go beyond the oppositions that govern his senses and reason - at length in the *De docta ignorantia*.<sup>129</sup>

For both, this ‘way of the intellect’ is a necessary condition for approaching God *mystically*.

Both denied self-abandonment and asserted the centrality of knowledge. Cassirer wrote that in this denying, Cusanus went beyond the traditional conception of mysticism. In fact both the denying and the assertion are Neoplatonic. What both presupposed is a

self-movement of the mind as well as an original force in the mind itself that unfolds in a continuous process of thought.<sup>130</sup>

Just as Hopkins wrote that Cusanus is not reporting on mystical experiences but

is reflecting dialectically upon the relationship between God’s vision of man and man’s vision of God<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> §575 ‘It is this appearing which originally gives the motive of the further development. The first appearance is formed by the syllogism, which is based on the Logical system as starting-point, with Nature for the middle term which couples the Mind with it. The Logical principle turns to Nature and Nature to Mind.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 314

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 315

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 292

<sup>129</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 45

<sup>130</sup> Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 14

<sup>131</sup> Hopkins in *Nicholas of Cusa’s Dialectical Mysticism, Text, Translation and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, op. cit., v

so Hegel philosophised likewise on that same relationship between man and God, finite and infinite, seer and seen, knower and known, subject and object, quoting in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*<sup>132</sup> Eckhart's use of the same Neoplatonic trope that Cusanus used in *De visione Dei*.

The philosophies of both Hegel and Cusanus are fundamentally neither apophatic nor kataphatic, and where Cusanus' philosophy explores profound subtleties of coincidence<sup>133</sup>, Hegel's, a great development on this, brings out *fully* though still in idealist form the subtleties *and* the driving dynamism and power of the dialectical and creative negation of Plotinus' system.

As I have stated, both embodied the wonder of the Neoplatonist towards the world - Cusanus describing it as 'a noble star'<sup>134</sup>, Hegel describing its aspects in detail

vast tracts of sea break out into phosphorescent light...the whole surface of the sea, too, is partly an infinite shining, partly an immeasurable, immense sea of light which consists purely of points of life lacking any further organisation. ...each drop of water is a living globe of infusoria...Earth, like water, displays infinite, universal fecundity<sup>135</sup>

For them, from their Neoplatonic perspective, the world is not only a worthy but a *necessary* object of study, because *God* is its centre and all creation is the emanation from oneness to otherness.<sup>136</sup> *Plotinus* not Hegel objectified the inner mystical world. Cusanus and Hegel believed that for theology to be authentic, it must be based in experience. When Marx stood their epistemology on its feet by incorporating it in materialism, he made experience as *praxis* the basis of *his* epistemology.

#### 13.6.4 The God of Hegel and Cusanus

God is living, eternal reason. He is everywhere, nowhere

We maintain, and it is evident truth, that the Supreme is everywhere and yet nowhere; keeping this constantly in mind let us see how it bears on our present inquiry.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 347-348. See 8.5, Notes

<sup>133</sup> 'Cusa also later characterises the theological position that he first worked out in *On Learned Ignorance* as an alternative to both negative and affirmative methods...Negative and affirmative theology (Cusa believed) are limited in what they can say; neither attains the divine obscurity directly. ...A theology that penetrates the divine obscurity must press beyond even the *via negativa*. We find in (Dionysius') *The Mystical Theology*, especially, the kind of theological method that Cusa sees himself as pursuing - not disjunctive, neither affirmative nor negative, but coincident.' *Nicholas of Cusa, Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans., H. Lawrence Bond, Paulist Press, New York, 1997, 32-33; 'Cusa...employs coincidence of opposites in *On the Vision of God* to generate an iconic and a mystical theology. He proposes this as his alternative to the apophysis and silence of the *via negativa*, as well as to the less worthy descriptions of predication and analogy. ...Cusa offers the coincidence of opposites as the central and unifying logical model in order to depict an appropriate likeness between metaphors and the divine reality. ...coincident models...cause the mind the leap across to divine mystery.' *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>134</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II,12,166

<sup>135</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 297-298

<sup>136</sup> Beck wrote of Cusanus 'Nicholas teaches a hypostatic union of nature itself with God. The near-deification of the world brings with it a deification of the soul.' Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 60

<sup>137</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., VI.8.16



Every cause which is separate from its effects exists at once everywhere and nowhere.<sup>138</sup>

Hence, the world-machine will have its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere, so to speak; for God, who is everywhere and nowhere, is its circumference and centre.<sup>139</sup>

and immanent

the Cardinal's solution to the problem of how we can see the invisible God in this life was based on a version of Neoplatonic dialectical thinking not found in Augustine. ...From the perspective of the Cardinal's dialectical Neoplatonism, God's transcendent otherness is identical with his absolute immanence.<sup>140</sup>

Hegel's God is clearly an immanent *this-worldly* one, dependent on human recognition<sup>141</sup>

He is Simplicity

God is not the foundation of contradiction but is Simplicity, which is prior to every foundation.<sup>142</sup>

By descending from its eternal simplicity, the absolute being (the 'Father') attains for the first time its 'highest being' - which is not the remote and inaccessible deity of rationalism but a...relational being that comes down into history and makes itself manifest (the 'Son').<sup>143</sup>

Both echoed Plotinus' portrayal of the One as the greatest activity in the greatest stillness

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<sup>138</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., Prop. 98

<sup>139</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II,12,162

<sup>140</sup> Bernard McGinn, 'Seeing and Not Seeing - Nicholas of Cusa's *De visione Dei* in the History of Western Mysticism' in Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, op. cit., 26-53, 34, 43; '(Cusanus did not believe in a transcendent God he) stands in the Neoplatonist tradition of Christian thought which veers toward an immanentist pantheism. The world, rather than being something separate from God and created by him, is the "emanation" or "explication" or "contraction" of God: the world, in a certain sense, is God, or an aspect of God.' Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 27

<sup>141</sup> Redding, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion', op. cit., 14; 'To achieve the aim of coherence, all transcendence had to be exorcised from the world because Hegel recognised very early on that transcendence was a threat to community' Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 135; '(One of the lessons in the *Phenomenology* is) the inadequacy of the assumption that the truth of the world is located in some transcendent beyond.' Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 137

<sup>142</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De Deo abscondito* ('On the Hidden God'), 1444, in *A Miscellany of Nicholas of Cusa*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1994, 300-305, 10, 303

<sup>143</sup> Hodgson in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 20

God...is...not only maximal motion but also minimal motion (i.e., motion which is most at rest).<sup>144</sup>

The Scholastics rightly regarded this as the definition of God, namely, that God is the *actus purus*. God is pure activity<sup>145</sup>

Reason in and for itself is eternal and at rest, but it is likewise activity, and its actions are exclusively rational. It produces itself from within itself<sup>146</sup>

For Cusanus and Hegel, given their conflation of the hypostases *as well as* their structuring of their philosophies on Proclus' triad of triads, God creates *because* he thinks<sup>147</sup> and creation, as the by-product of his contemplation is crucial. God, himself, is Infinite Art

Therefore, the power of the Creative Art (this Art is the absolute and infinite Art, i.e., the Blessed God) works all things by His Spirit, or Will.<sup>148</sup>

Hegel put this most simply

God does not create the world once and for all, but is the eternal creator, the eternal act of self-revelation. This *actus* is what God is; this is God's concept, God's definition.<sup>149</sup>

### 13.6.5 Infinity and the finite

the more subtly the mind contemplates itself in and through the world unfolded from itself, the more abundantly fruitful it is made within itself, since its End is Infinite Reason. Only in Infinite Reason will the mind behold itself as it is<sup>150</sup>

Neoplatonism could be defined as the theory of the movement of consciousness from infinity to the finite and back again. The most important relationship of all to Neoplatonists, from Plotinus to Neoplatonism's consummate proponent Hegel, is that between the infinite and the finite.

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<sup>144</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De Possest* ('On Actualised-Possibility'), op. cit., 10, 919; 'The same (Pseudo-) Dionysius affirms of the same Beginning that it is finite and infinite, at rest and in motion—and that it is neither at rest nor in motion.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* ('On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses'), op. cit., 11, 796; (with regard to Cusanus' philosophy) 'in God the most tremendous motion is at the same time perfect rest.' Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 136

<sup>145</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 237

<sup>146</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 209. See 6.2

<sup>147</sup> As I have discussed previously (see 7ff.), for Plotinus, the One *neither* creates (it 'generates') *nor* thinks (because thinking requires an object and therefore a division into subject and object).

<sup>148</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* ('The Layman on Mind'), op. cit., 13, 147, 581; 'because the Creator-Intellect makes itself the goal of its own works in order for its glory to be manifested, it creates cognising substances that are capable of beholding its reality [*veritas*]. ...all that remains to be said is contained in an enfolded way.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* ('On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses'), op. cit., 4, 793; 'there is one Beginning, from whose Absolute Oneness multitude flows forth, from whose Absolute Equality inequality flows forth, and from whose Absolute Union division flows forth', Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., 1,1,6, 165

<sup>149</sup> Hegel in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 210

<sup>150</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., 1,1,5, 165

For Plotinus, the One (the Formless Form, the Father, the Simple, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Transcendence, the Unconditioned, the Fountain and Principle of Beauty) is the *principle* of form, being, number, order, measure and limit though none of those itself. It is beyond space and time and is the greatest in reality. It is infinite power.

Its light, the second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle is its most perfect possible image

Plotinus' World of Forms...represents (the One's) infinity as best it can in the plurality of Forms. Intellect is itself infinite in power and immeasurable, because it has no extension and there is no external standard by which it could be measured, but finite because it is a complete whole composed of an actually existing number (all that can possibly exist) of Forms, which are themselves definite, limited realities.<sup>151</sup>

Plotinus concluded an important section of the *Enneads* in which he proposed a contemplative method for 'dematerialising' the visible universe in order to 'see' that of the spiritual intelligible where all elements have no perceptible shape, magnitude, temporal or spatial difference (since each is all, and all, though distinct, are an infinite unity) with

But this, the [intelligible] All, is universal power, extending to infinity and powerful to infinity; and that god is so great that his parts have become infinite<sup>152</sup>

In sum, the second hypostasis is the realm of infinity *within which* finitude functions. It is there that the Forms or Ideas in their diversity have their most complex meaning, infinity being the dominant principle. The progress of one's soul is through that realm, from least rationally developed within it, beyond most rationally developed within it (the near unity of subject and object), to the desired first hypostasis, the One.

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<sup>151</sup> Armstrong in Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. I, xxi

<sup>152</sup> 'Let us then apprehend in our thought this visible universe, with each of its parts remaining what it is without confusion, gathering all of them together into one as far as we can, so that when any one part appears first, for instance the outside heavenly sphere, the imagination of the sun and, with it, the other heavenly bodies follows immediately, and the earth and sea and all the living creatures are seen, as they could in fact all be seen inside a transparent sphere. Let there be, then, in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it, either moving or standing still, or some things moving and others standing still. Keep this, and apprehend in your mind another, taking away the mass: take away also the places, and the mental picture of matter in yourself, and do not try to apprehend another sphere smaller in mass than the original one, but calling on the god who made that of which you have the mental picture, pray him to come. And may he come, bringing his own universe with him, with all the gods within him, he who is one and all, and each god is all the gods coming together into one; they are different in their powers, but by that one manifold power they are all one; or rather, the one god is all; for he does not fail if all become what he is; *they are all together and each one again apart in a position without separation* (my italics), possessing no perceptible shape - for if they did, one would be in one place and one in another, and each would no longer be all in himself...nor is each whole like a power cut up which is as large as the measure of its parts. But this, the [intelligible] All, is universal power, extending to infinity and powerful to infinity; and that god is so great that his parts have become infinite...' Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. V, V.8.9. I contend that Plotinus' recommendation, via a similar passage by Bergson in *Matter and Memory* is reflected in the Cubism of Picasso and Braque, particularly the so-called 'intellectual', 'Analytic' phase ('In short, try first to connect together the discontinuous objects of daily experience; then resolve the motionless continuity of their qualities into vibrations on the spot; finally fix your attention on these movements, by abstracting from the divisible space which underlies them and considering only their mobility (that undivided act which our consciousness becomes aware of in our own movements): You will thus obtain a vision of matter, fatiguing perhaps for your imagination, but pure, and freed from all that the exigencies of life compel you to add to it in external perception.') H.Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1896; trans. N. Paul, W. Palmer, New York, 1988, 208.

Proclus believed that all that exists consists of the Unlimited (*apeiria*, which corresponds to procession) and Limit (*peras*). He was in agreement with Plotinus that both complement each other and cannot function apart

At the heart of all existence Proclus sees the cooperation of two principles: Limit (*peras*) and the Unlimited (*apeiria*). ...For Proclus, Limit and the Unlimited represent a sort of basic ‘interface’ between the One and the lower levels. ...Limit is always tied to the Unlimited (*PT* III 8, 31.18-32.7)...All that exists needs to depend on these two primal principles: it needs to be limited while possessing an indefinite potency.<sup>153</sup>

Proclus greatly clarified the relationship in Neoplatonism between the infinite and the finite. Propositions 84-96 of his *Elements of Theology* address being, limit and infinitude. Prop. 89 states ‘All true Being is composed of limit and infinite’, Prop. 92 states ‘The whole multitude of infinite potencies is dependent upon one principle, the first Infinity, which is not potency in the sense that it is participated or exists in things which are potent, but is Potency-in-itself, not the potency of an individual but the cause of all that is’ and Prop. 95 states ‘The more unified potency is always more infinite than one which is passing into plurality’<sup>154</sup>

#### 13.6.5.1 ‘Understanding’, ‘reason’, finitude and infinity

I will now go over and expand on my initial discussion at 4. of the difference between Hegel’s *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, sourced in the *Enneads* as discursive analysis and the reason of contemplation, which Cusanus knew in turn as *ratio* and *intellectus*<sup>155</sup>.

The first pertains to the senses and excludes contradiction thereby dissolving relationships, merely distinguishing between things (e.g. the antithesis between infinity and finitude) and identifying only multiplicity. It draws inferences on the *basis* of non-contradiction

reason denies that there is an enfolding of opposites, and it affirms the unattainability of enfolded opposites...the root of all rational assertions is the following: viz., that a coincidence of opposites is not attainable.<sup>156</sup>

The latter functions on the basis of the *unity* of opposites, presupposing the self-movement of ‘mind’ unfolding in the process of its thinking.

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<sup>153</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 77-78

<sup>154</sup> ‘For if the first Infinity is nearest to the One (prop. 92), then of two potencies that which is more akin to the One is infinite in a greater degree than that which falls away from it; since a potency as it becomes manifold loses that likeness to the One which caused it while it abode therein to transcend the rest, concentrated in indivisibility. For even in things subject to division potencies are multiplied by co-ordination, enfeebled by partition.’ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Nicholas’s distinction between *ratio* (reason) and *intellectus* (understanding) —the latter being the higher mental faculty—has been thought to resemble, in relevant respects, Kant’s distinction between *Verstand* (understanding) and *Vernunft* (reason), so that for the most part nowadays the Germans translate Cusa’s word “*ratio*” by “*Verstand*” and his word “*intellectus*” by “*Vernunft*”...Nicholas claims that the principle of noncontradiction applies only at the level of *ratio*, not at the level of *intellectus*.’ Hopkins, ‘Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?’, op. cit., 15. Kant’s relationship with Neoplatonism is yet another, not only of philosophers, that has been suppressed in the name of patriarchal capitalist ideology and white, Western supremacism.

<sup>156</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* (‘On Speculations’), op. cit., II, 1, 76, 200

That unity of opposites is reflected even in the name of Cusanus' principle of 'learned ignorance' which principle *exemplifies* how those opposites 'coincide'.

Where contradiction is a *barrier* for the understanding, for Cusanus, true reason's grasp of contradiction and its necessity is the *means* by which the philosopher, in humility, makes their way to the wall of Paradise, their *intellectus* going beyond to the vision of God, while for Hegel it is the thoroughly explicated *engine* of a complete system, the pinnacle of which, again, is that same, ultimate, apprehension.

Of particular importance (on which I will soon develop), where the former reason works with bounded, defined concepts and judgements, the latter works with concepts which have their meaning in their inter-relationships – most importantly, that between infinity and the finite

through a movement of reason, which is much lower than the intellect, names are bestowed for distinguishing between things. But since reason cannot leap beyond contradictories: as regards the movement of reason, there is not a name to which another name is not opposed. Therefore, as regards the movement of reason: plurality or multiplicity is opposed to oneness.<sup>157</sup>

Where the act of understanding is that of finitude because it addresses objects as though they are distinct and self-sufficient, thereby taking them out of context and treating them abstractly, the higher 'reason' - *intellectus* or *Vernunft* - is speculative.

Where *intellectus* is stuck at the contradictions in conceptual relationships, *Vernunft*, a most important *further* development on this, explores those conceptual relationships in their dialectical development. It treats objects as 'determinate', showing the 'totality' of relations that conditioned them.

While Neoplatonism has undergone development - *clarification* as much as anything - it has *always* pursued the mystical merging of knower, knowing and known, of subject and its object, leading to infinite and absolute truth. Towards this,

the main point is to distinguish the genuine Notion of infinity from spurious infinity, the infinite of reason from the infinite of the understanding; yet the latter is the *finitised* infinite, and it will be found that in the very act of keeping the infinite pure and aloof from the finite, the infinite is only made finite.<sup>158</sup>

### 13.6.5.2 The fundamental notion in philosophy, conflation and the Proclean triad

For Cusanus and Hegel, the genuine infinite is the fundamental notion in philosophy, the most important principle of philosophical knowledge and the basis of all truth. Where Cusanus positioned the genuine infinite as the Maximum in the ultimate relationship of *coincidentia oppositorum* - that

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<sup>157</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,24,76, 40

<sup>158</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 137

between the two superlatives Maximum and Minimum (the former enfolding all else) - and explored that relationship

the Maximum is such that in it the Minimum is the Maximum, and thus the Maximum infinitely and in every respect transcends all opposition. From this principle there can be elicited about the Maximum as many negative truths as can be written or read; indeed, all humanly apprehensible theology is elicited from this very great principle. ...For whoever understands this [point] understands all things; he transcends all created understanding. For God, who is this Maximum, 'is not thing and is not any *other* thing; He is not *here* and is not *there*,' as the same Dionysius says regarding the divine names; for just as He is all things, so He is not any of all the things.<sup>159</sup>

Hegel developed that same principle to its fullest within Neoplatonism, addressing the transitional unity of the infinite and the finite, each functioning inseparably and dialectically within the other.<sup>160</sup> Magee wrote

The concept of the true infinite is extraordinarily important for Hegel's philosophy. In the Doctrine of Being of the Logic, it sets the stage for a major transition: to the concept of being-for-self, which Hegel describes as 'the infinite determinacy that contains distinction within itself as sublated' (EL #96 A). Ultimately, Hegel will characterise the Absolute (the whole of the real) as precisely such an infinite which contains the finite within itself as its internal self-differentiation. The true infinite is also important for understanding Hegel's treatment of God (the equivalent of the Absolute). Traditional theology, Hegel holds, is fundamentally mistaken in claiming that the infinite God and finite creation must be absolutely distinct for, again, this distinction would actually cancel God's infinity. Therefore, God must 'contain' the world as a moment of his being; the infinite must contain the finite.<sup>161</sup>

Where for Cusanus God is Absolute Maximum uncontracted, the universe, its image, a oneness-in-plurality, is the contracted maximum (comprised of a multiplicity of finite elements) and Christ is

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<sup>159</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,16,43, 25; 'Cusanus' theology...requires the convergence of the Absolute-Greatest with the Absolute-Smallest as the firm principle and the necessary vehicle of progressing knowledge.', Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 14

<sup>160</sup> 'it is this unity (of the finite and the infinite) alone which evokes the infinite in the finite and the finite in the infinite; it is, so to speak, the mainspring of the infinite progress.' Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 142; 'everything finite, instead of being stable and ultimate, is rather changeable and transient...the finite...is forced beyond its own immediate or natural being to turn suddenly into its opposite.', Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 118 (anathema to bourgeois ideologues and a fundamental reason why they refuse to give Plotinus the recognition he deserves are the words that follow 'All things, we say - that is, the finite world as such - are doomed; and in saying so, we have a vision of Dialectic as the universal and irresistible power before which nothing can stay, however secure and stable it may deem itself.');

'Indeed, even in the case of the infinite, it has the infinite on one side and finitude on the other. But the truth of the matter is that neither the finite nor the infinite standing over against it has any truth; rather both are merely transitional. To that extent this is a mystery for sensible representation and for the understanding, and both resist the rationality of the idea. ...life itself is a contradiction, and the way the understanding comprehends such distinctions is that the contradiction remains unresolved', Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 281-282

<sup>161</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 119; 'Traditional theology' means 'Christian theology'. Here is another fundamental difference between the Proclean triad and the Christian Trinity which ideologues gloss over.

the Absolute and contracted Maximum (both infinite and finite) - each, in turn, the subjects of the three books of *De docta ignorantia* - Hegel used the same focus on infinite (God), finite (nature) and the finite and infinite (Mind'/Spirit<sup>162</sup>) to address the same process and stages of development in his *Encyclopaedia*.

Where Cusanus distinguished between the infinity of God and that of the universe (which he described as *privatively* infinite because although it is unbounded by any physical reality external to itself it still *lacks* the negative infinity of God)<sup>163</sup>, Hegel addressed in his development of this a distinction between 'two' infinities in his notion of the 'genuine' and 'spurious' infinities - the former and its relationship with the finite cognised as for Cusanus on the basis of speculative reason, the latter the one-sided infinite of 'understanding'.<sup>164</sup>

In the Doctrine of Being of the Logic, Hegel argues that when we consider a finite something we are automatically led to think of its other, which limits it. (He calls this 'bad infinity' -) that which simply goes on and on and on; an unending series of distinct, finite terms which succeed one another without end. This is the infinity of the understanding...This infinity, Hegel argues, is fundamentally false. ...if the infinite is limited, it cannot truly be infinite! True or genuine infinity, therefore, cannot stand in opposition to the finite. This means that the only way that is left for the infinite to be genuinely infinite would be for it to *contain* the finite within itself...The understanding finds this outrageous, and declares it impossible. But for Hegel there is a simple, speculative solution: the infinite can retain its infinity if, in effect, it absorbs the finite as its internal moments or internal differentiation. The shift here is from seeing the infinite and finite as externally related (which is how the understanding sees things), to conceiving them as internally related. The true infinite is infinite, then, not because it goes on and on, but because it contains finitude within itself and is thus not limited, restricted, or defined by anything outside itself.<sup>165</sup>

To recapitulate, the second hypostasis Intellectual-Principle (Divine Mind, Divine Intellection) is the beginning of plurality or complexity and connotes the highest knowable by reason. It contains the Intellectual, Intelligible or Spiritual Universe - the totality of divine thoughts (Forms or Ideas).

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<sup>162</sup> 'The two first parts of the doctrine of Mind embrace the finite mind.' Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 22. The 'two first parts' in my copy being Mind Subjective and Mind Objective, the third being, of course, Absolute Mind.

<sup>163</sup> 'The notion of Absolute Infinity...(is) central to (Cusanus's) entire treatise (*De Visione Dei*)', Bernard McGinn, 'Seeing and Not Seeing - Nicholas of Cusa's *De visione Dei* in the History of Western Mysticism' in Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, op. cit., 26-54, 47; '(For Cusanus) the infinite is the essence of the finite.', Elizabeth Briant, 'How Can the Infinite be the Measure of the Finite?' *Ibid.*, 210-226, 216

<sup>164</sup> 'Much depends on rightly apprehending the notion of infinity, and not stopping short at the wrong infinity of endless progression. ...No doubt philosophy has also sometimes been set the task of finding an answer to the question, how the infinite comes to the resolution of issuing out of itself. This question, founded, as it is, upon the assumption of a rigid opposition between finite and infinite, may be answered by saying that the opposition is false, and that in point of fact the infinite eternally proceeds out of itself, and yet does not proceed out of itself. If we further say that the infinite is the not-finite, we have in point of fact virtually expressed the truth: for as the finite itself is the first negative, the not-finite is the negative of that negation, the negation which is identical with itself and thus at the same time a true affirmation.' Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 137-138

<sup>165</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 118-119

While infinite in power and without extension because immeasurable, as the image of the One and though a complete whole, it is comprised of an existing number (all that can exist) of definite, finite realities - the Forms.

This 'Totality of the Supreme Wisdom or "Mentation"'<sup>166</sup> is also *the totality of all finite 'minds'* or intelligences which are images of the Universal or Divine Mind (which, I will argue, becomes the cultus of Cusanus and Hegel). Thus Intellectual-Principle is not *only* a unity-in-diversity of Ideas but a complexity of the finite *within* the infinite, through which the soul rises in its development. Magee put the Neoplatonic position

Only the whole is true, and discovering the 'truth' of any finite object or idea consists in understanding its relation to the whole.<sup>167</sup>

Cusanus and Hegel developed their philosophies against the *background* of their conflation of the hypostases,<sup>168</sup> - no longer on the *basis* of the hypostatic process of emanation and return from and to the One but, using the Christian Trinity and myth, from and to the one Being or God of Proclus' inner triad of triads.

Of particular importance to this is their incorporation of the first hypostasis in the first element of Proclus' triad - Being - in the second hypostasis, because the One is the Absolute infinite.

Cusanus' words in *De docta ignorantia* (one of the most important of his treatises on the relationship between infinite and finite)

For the Infinite Form is received only finitely, so that every created thing is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god, so that it exists in the way in which this can best occur.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> In Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xxxiii

<sup>167</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 252

<sup>168</sup> I have discussed Cusanus' and Hegel's conflation of the three hypostases into the second and exemplified this, particularly with regard to Hegel (see 7.). They used 'One' in the sense of *both* first and second hypostases, wrote that the beginning is devoid of predication and used 'One', 'God', 'Being' and 'Mind' interchangeably. Exemplifying *his* conflation of the hypostases, Cusanus, when discussing 'the four onenesses', wrote 'since intelligence's oneness is unfolded in the soul, intelligence shines forth in the soul as in its own image. God is intelligence's light, because He is intelligence's Oneness; similarly, intelligence is the soul's light, because intelligence is the soul's oneness', Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., 7, 27

<sup>169</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II, 2, 104; 'every existing thing is a combination of the finite and the infinite: from the finite it has its being; from the infinite it has its power.', *De venatione sapientiae* ('On the Pursuit of Wisdom'), 1462-3, in Nicholas of Cusa: *Metaphysical Speculations*, Six Latin Texts Translated into English, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1998, 1278-1354, 21, 59; Hopkins wrote "when Nicholas refers to every created thing as 'a finite infinity, as it were,' he does not mean that Infinity itself is contracted, or delimited. The words 'as it were' signal a *modus loquendi*: every finite creature 'resembles' the Infinite God in that it is as perfect as it can be.", Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysics of Contraction*, op. cit., 102. As I have indicated, quoting Armstrong at 13.5, this is the position of Plotinus. "In the Cusan infinite, each part is also infinite. God is 'all in all.'", Weeks, *German Mysticism - From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, 107



echo the generation from the first into the second hypostasis whereby *Formless* Form is received only finitely, so that every created thing (Form/Idea/intelligence) is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god, existing in the way in which this can best occur.<sup>170</sup>

*This* is the Intellectual and Spiritual Universe, the *philosophical* not Christian realm on which Cusanus and Hegel philosophised. I strongly disagree with Magee's assertion that

Hegel's concept of the 'true infinite'...would seem to owe something to Spinoza's theology<sup>171</sup>

and that Hegel had 'solved the dilemma'<sup>172</sup>. The nature of the 'true infinite' and the speculative (mystical) relationship between infinite and finite was established in the *Enneads* and clarified and developed particularly by Proclus and then Cusanus on the basis of the conflation of the hypostases into the second, within which was suspended Proclus' triad of Being/Life/Intelligence. Cusanus wrote

Your Concept is most simple eternity itself. Now, *posterior* to most simple eternity no thing can possibly be made. Therefore, infinite duration, which is eternity itself, encompasses all succession. Therefore, everything which appears to us in a succession is not at all posterior to Your Concept, which is eternity. For Your one Concept, which is also Your Word, enfolds each and every thing.<sup>173</sup>

Prior to Marx's incorporation of Neoplatonic dialectic in materialist epistemology, Hegel developed that relationship, as well as other aspects of Neoplatonism, to their highest point. Because of his debt to Cusanus, by no means only with regard to the theorising of infinity and finitude on the basis of a conflation of the Neoplatonic hypostases and of Proclus' triad specifically, Hegel made sure he

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<sup>170</sup> 'Cusanus gives expression to this important difference between finite and Infinite...Just as any creature is not other than itself so it is not other than the divine Not-Other. The divine Not-Other both is and is not every finite other.', Miller, 'Cusanus, Nicolaus [Nicolas of Cusa], op. cit.

<sup>171</sup> Magee immediately followed these words with the Neoplatonic giveaway 'For both Hegel and Spinoza, the true is the whole.' (Both Spinoza and Hegel conceived of God) as infinite, and understand this to mean that there are no beings existing outside God that would limit him. Thus, the finite must be contained within the infinite. This is Hegel's concept of the 'true infinite', and it would seem to owe something to Spinoza's theology. For both Hegel and Spinoza, the true is the whole.' Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 225.

<sup>172</sup> 'Speculation allows Hegel to solve many philosophical problems which remain insoluble for the understanding. For example, the understanding insists that the universe must be either finite or infinite, but cannot be both. However, as Kant demonstrated, there seem to be equally good arguments for either position. Hegel *solves the dilemma* (my italics) by asserting that the standard conception of infinity (as that which goes on forever) is false. Since the (false) infinite *excludes* the finite, it is actually limited by what it excludes, and thus cannot be infinite (or unlimited). The true infinite, for Hegel, has nothing 'outside' itself which could limit it, thus it must 'contain' or be composed by all that which is finite. This argument is impossible for the understanding to grasp, because it is incapable of adopting a critical standpoint about its most fundamental presuppositions. It is really for precisely this reason that Hegel regards the understanding as unphilosophical.', Ibid., 252-253. Cusanus philosophised on the same relationship between infinite and finite with regard to the universe in Book II of *De docta ignorantia*.

<sup>173</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 10, 43. 'Infinity exists and enfolds all things; and no thing can exist outside it. Hence, nothing is other than it or different from it. Therefore, Infinity is all things in such way that it is none of them.' Ibid., 13, 56; 'the Infinite is not contractible to equality with the finite, although it is not unequal to anything. For how could inequality befit the Infinite, which *more* and *less* do not befit? Therefore, the Infinite is not greater than or lesser than or unequal to any given thing. Yet, it is not on this account equal to the finite, because it is infinitely above everything finite. And because it is infinitely above everything finite—i.e., because it exists per se—the Infinite is altogether absolute and uncontractible.' Ibid., 13, 57

never even named him, although Cusanus *is* named and discussed to varying degrees including detailed in seven of the nine histories of philosophy (the other two dealing only with ancient philosophy) Hegel cited as sources for his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (see 13.4.1, 13.4.2).

### 13.6.5.3 Measure, circles, spheres and God

Brient asked

In what sense is the infinite the *measure* for the finite?<sup>174</sup>

Hegel answered

Measure, like the other stages of Being, may serve as a definition of the Absolute: God, it has been said, is the Measure of all things.<sup>175</sup>

Cusanus used three mathematical metaphors to explain the possibility of this proposition. The first is the number series - that we can recognise the comparative *as* comparative implies an awareness of the superlative. The second is the division of the continuum and of a finite line in particular. He used this to indicate that the infinite, as its *essence*, is the measure of the finite.<sup>176</sup> The third metaphor is of an *n*-sided polygon inscribed in a circle. The increase of its sides brings it ever closer to coincidence with the circumference of the circle, thus illustrating that the infinite is the measure of the finite as its goal and perfection.<sup>177</sup> In all three, mathematical infinity is a metaphor for God's infinity. For Cusanus, mathematics *symbolises* the creative power of the divine.

Cusanus further explored the metaphorical potential of an infinite line arguing that it is a triangle and, drawing on two concepts that are Neoplatonic markers, that the maximum triangle is a circle and a sphere.<sup>178</sup> He likened the infinite circle to oneness.<sup>179</sup>

In *De visione Dei* he wrote

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<sup>174</sup> Brient, 'How Can the Infinite be the Measure of the Finite?', op. cit., 210

<sup>175</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 157

<sup>176</sup> 'an infinite line is the essence of a finite line. Similarly, the unqualifiedly Maximum is the Essence of all things.' Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I, 17, 47

<sup>177</sup> 'Cusanus uses each of these mathematical metaphors to illustrate general metaphysical principles that pertain to the relationship between the infinite and the finite, namely, between God and creation. He uses the example of the number series to figure the unfolding of creation in all its multiplicity from divine unity. His reflections on the nature of the continuum, in turn, serve to articulate his conception of the immanence of the infinite in the finite and illustrate important aspects of his metaphysics of contraction. Finally, the the maximum polygon, which is resolved into identity with the circle, figures the link between the infinite and the finite - the locus of enfolding and unfolding as a limit-concept, one in fact that posits the coincidence of the privative infinity of the universe with the absolute infinity of God.', Brient, 'How Can the Infinite be the Measure of the Finite?', op. cit., 224-225

<sup>178</sup> *De docta ignorantia*, Bk I, Chapter 15, 'The maximum triangle is a circle and a sphere.'

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk I, Chapter 21, 'The likening of an infinite circle to oneness.'

the angle of Your eye, O God, is not of a certain magnitude but is infinite. Moreover, the angle of Your eye is a circle—or better, an infinite sphere—because Your sight is an eye of sphericity and of infinite perfection.<sup>180</sup>

When praising this world as a copy of the intelligible, Plotinus asked

And what globe more minutely perfect than this, or more admirably ordered in its course, could have been conceived in the image of the self-centred circling of the World of Intelligibles? And for a sun figuring the Divine sphere, if it is to be more splendid than the sun visible to us, what a sun it must be!<sup>181</sup>

All-Soul and Intellectual-Principle (the Divine Sphere) form concentric circles around the One - the third hypostasis around the second, both around the first. This Divine Triad, a unity, is the Divinity itself which is also named, as a totality, the Divine Circle.

Prop. 33 In *The Elements of Theology* states

*All that proceeds from any principle and reverts upon it has a cyclic activity.*

The explanation is

For if it reverts upon that principle whence it proceeds (prop. 31), it links its end to its beginning, and the movement is one and continuous, originating from the unmoved and to the unmoved again returning. Thus all things proceed in a circuit, from their causes to their causes again. *There are greater circuits and lesser, in that some revert upon their immediate priors, others upon the superior causes, even to the beginnings of all things.* (my italics) For out of the beginning all things are, and towards it all revert.<sup>182</sup>

Prop. 146 states

*In any divine procession the end is assimilated to the beginning, maintaining by its reversion thither a circle without beginning and without end.*<sup>183</sup>

In *On the Theology of Plato* Proclus wrote

And intellect is that which converts itself to the principles, conjoins the end with the beginning, and produces one intelligible circle.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 8, 32

<sup>181</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., II.9.4

<sup>182</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., Prop. 33

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, Prop. 146

<sup>184</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. III, Ch. IX

Cusanus wrote in Book I of *De docta ignorantia*

Others who have attempted to befigure infinite oneness have spoken of God as an infinite circle. But those who considered the most actual existence of God affirmed that He is an infinite sphere, as it were. I will show that all of these [men] have rightly conceived of the Maximum and that the opinion of them all is a single opinion. ...the infinite line, which is a triangle, is also a circle. And [this is] what was proposed [for proof].

Moreover, that an infinite line is a sphere becomes very obvious in the following way: The line AB is the circumference of the maximum circle—indeed, it *is* the [maximum] circle, as was just proved. And, in the triangle ABC, AB was brought from B to C, as was previously stated. But BC is an infinite line, as was also just proved. Hence, AB [which is the maximum circle] reached C by *a complete coming around upon itself*. (my italics) And since this is the case, it follows of necessity that from such *a coming around of a circle upon itself* (my italics) a sphere is originated. And given that we previously proved that ABC is a circle, a triangle, and a line, we have now proved that it is also a sphere. And these are [the results] we set out to find.<sup>185</sup>

In his *Science of Logic* Hegel wrote

The essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first.

We see therefore that, on the other hand, it is equally necessary to consider as *result* that into which the movement returns as into its *ground*. ...the line of the scientific advance becomes a *circle*.<sup>186</sup>

The image of the progress to infinity is the *straight line*, at the two limits of which alone the infinite is, and always only is where the line - which is determinate being - is not, and which goes *out beyond* to this negation of its determinate being, that is, to the indeterminate; the image of true infinity, *bent back into itself, becomes the circle*, (my italics) the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without *beginning* and *end*.<sup>187</sup>

Finally, on the second-last page of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel not only echoes Plotinus, Proclus and Cusanus, writing

By virtue of the nature of the method just indicated, the science exhibits itself as a *circle* returning upon itself, *the end being wound back into the beginning*, (my italics) the simple ground, by the mediation; this circle is

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<sup>185</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I, 12, 34; I, 15, 40-41

<sup>186</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 71-72

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

moreover a *circle of circles*, for each individual member as ensouled by the method is reflected into itself, so that in returning into the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member.<sup>188</sup>

in the next sentence, as I argued at 13.6.2.4 of §575 in the *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit*, he again refers to the ‘links of the chain’ of the Proclean triad and his *Encyclopaedia*, in developmental order - logic, nature and spirit.<sup>189</sup>

Links of this chain are the individual sciences of logic, nature and spirit. each of which has an *antecedent* and a *successor* - or, expressed more accurately, *has* only the *antecedent* and *indicates* its *successor* in its conclusion.<sup>190</sup>

#### 13.6.5.4 The use to an absolute idealist of the historical Christ and of Christianity

For Cusanus and Hegel, Christ signifies the necessary connection of the infinite and finite

Every happy spirit sees the invisible God and is united, in You, Jesus, to the unapproachable and immortal God. And thus, in You, the finite is united to the Infinite and Ununiteable<sup>191</sup>

But where Cusanus discussed Christ’s incarnation and death in a manner consistent with Christian belief

Blessed is God, who by His own son has redeemed us from the darkness of such great ignorance in order that we may discern to be false and deceptive all the things which are somehow done by a mediator other than Christ, who is truth, and by a faith other than [faith] in Jesus.<sup>192</sup>

Hegel emphasised God’s *requirement* that Christ be made incarnate and the worldly *physicality* of Christ’s experience as a subject

for God to be spirit he must appear as man, as an individual subject - not as ideal humanity, but as actual progress into the temporal and complete externality of immediate and natural existence. ...as an actual individual subject, he enters difference as opposed to both unity and substance as such; in this ordinary spatial and temporal existence he experiences the feeling,

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 842

<sup>189</sup> §575 ‘It is this appearing which originally gives the motive of the further development. The first appearance is formed by the syllogism, which is based on the Logical system as starting-point, with Nature for the middle term which couples the Mind with it. The Logical principle turns to Nature and Nature to Mind.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 314

<sup>190</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 842

<sup>191</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* (‘The Vision of God’), op. cit., 21, 94

<sup>192</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’), op. cit., III, 11, 253

consciousness, and grief of disunion in order to come, through this opposition and likewise its dissolution, to infinite reconciliation.<sup>193</sup>

both for the purpose of *illustrating* through God's appearance in history Neoplatonic division into subject and object and the process of the development between them

Because the concept of religion entails the *unity* of subjective consciousness and its object, namely God as absolute essence or spirit, when the concept of religion becomes objective to itself, this unity of finite and infinite consciousness comes fully to expression. For this reason, Christianity is the "consummate" or "absolute" religion'<sup>194</sup>

and, again through the profound historical experience of god-as-man, for the purpose of *objectifying* his Neoplatonism, of *anchoring* it in the lived world and of making it a lesson for *everyman*.

In his *Philosophy of Mind* he wrote

even (the Greeks) did not attain, either in philosophy or in religion, to a knowledge of the absolute infinitude of mind...It was Christianity, by its doctrine of the Incarnation and of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers, that first gave to human consciousness a perfectly free relationship to the infinite and thereby made possible the comprehensive knowledge of mind in its absolute infinitude.<sup>195</sup>

Hegel knew this to be incorrect. Not only was he familiar with Plotinus and the Neoplatonists after him, he followed Cusanus in bringing the first hypostasis into the second, making it the first element in his Proclean, *not* Christian triad. Now the One was also one Being - enabling, for Hegel, *complete* knowledge of the entire process of emanation and return, including 'knowledge of the absolute infinitude of mind' - *sans* Christianity.

Further, as Chlup wrote of the 'late' Neoplatonists' interest in religion

If in the sixth to fifth centuries BC philosophy emerged out of religion as an independent cultural phenomenon, in the fifth to sixth centuries AD she in turn received religion into her womb.<sup>196</sup>

He expanded

though late Neoplatonists do not see the boundaries between levels of reality as penetrable from below upward, they do see them as permeable in the opposite direction. In other words, while we certainly cannot climb upward, higher beings may easily send their irradiation downward. If we cannot

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<sup>193</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, op. cit., 435

<sup>194</sup> Editor in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 163

<sup>195</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 2

<sup>196</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 32

ascend to them directly, we may at least open up and tune in to the beneficent power that they constantly keep on sending down towards us. ... Eastern Neoplatonists strive to achieve a balance between...seeing our dependence on the free will of higher beings as no less important than philosophical practice. ...As a result, eastern Neoplatonists take great interest in religion.<sup>197</sup>

Where the Catholic cardinal freely acknowledged his debt

Hence, as Proclus reports, the Platonists—viewing this infinite and boundless possibility-of-being-made—asserted that all things derive from the finite, or determinate, and the infinite: the Platonists related the finite to [a thing's] determinate essence, and they related the infinite to [its] power and [its] possibility-of-being-made.<sup>198</sup>

Hegel wrote (of consciousness) in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*

It is I who produce that beyond; the finite and the infinite are equally my product, and I stand above both of them, both disappear in me. I am lord and master of this definition: I bring it forth. They vanish in and through me - and thus the second position is established: that I am the affirmation which at first I placed outside in a beyond; the infinite first comes into being through me. I am the negation of negation, it is I in whom the antithesis disappears; I am the reflection that brings them both to naught.<sup>199</sup>

These are clearly not the words of a Christian. Rather, they are those of one whose 'absolute' and 'consummate' are Neoplatonic.

### 13.6.6 The cognition of absolute truth - God is a Proclean 'syllogism'

Neoplatonism, from its outset, was a school of amalgamation and development.<sup>200</sup> The same explicative process that the relation between infinity and finitude underwent can be seen with concepts - from Plotinus' 'impressions' (a term Cusanus also used) to Cusanus' concepts in their coincidental relationships to Hegel's concepts in their dialectical development *and* in the degree to which God/Absolute Truth can be known. Where Plotinus emphasised the One's unknowability by normal cognition Proclus, while consistent with him also more systematically explored the potential for knowledge up to the first hypostasis with his henads.

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 30-31

<sup>198</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* ('On the Pursuit of Wisdom'), 1462-3, op. cit., 29, 88

<sup>199</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 295

<sup>200</sup> 'Heir to the great philosophies of the ancient world, those of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, (Plotinus) borrowed from all of them the insights which he needed, but without surrendering at any point the dominant influence of Platonism. Eclectic in appearance but powerfully unified by the strength of a single pervading impulse, his system has, by various channels often obscure and often indirect, come to be and remained one of the guiding forces in the thought of the West, whether Christian or secular, from Augustine and Scotus Eriugena to Dean Inge and Bergson. He is the last great philosopher of antiquity, and yet in more than one respect, and notably in the stress which he places on the autonomy of spirit, he is a precursor of modern times.' Henry, in Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xlii

Cusanus, despite Hopkins' assertion that he believed 'human minds...will never—not even in the next life—be able to discern God's nature as it is in itself'<sup>201</sup> was *ambivalent* about the extent to which we can acquire knowledge (which I will soon address) while Hegel *claimed* to have closed the gap of cognition, reducing the One to a prose-poetic device that functioned entirely within the Proclean triad. Differences between Hegel and his predecessors are not *fundamental* but *developmental*.

Again, particularly in relation to what can be known/cognised, the language of Neoplatonism, redolent with prose-poetic devices, should never be taken literally. Hopkins gave three examples where it *appears* Cusanus contradicted himself but, from his mystical point of view, was consistent

Nicholas's terminology is quite fluid. No example of this fluidity is more striking than is his language of *coincidentia oppositorum*: (1) God, says Nicholas, is the Coincidence of opposites; (2) opposites coincide *in* God; and (3) God is *beyond* the coincidence of opposites. However, Nicholas does not understand different things by these three different statements. On the contrary, he regards them as interchangeable. Accordingly, their apparent surface-meaning is not the same as their deeper true-meaning. Because God is the Coincidence of opposites, He may be called by opposing names, as in the case of Motion and Rest. Because opposites coincide in God, there is no opposition in Him, and, thus, all names to which other names are opposed may be denied of Him. Because God is beyond the coincidence of opposites, He is ineffable, and no names, whether positive or negative, at all befit Him.<sup>202</sup>

The same mystical reasoning applies to Cusanus' assertion that we can't know absolute truth and Hegel's that we can. They were ultimately arguing the same thing - their philosophies describe Neoplatonic emanation and return, from infinite unity to division and finitude, to return and resolution in the unity of *an infinity of finite perspectival 'minds'* in a cultus.

Rather than being, as Buhle wrote of Cusanus' God, a logical *concept*,<sup>203</sup> or as Jaspers wrote, an 'intellectual object' that can only be seen 'without seeing'<sup>204</sup>, it is, for both Cusanus and Hegel a 'logical', Neoplatonic *process*

the process of constituting...distinctions within himself. It is his nature and his concept eternally to make these distinctions and at the same time to take them back into himself<sup>205</sup>

Of 'logical', Redding wrote

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<sup>201</sup> Hopkins in *De Deo abscondito* ('On the Hidden God'), op. cit., Note 1, 308

<sup>202</sup> Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations: volume two*, op. cit., 59-60

<sup>203</sup> See 13.4.1

<sup>204</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 139

<sup>205</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 171



it is clear that Hegel means something quite different by the term ‘logic’ than is meant in the ‘formal’ logic dominant in contemporary philosophy, but exactly what it is committed to beyond that is far from clear.<sup>206</sup>

In fact, it is *quite* clear that its meaning and what is committed to are *theological* - neither Cusanus nor Hegel separated faith from reason (an obvious contradiction in terms) and for both, God is what God does.<sup>207</sup>

For the Neoplatonist, ‘mind’ (not only the power of perception, understanding and reasoning but of *imagining*) performs its operations in order to know itself. In performing those operations it not only knows itself but, as an image of eternal unfolding Being, as the mirror of *God’s* ‘Mind’, it knows the *immanent* God itself

when, as best it can, the human mind (which is a lofty likeness of God) partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities, [which are made] in the likeness of real entities. Consequently, the human mind is the form of a surmised [rational] world, just as the Divine Mind is the Form of the real world.<sup>208</sup>

and, for the Neoplatonist

the more subtly the mind contemplates itself in and through the world unfolded from itself, the more abundantly fruitful it is made within itself, since its End is Infinite Reason. Only in Infinite Reason will the mind behold itself as it is<sup>209</sup>

For Cusanus, our ‘minds’, again as images of God, are not only an Absolute Oneness, but triune

just as the First Beginning of all things, including our minds, is shown to be triune (so that of the multitude, the inequality, and the division of things there is one Beginning, from whose Absolute Oneness multitude flows forth, from whose Absolute Equality inequality flows forth, and from whose Absolute Union division flows forth), so our mind (which conceives only an

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<sup>206</sup> Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 150

<sup>207</sup> Hegel famously wrote that philosophy is the service and explication of God - ‘philosophy is theology, and one’s occupation with philosophy...is of itself the service of God.’, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 153, 152, 84; ‘(The subject of the theology of coincidence) is God’s activity - by telling what God does, it tells what God is, for God is hidden except as God reveals Godself.’, Bond, in Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa, Selected Spiritual Writings*, op. cit., 35

<sup>208</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* (‘On Speculations’), op. cit., 1,1,5, 164-165

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 1,1,5, 165

intellectual nature to be creative) makes itself to be a triune beginning of its own rational products.<sup>210</sup>

Hegel rebadged this

We know, in terms of our own spirit, that first of all we are able to think without this antithesis or cleavage within us, that secondly we are finite spirit, spirit in its cleavage and separation, and that thirdly we are spirit in the state of sensibility and subjectivity, of return to self - [which is] reconciliation, innermost feeling. Of these three, the first is the realm of *universality*; the second, the realm of *particularity*; the third, that of *singularity*. These three realms are a presupposition that we have taken up as our definition.<sup>211</sup>

Hegel wrote that *Böhme* had the idea that the Trinity is in everything,<sup>212</sup> which Magee repeated<sup>213</sup> - although he also wrote that Hegel never expressed indebtedness to *Böhme*<sup>214</sup> and, most importantly, that *Böhme*'s Trinity functions differently to that of Hegel.<sup>215</sup> I contend that developments in Neoplatonism on this subject were the inspiration for *both Böhme and Hegel*.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 1,1,6, 165. 'In God all things are present in a trinity - and so too in our mind. Our mind is composed of modes of apprehending.', Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* ('The Layman on Mind'), op. cit., Chapter title, 532. 'Modes of apprehending' is one of Cusanus' expressions Hegel used: 'the absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*. It is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy. Since it contains *all* determinateness within it, and its essential nature is to return to itself through its self-determination or particularisation, it has various shapes, and the business of philosophy is to cognise it in these. Nature and spirit are in general different modes of presenting *its existence*, art and religion its different *modes of apprehending* (my italics) itself and giving itself an adequate existence. Philosophy has the same content and the same end as art and religion; but it is the highest *mode of apprehending* (my italics) the absolute Idea, because its mode is the highest mode, the Notion.', Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 824. To repeat the point made at 11.3.11, this quotation exemplifies Hegel's application of the Neoplatonic metaphor of 'shape' to the ultimate category in his *Science of Logic*.

<sup>211</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 273

<sup>212</sup> '(Böhme's) sole thought is the Trinity: it is the universal principle in which and through which everything is, and it is indeed that principle in such a way that everything has this Trinity within it, not just as a Trinity of representation but as real. The rest of his thought is then the explication of the Trinity...For him this trinity is the universal life, the wholly universal life in each and every individual; it is the absolute substance.', Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 96.

<sup>213</sup> '(In writing of Böhme, Hegel wrote that he perceived the Trinity in everything and) not as a Trinity pertaining to the ordinary conception, but as the real Trinity of the Absolute Idea. (*LHP 3:196*) Hegel notes that Böhme regards the Trinity as "the absolute Substance" (*LHP 3:212*)', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 49

<sup>214</sup> 'Hegel never once says anything that would indicate that he is indebted to Böhme or that Böhme in some way influenced him.', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 589

<sup>215</sup> 'As we shall see, Böhme's Trinity works differently from Hegel's', Ibid., 550. I will soon more thoroughly discuss Magee's position on the relationship between Hegel, Böhme and Hermetism.

<sup>216</sup> Beck implied that Böhme and Hegel knew of or were at least influenced by Cusanus: 'When Meister Eckhart ascribed (in accordance with his view of the Trinity) a tension within the Godhead to which God himself owes his being, when Nicholas of Cusa made God the coincidence of *opposites*, they set a pattern which Böhme accepted and Hegel rationalised by seeing the Absolute as itself a dialectic process', Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, op. cit., 156; 'There is general agreement among scholars as to the intellectual streams that coalesce to form theosophy: medieval German mysticism, alchemy, Paracelsism, and Kabbalism.', 'Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy', Glenn Alexander Magee, Chapter 16, in Glenn Alexander Magee, Ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016, 522-523

The nature of the relationship between ‘mind’ and God, embodied in the concluding and culminating words in Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* - his quotation from the *Metaphysics* 1072b18-30 - resonates in the words of Cusanus

mind uses itself insofar as it is the image of God. And God, who is all things, shines forth in mind when mind, as a living image of God, turns to its own Exemplar and assimilates itself thereto with all its effort. In this way the mind beholds all things as something one and beholds itself as an assimilation of that one. By means of this assimilation it makes concepts of that one thing which is all things. (In this way it makes theological speculations.) In the one thing which is all things it very tranquilly finds rest as in the goal of all its concepts and as in the most delightful true being of its life. About this mode [of being], enough could never be said.<sup>217</sup>

For the Neoplatonist, as discussed (4., 10.7, 10.9.1, 11.3.11.8, 13.6.5.1), there are two types of knowledge, discursive, that which separates and ‘unified’ or speculative. Plotinus believed that the activity of knowing the object equates to (Divine) Mind’s knowing (itself). In that activity the object must be diverse. The activity is *driven* by difference and the knowing is perspectival. Thinking is movement - Divine Mind gives birth to objects as the embodiment of its outgoing creative power *and* in its contemplative recollection of and desire to unite with the One.

Hegel believed that every content is something that thought has given to itself and Cusanus also believed that we know through our *productive* intellectual activity, a reflection of God’s activity. Cassirer wrote

Cusanus sets up and defends his basic view of knowledge, when he explains that all knowledge is nothing but the unfolding and explication of the complication that lies within the simple essence of the mind<sup>218</sup>

Cusanus described that process

the mind both distinguishes all things and unites all things, [doing so] by means of a marvellous two-way progression in which (1) Divine and Absolute Oneness *descends* by stages in and through intelligence and reason and (2) the perceptible-contracted oneness *ascends* through reason unto intelligence.<sup>219</sup>

For the Neoplatonist, true knowledge is not only the knowledge of God, it must be an intellectual *system* - what Hegel described as ‘science’. He wrote in his *Phenomenology* that

knowledge is only actual, and can only be expounded, as Science or as *system*<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’), 7,106, 560

<sup>218</sup> Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 57

<sup>219</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* (‘On Speculations’), op. cit., 1,4,16, 170

<sup>220</sup> Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit. 13

Redding noted the centrality of prose-poetic devices to Hegel's 'science'

Hegel employs *forms of expression* for the presentation of his own *philosophical* thought that are redolent with the type of imagistic and figurative locutions supposedly at home in religion. Moreover, the actual imagery employed seems to refer to the type of trinitarian version of Christianity that can seem antithetical to those forms of Christian thought that lent themselves to the sort of "demythologization" characteristic of the enlightenment attitude to religious doctrine. Such factors as these make it easy to portray Hegel's philosophy as a type of irrationalist mysticism, or at least as a *disguised* theology with a content from revealed religion, and thus aligning him more to the spirit of the Counter-Enlightenment than the Enlightenment.<sup>221</sup>

Cassirer points to the roots of this in German culture

In the mystical theology of the fifteenth century two fundamental tendencies stand sharply opposed to each other; the one bases itself on the intellect; the other considers the will to be the basic force and organ of union with God. In this dispute, Cusanus sides emphatically with the former. True love of God is *amor Dei intellectualis*; it includes knowledge as a necessary element and a necessary condition.<sup>222</sup>

On the extent of possible knowledge, Armstrong wrote

Plotinus insists...that the One or Good is beyond the reach of human thought or language...Language can only point the mind along the way to the Good, not describe, encompass, or present It. As Plotinus himself says (VI.9.3), "strictly speaking, we ought not to apply any terms at all to It; but we should, so to speak, run round the outside of It trying to interpret our own feelings"<sup>223</sup>

Proclus was consistent with Plotinus on this, but, with his henads, he also began to blur what was 'god' and where the limits of knowledge lay.<sup>224</sup> Dodds wrote

(Prop. 115 [*Every god is above Being, above Life, and above Intelligence*]) seems to make it plain that whereas Plotinus puts 'all the gods' within *nous* (V.1.4), the divine henads are to be placed in the first of the three traditional 'hypostases' and not (as Vacherot, Simon and others assume) in the second.

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<sup>221</sup> Paul Redding, 'Some Metaphysical Implications of Hegel's Theology', paper given to the conference *Hegel and Religion*, University of Sydney, September 14-15, 2010, 1

<sup>222</sup> Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 13

<sup>223</sup> Armstrong in Plotinus, *Enneads*, op. cit., vol. I, xv

<sup>224</sup> 'Prop. 123. *All that is divine is itself ineffable and unknowable by any secondary being because of its supra-existential unity, but it may be apprehended and known from the existents which participate it: wherefore only the First Principle is completely unknowable, as being unparticipated. ...from the beings dependent upon them (i.e. the gods) the character of their distinctive properties may be inferred, and with cogency. ...to each cause is attached, and from each proceeds, that effect which is akin to it.*', Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 109-10

But it must be admitted that Pr. is himself responsible for a good deal of the confusion which exists on the subject, in that he frequently speaks of such entities as Eternity, Time, the (a word in Greek), and even the sensible world as ‘gods’, and of gods as ‘intelligible’, ‘intellectual’ or ‘intra-mundane’.<sup>225</sup>

Cusanus wrote that human reason cannot comprehend the infinite but it *does* proceed in finite steps on the basis of the entities it creates - ‘conjectures’, ‘surmises’ or ‘symbolisms’

as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of conceptual beings and of artificial forms that are only likenesses of his intellect, even as God’s creatures are likenesses of the Divine Intellect<sup>226</sup>

The ‘mind’ is the form of a *world* of conjectures - aids that we use towards a truth beyond reason. Truth is enfolded in infinite ‘Mind’. Our concepts share in that truth as never-ending approximations as they unfold - we can only know truth in its ‘otherness’. Just as we are unable to know the absolute truth of God, so we are unable to know the world with ultimate precision.

It would seem clear-cut, as Hopkins tells us, that for Cusanus we cannot know God, the Absolute - we cannot attain the complete knowledge Hegel claimed *his* philosophy gives us. But we are dealing with a highly philosophical *mysticism* in which nothing is simple or, as Hegel would put it, nothing is to be judged by the method of *Verstand*, by the method of mere analysis and what *seems* to be so.

Neoplatonism is a dialectically functioning whole of intertwined constructs conceptually centred on the *process* ‘God’. Recognising these aspects enables one to explore beyond the literal, surface meaning of Cusanus’ words, to how he advised we *can* know God, and to understand the ways in which Hegel *developed* on that method to attain knowledge in his own philosophy.

The philosophy of Cusanus was the last major reworking of Neoplatonism before Hegel completed its development. Cusanus is the major link between Proclus and Hegel and both the former were equally important to the latter. Even though Cusanus wrote repeatedly in different ways that God, the ultimate principle, cannot be known, echoing both Plotinus and Proclus on the first hypostasis, he used the Trinity to substantially build on Proclus’ blurring of the gap between the ultimate principle and what could be known. He brought the One into the second hypostasis as the first element of Proclus’ triad Being, Life, Intelligence which he made the basis of his philosophy as Hegel, following him, did with his.

Now, not only could God be seen as can the One by the returning soul in its final stage prior to re-unification with its source, the ultimate principle *itself* ‘sees’ - it is no longer a principle that simply *generates* all else. ‘*He*’ is now an active participant in his own process. He mirrors it, his ‘seeing’ is his being. He is now *both* hidden *and* ‘visible’.

Where Cusanus substantially developed Proclus’ position on the limits of knowledge, he still remained, however, ambivalent. Hegel *completed* this historically protracted development in the

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<sup>225</sup> Dodds’ Commentary in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 161

<sup>226</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* (‘On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses’), op. cit., 7, 794

Neoplatonic drive for knowledge, arguing that God - the entire process - can be fully cognised<sup>227</sup>. To do this, despite his claim to Christianity - he was *not* consistent, as I have argued, with Christian and Trinitarian doctrine - he philosophised on the basis of Cusanus' adaptation of Proclus' triad, using the One as he did with the Trinity - as metaphorical, prose-poetic devices. Now, nothing was beyond Being.

In order to close the circle of Neoplatonic knowledge, Hegel also recognised and employed another profound development by Cusanus - the focus on concepts in their contradictory relations. What was for Cusanus the detailed study of *coincidentia oppositorum* was for Hegel the study of the flowing development of concepts in their dialectical relations. Hegel's emphasis on concepts and the complexity of their development is at the heart of his claim to 'science'.

For Cusanus, the *primary* way in which the ultimate principle can be known is in the act of 'seeing'<sup>228</sup>. Education in learned ignorance and the speculative potential of *coincidentia oppositorum* can only take us up to the wall of Paradise, wherein the ultimate principle exists<sup>229</sup>. But '*seeing*' takes us *within* because our vision of the triune God is God's vision of himself - one 'eye' 'sees' itself.<sup>230</sup> In Neoplatonism, to 'see' is to 'know' *beyond* conceptualisation - to understand the infinite 'incomprehensibly'. It is the unity of lover/loving/loved, of knower/knowing/known.

This unity is that of *intellectual* intuition which Cusanus described as 'perfect knowledge' and which he defined as the coincidence of

*being something one in which are all things and being all things in which  
there is something one*<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> It is fundamentally on *this* point - that Hegel argued that the entire system ('God') can be conceptually cognised, that he warrants the description 'the consummate Neoplatonist'. In arguing this claim, he brought development within Neoplatonism to an end.

<sup>228</sup> 'in the name "*Theos*" there is enfolded a certain way-of-seeking whereby God is found, so that He can be groped for. "*Theos*" is derived from "*theoro*," which means "I see" and "I hasten." Therefore, the seeker ought to hasten by means of sight, so that he can attain unto God, who sees all things. Accordingly, vision bears a likeness to the pathway by means of which a seeker ought to advance. Consequently, in the presence of the eye of intellectual vision we must magnify the nature of sensible vision and construct, from that nature, a ladder of ascent.', Nicholas of Cusa, *De quaerendo Deum* ('On Seeking God'), op. cit., I,19, 315

<sup>229</sup> 'every concept reaches its limit at the wall of Paradise. ... You are free from all the things that can be captured by any concept.', Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 13,52, 704

<sup>230</sup> Hegel quoted Eckhart: 'The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one and the same. In righteousness I am weighed in God and he in me. If God did not exist nor would I; if I did not exist nor would he.' In Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. I, 347-348

<sup>231</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De filiatione Dei* ('On Being a Son of God'), 1445, in *A Miscellany of Nicholas of Cusa*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 341-358, 3,70, 349

The difference between knowledge of the ‘sensible’ world and that (intuitive) of the intellectual is like the difference between knowing *that* something is and *why* it is.<sup>232</sup> This is not ‘the immediate knowledge of the Absolute’ that Hegel was so critical of in his *Phenomenology* but *is* consistent with the ‘mindful’, ‘pure intuition or pure thinking’ that he most valued - an intuition that enables one ‘to apprehend the spiritual bond unifying all the details’ (see 9.4).

Cusanus philosophised on how we can have knowledge of God and attain the ‘pure intellectual life’<sup>233</sup> of *theosis* - which he defined as ‘*knowledge of God and His Word and intuitive vision*’<sup>234</sup> - by becoming his ‘sons’<sup>235</sup> in the next life<sup>236</sup>

if we have accepted the Divine Word Himself, then there arises in our rational spirit the power of sonship. ...It is as if the intellect were a divine seed - the intellect whose power in the believer can reach such heights that it attains unto *theosis*. ...that is, unto the ultimate perfection of the intellect - in other words unto the apprehension of truth, not as truth is bedarkened in figurativeness and symbolisms and various degrees of otherness...but rather as truth is intellectually visible in itself. ...if faith is present, ascent even unto being a son of God is not forbidden.<sup>237</sup>

Further, Cusanus explored the relationship between Concept and concept, Word and word

Every corporeal utterance is a sign of a mental word. The cause of every corruptible mental word is an incorruptible word, viz., a concept. Christ is the incarnated Concept of all concepts, for He is the Word made flesh.<sup>238</sup>

He philosophised on how we should use words to attain the ‘mind’ of the teacher ‘while in *this* world’. The following paragraphs from *De Filiatione Dei* show how he ‘surmised’ we can have knowledge of God by this means

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<sup>232</sup> ‘Therefore, [in that state] the intellect perceives all things intellectually and beyond every sensible, distracting, and obscuring mode. Indeed, it beholds the entire sensible world not in a sensory manner but in a truer, viz., intellectual, manner. For this perfect knowledge is called intuition because between the knowledge of that world and the knowledge of this sensible [world] there is something like the difference which there is between knowledge received by sight and knowledge received by hearing. Therefore, the more certain and clear is the knowledge produced by sight than is the knowledge (of the same thing) effected by hearing, the much more does intuitive knowledge of the other world excel the knowledge which there is of this [present world]—just as *knowing why something is* can be called intuitive knowledge, since the knower looks into the reason for the thing, and *knowing that something is* [can be said to come] from hearing.’, Ibid., 6,89, 358

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 3,71, 350

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 1,52, 341

<sup>235</sup> ‘sonship is nothing other than our being conducted from the shadowy traces of mere representations unto union with Infinite Reason...to this [intellectual spirit] God will not be *other* than it or different or distinct; nor will Divine Reason be *other* or the Word of God *other* or the Spirit of God *other*. For all otherness and all difference are far beneath sonship.’, Ibid., 3,68-69, 348

<sup>236</sup> He described this philosophising as ‘a surmise of sorts (although a very remote one) about *theosis*’ Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 1, 52-53, 341-342

<sup>238</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’), op. cit., III,11,247

Hence, since the mastery which we seek and in which the happiness of our intellectual life consists is the mastery of true and eternal things: if our intellectual spirit is to become a perfect master, so that within itself it will possess eternally the very delightful intellectual life, then its study must not cling to temporal shadows of the sensible world but must use them, *en passant*, for intellectual study—as schoolboys use material and perceptible writings. For their study is not of the material shapes of the letters but rather of the rational signification of those letters. Likewise, they use in an intellectual way, not in a sensory way, the vocal words by means of which they are taught, so that by means of these vocal signs they attain unto the mind of their teacher.<sup>239</sup>

Just as the mental word is the source of the vocal word but is not contracted to it though signified by it, so the ineffable Word is the source of the mental word though not contracted to *it* yet likewise signified by *it*. The mental, intellectual word is the reception of the ineffable Word

...the One is, in a way that cannot be participated in, the Fount of intelligible beings and is all that which they are. (By comparison, the mental word is the fount of the vocal [word] and is all that which [the vocal word] is; and the mental word is signified by the vocal word without there being any intermixing or dividing of the mental word, since the mind cannot be either participated in, or in any way attained unto, by the vocal word.) But the intellectual [i.e., mental] word is itself the intellectual reception of the ineffable Word. Therefore, every intellectual word remains free from all contraction to the sensible. Now, that which the intellectual is it has intellectually from the Ineffable. If the Ineffable is given a name by the intellect, then this [name-giving] is done in an unrestricted manner, since the intellectual mode, in turn, is not restricted to sensibly contracted things.

Therefore, the Ineffable can in no way either be named or attained unto. Hence, a non-relational name—whether “being” or “deity” or “goodness” or “truth” or even “power” or any other name whatsoever—does not at all name God, who is unnameable. Rather, a non-relational name speaks of the unnameable God by means of various intellectual modes. *In this way the Ineffable is effable, the Incapable of being participated in is capable of being participated in, and the Transcender of every mode is modifiable.* Consequently, God is the Beginning, which is above the one and above mode; [yet,] in the one and in its modes He exhibits Himself as [therein] able to be participated in. *Therefore, I surmise that the pursuit by which we attempt, while in this world, to ascend unto the attainment of sonship, is perhaps possible* with the aid of something else, so that my speculation deals with the one and its modes. (my italics)<sup>240</sup>

Just as words of the sensory world can signify those of the ‘mental’, these in turn can carry us to participation in the ineffable. Cusanus is not simply philosophising about a problem experienced by mysticism. No written or spoken word can fully convey *our* ‘mental’ content. In speaking or writing

<sup>239</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De filiatione Dei* (‘On Being a Son of God’), 2,60, 345

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 4,77-78, 352-353



a word we have to *thereby* limit or bound our mental content *in order* to use it (what Cusanus referred to as ‘sensibly contracted’). It is an unavoidable constraint of the sensory world which mystics and artists with words give great consideration to.

Our knowledge of God is an inward process of *self*-knowledge and *self*-realisation - of a world, of a universe, within

the intellect is *actually* an intellectual universality of all things... (As such, the intellect) does not behold temporal things temporally, in constant succession, but beholds them in an indivisible present. For the present, or the now, that enfolds all time is not of this sensible world, since it cannot be attained by the senses, but is of the intellectual [world]. Likewise, [the intellect] does not at all behold quantities in their extended, divisible materiality but beholds them in an indivisible point in which there is the intellectual enfolding of all continuous quantity. Moreover, [the intellect] does not [then] behold differences-of-things in a variety of numbers but beholds [these things] intellectually in the simple unit, which enfolds every number.<sup>241</sup>

The words of Cusanus

Now, knowing occurs by means of a likeness. But since the intellect is a living intellectual likeness of God, then when it knows itself it knows, in its one self, all things. Now, it knows itself when it sees itself in God as it is. And this [seeing] occurs when in the intellect God is the intellect.<sup>242</sup>

are echoed in those of Hegel

I only know an object in so far as I know myself and my own determination through it, for whatever I am is also an object of my consciousness...I know my object, and I know myself; the two are inseparable.<sup>243</sup>

God, ‘understandable truth’, *exists only* in that knowing<sup>244</sup>

Now, we call that which is the object [of the intellect] *truth*. Therefore, my God, since You are understandable Truth, the created intellect can be united to You.<sup>245</sup>

The problems of language and epistemology are closely related. Cusanus gave a great deal of thought to how language frames and directs considerations of the latter. Believing that learned

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 6,87-88, 357

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 6,86, 356

<sup>243</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 47

<sup>244</sup> ‘God exists only in knowing, in the element of the inner life.’, Hegel, *Aesthetics - Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, op. cit., 543

<sup>245</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* (‘The Vision of God’), op. cit., 18,82

ignorance required a new kind of logic, he thought that coincident language and method in theology reconciles opposites and mediates between the infinite and the finite and that to attain knowledge, just as sensory reasoning has to be transcended, so too the sensory *meanings* of words - the limits of conceptual thinking. He subscribed to ‘non-conceptual insight’<sup>246</sup> and held that the function of language in mystical theology is to kindle and rouse the soul. I have addressed this same fundamental aspect of Hegel’s philosophy throughout this thesis, using Magee’s apt expression ‘mytho-poetic circumscription’, particularly at 10.6.<sup>247</sup>

Cusanus was acutely aware of the imprecision of words

it is not the case that words are precise and thus that a thing cannot be named by a more precise word. For the form which a man conceives is not the thing’s essential form, which precedes each thing. If anyone knew the name of that form, he would name all things correctly and would have a most perfect knowledge of all things.<sup>248</sup>

Yet, while fully aware of the constraints of concepts, he also recognised their *philosophical necessity* (they are the vehicles for truth) and their *speculative potential* (the exploration of them in their unfolding is ‘mind’s’ *means* of movement). In his writing on both these points he far more than laid the groundwork for Hegel’s far more systematically dialectical conceptual philosophising.

As discussed (9.3, 11.3.11.7), God’s ‘Mind’ is the exemplar for our minds. As infinite ‘Mind’ (‘the totality of the truth of things’<sup>249</sup>) moves itself by conceiving, so does ‘mind’ (‘the totality of the assimilation of things’<sup>250</sup>). Where divine ‘Mind’ produces things, our ‘minds’ (as images of God’s), *conceptualise* in the unfolding *and* enfolding of *their* world - conceptualisation itself being the *production* of knowledge. ‘Mind’, the image of the Trinity and that of ‘a second god’<sup>251</sup> is the

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<sup>246</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 139

<sup>247</sup> Magee himself engaged in his own mytho-poesis: ‘the Absolute is literally embodied in the pure aether of thought. Hegel’s philosophical speech is not an account of the Absolute, it is the concrete, “aetherial” realisation of the Absolute itself.’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 95. How an ‘aetherial’ realisation of the Absolute is ‘concrete’ is known only to Magee.

<sup>248</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* (‘On the Pursuit of Wisdom’), 1462-3, op. cit., 33 (‘The meaning of a word’), 97, 1339; ‘just as human reason does not attain unto the quiddity of God’s works, so neither does a name. For names are imposed by the operation of reason. For we name one thing by one name, for a certain reason; and [we name] the very same thing by another name, for another reason. Moreover, one language has names that are more suitable, whereas another language has names that are cruder and less suitable. In this way, I see that since the suitability of names admits of more and less, the precise name [of a thing] is not known.’, Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’), op. cit., 2,58, 536

<sup>249</sup> Miller, ‘Cusanus, Nicolaus [Nicolas of Cusa], op. cit.

<sup>250</sup> I.e. ‘likeness of truth’. Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> ‘note that Hermes Trismegistus states that man is a second god. For just as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of conceptual beings and of artificial forms that are only likenesses of his intellect, even as God’s creatures are likenesses of the Divine Intellect.’, Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* (‘On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses’), op. cit., 7, 794; ‘For man is god, but not unqualifiedly, since he is man; therefore he is a human god. Man is also world, but he is not contractedly all things, since he is man; therefore man is a microcosm, or a human world’, Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* (‘On Speculations’), op. cit., II,14,143, 236

always living, self-moving triunity of intellectual life that gives rise to the ‘rational operations’<sup>252</sup> of its understanding.

As dealt with previously (13.4.1), Buhle, in vol. 2.1 of his *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, one of the histories Hegel is known to have used as sources for his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* - but which history he did not name - discussed and quoted in detail Cusanus’ theory of cognition in his *De coniecturis*. For Cusanus, Christ, as the Word of God, is the centre of the conceptual structure of the world, the embodiment of the Concept of all concepts - the crucial bond between infinite and finite.<sup>253</sup> When ‘mind’ functions as the image of God by producing concepts, God shines forth in it.

‘Definition’ (not that of *ratio* but of *intellectus*) was extremely important to Cusanus. In defining the concept as ‘the unfolding of the word’<sup>254</sup>, he implied that he considered its meaning to be a *developmental process*. It is both that which is first and, *in its unfolding*, defines (develops) itself *and* what grows from it

not only [must it be the definition of itself], but also all things must be defined through it, since they cannot exist unless they exist and are defined through it.<sup>255</sup>

For Hegel, God had the ‘presuppositionless’ *right* (! see 11.3.11.5) that the *Science of Logic* (and Hegel’s entire system) began with him.<sup>256</sup> Both his *Logic* and *Encyclopaedia* conclude with Absolute Idea which Hegel *equated* with Aristotle’s concept of God.<sup>257</sup> Magee was not correct in writing that Absolute Idea is defined by the development leading to it<sup>258</sup> because ‘*God*’, *both the*

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<sup>252</sup> ‘mind brings forth from itself rational operations, [or rational movement]. Thus, mind is the form of moving.’ Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’), op. cit., 15,157, 587

<sup>253</sup> ‘As often before, the Word is the term for the unity of the created and uncreated worlds. However, with Cusanus the old mysticism of the cosmic Word is combined with new and remarkably modern theories of the universe.’, Weeks, *German Mysticism - From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, op. cit., 111

<sup>254</sup> ‘Aristotle asserted that the light of knowledge is in the definition, which is the unfolding of the word.’, Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* (‘On the Pursuit of Wisdom’), 1462-3, op. cit., 33,98, 1339

<sup>255</sup> ‘Dionysius saw these points very clearly in the chapter on the Perfect and the One, in *The Divine Names*, where he says: “That One—the Cause of all—is not a one out of many; rather, it is prior to everything one, prior to all multitude, and is the definition of every one and of all multitude.”...the trine and one God is the Definition defining itself and all other things.’, *Ibid.*, 14,39-40, 1303-1304

<sup>256</sup> ‘*God* has the absolutely undisputed right that the beginning be made with him’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 75, 78.

<sup>257</sup> ‘now the idea comes to be its *own object*. This is the *noesis noeseos* which Aristotle long ago termed the supreme form of the idea.’, §236, Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, op. cit., 292

<sup>258</sup> ‘the entirety of the *Logic* is the “definition” of Absolute Idea’, ‘Hegel speaks of Absolute Idea as “the Idea that thinks itself” (EL #236), and he explicitly likens it to Aristotle’s concept of God.’, Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 24, 100

*source and entirety* of that Neoplatonic process, defines *it*. For Cusanus and Hegel, ‘God’ is his (its) own definition.<sup>259</sup>

The academic position - i.e. the position of those employed primarily to maintain capitalist ideology and domination - is that German philosophy after Kant developed in response to *him* not that *all* of them developed in response to Neoplatonism, in response to a philosophy with ‘the tremendous power of the negative’<sup>260</sup> at its core

Hegel derives the basic outlines of his account of self-driving reason from Kant. Kant divided human rationality into two faculties: the faculty of the understanding and the faculty of reason. The understanding uses concepts to organise and regularise our experiences of the world. Reason’s job is to coordinate the concepts and categories of the understanding by developing a completely unified, conceptual system, and it does this work, Kant thought, on its own, independently of how those concepts might apply to the world. Reason coordinates the concepts of the understanding by following out necessary chains of syllogisms to produce concepts that achieve higher and higher levels of conceptual unity. Indeed, this process will lead reason to produce its own transcendental ideas, or concepts that go beyond the world of experience. Kant calls this necessary, concept-creating reason “speculative” reason (cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxx–xxi, A327/B384). Reason creates its own concepts or ideas—it “speculates”—by generating new and increasingly comprehensive concepts of its own, independently of the understanding. In the end, Kant thought, reason will follow out such chains of syllogisms until it develops completely comprehensive or unconditioned universals—universals that contain all of the conditions or all of the less-comprehensive concepts that help to define them. As we saw Hegel’s dialectics adopts Kant’s notion of a self-driving and concept-creating “speculative” reason, as well as Kant’s idea that reason aims toward unconditioned universality or absolute concepts. ...

Hegel adopts Kant’s dialectical conception of reason, but he liberates reason for knowledge from the tyranny of the understanding. Kant was right that reason speculatively generates concepts on its own, and that this speculative process is driven by necessity and leads to concepts of increasing universality or comprehensiveness. Kant was even right to suggest—as he had shown in the discussion of the antinomies—that reason is dialectical, or necessarily produces contradictions on its own. Again, Kant’s mistake was that he fell short of saying that these contradictions are in the world itself. He failed to apply the insights of his discussion of the antinomies to “*things*

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<sup>259</sup> NICHOLAS: I ask you, then, first of all, what is it that most of all gives us knowledge?

FERDINAND: Definition.

NICHOLAS: You answer correctly, for the definition is the constituting ground (*oratio seu ratio*). But on what basis is [definition] called definition?

FERDINAND: On the basis of defining, since it defines everything.

NICHOLAS: Perfectly correct. Hence, if definition defines everything, then does it define even itself?

FERDINAND: Certainly, since it excludes nothing.’, Nicholas of Cusa, *De li non aliud* (‘On Not-Other’), 1461-2, in *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1999, 1108-1166, 1,3, 1108-1109

<sup>260</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 19

*in themselves*” (SL-M 56; SL-dG 35). Indeed, Kant’s own argument proves that the dialectical nature of reason can be applied to things themselves. The fact that reason develops those contradictions *on its own, without our heads to help it*, shows that those contradictions are not just in our heads, but are objective, or in the world itself. Kant, however, failed to draw this conclusion, and continued to regard reason’s conclusions as illusions. Still, Kant’s philosophy vindicated the general idea that the contradictions he took to be illusions are both objective—or out there in the world—and necessary. As Hegel puts it, Kant vindicates the general idea of “the *objectivity of the illusion* and the *necessity of the contradiction* which belongs to the nature of thought determinations” (SL-M 56; cf. SL-dG 35), or to the nature of concepts themselves.<sup>261</sup>

I could not believe that this mix of key elements in Kant’s philosophy, *all* found in Neoplatonism, did not come *from* Neoplatonism, particularly via Cusanus (see 13.4) or from others influenced by it - the two ‘reasons’, how concepts are created and used in a dialectical conception of self-driving reason - a ‘speculative’ process of necessity leading to concepts of increasing universality or absolute concepts and syllogisms that produce concepts that achieve higher levels of conceptual unity (I will soon address Hegel’s use of ‘syllogisms’).<sup>262</sup> Above all is the importance of *theology* to Hegel’s theory of knowledge.

Plotinus asked ‘What art is there, what method, what discipline to bring us there where we must go?’<sup>263</sup> and answered that it is not ‘all that coil of premises and conclusions called the art of reasoning’<sup>264</sup> - that of Aristotelian and Stoic logic - but ‘authentic science’<sup>265</sup>, ‘supremely precious’<sup>266</sup> Platonic dialectic, which deals not with propositions and rules, but with truths of

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<sup>261</sup> Julie E. Maybee, ‘Hegel’s Dialectics,’ op. cit.

<sup>262</sup> Consider Kant’s perspectivism and his transcendental unity of apperception, a ‘pure original unchangeable consciousness’ (Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, trans., Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan, London, 1987, A 107, 136). Redding said Schelling ‘developed Kant’s hints about a type of Neoplatonic unity of the world of things-in-themselves by identifying this world with the totality of things in their interconnection. He identifies the world of appearances with this totality, as it were, grasped from within’, lecture, University of Sydney, 04.10.10. Plotinus ‘solved’ Kant’s phenomenal/noumenal dilemma...1,500 years before Hegel: ‘Consider sense-knowledge: its objects seem most patently certified, yet the doubt returns whether the apparent reality may not lie in the states of the percipient rather than in the material before him; the decision demands intelligence or reasoning. Besides, even granting that what the senses grasp is really contained in the objects, none the less what is thus known by the senses is an image: *sense can never grasp the thing itself; this remains forever outside.* (my italics)

...The only way to this is to leave nothing outside of the veritable Intellectual-Principle which thus has knowledge in the true knowing (that of identification with the object), cannot forget, need not go wandering in search. At once truth is there, this is the seat of the authentic Existents, it becomes living and intellectual: these are the essentials of that most lofty Principle; and failing them where is its worth, its grandeur?

...*Thus veritable truth is not accordance with an external; it is self-accordance* (my italics); it affirms nothing other than itself and is nothing other; it is at once existence and self-affirmation.’, Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.5.1-2. Magee, to repeat, wrote, quoting Beck and without expansion, that Schelling read Cusanus. ‘Beck also makes the claim that the *Naturphilosophie* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as theosophy and Protestant mysticism, have their roots in Cusa’ (Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 28).

<sup>263</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., I.3.1

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, I.3.4

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, I.3.5

difference and identity, motion and rest, knower and known<sup>267</sup> - of *unceasing negation* in emanation from the source to return to it by *a process of increasingly comprehensive conceptualisation, concluding in the absolute*

It is the Method, or Discipline, that brings with it the power of pronouncing with final truth upon the nature and relation of things - what each is, how it differs from others, what common quality all have, to what Kind each belongs and in what rank each stands in its Kind and whether its Being is Real-Being, and how many Beings there are, and how many non-Beings to be distinguished from Beings.<sup>268</sup>

As did Plotinus, Cusanus<sup>269</sup> and Hegel<sup>270</sup> also rejected the 'laws of thought' (those of identity [a = a], non-contradiction [a thing cannot be both a and -a] and the excluded middle [either a or -a]) from their method of knowledge, making contradiction its centrepiece. In so doing, Cusanus set the precedent of freeing *God's* omnipotence from qualification<sup>271</sup>

He believed that the highest mysteries of the Trinity couldn't be attained as long as one held that opposites are mutually exclusive

The oppositeness of opposites is oppositeness without oppositeness, just as the End of finite things is an End without an end. You, then, 0 God, are the Oppositeness of opposites, because You are infinite. And because You are infinite, You are Infinity. In Infinity the oppositeness of opposites is present without oppositeness.<sup>272</sup>

He applied this subtle manner of thinking to the world

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<sup>267</sup> 'Thus the Primals (the first 'Categories') are seen to be: Intellectual-Principle; Existence; Difference; Identity: we must include also Motion and Rest: Motion provides for the intellectual act, Rest preserves identity as Difference gives at once a Knower and a Known, for, failing this, all is one, and silent.' Ibid., V.1.4

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., I.3.4

<sup>269</sup> 'Cusanus' theology abandons Scholastic logic, the logic of generic concepts, dominated by the principle of contradiction and of the excluded middle; but it demands in its place a new type of mathematical logic, one that does not exclude but, in fact, requires the possibility of the coincidence of opposites, and requires the convergence of the Absolute-Greatest with the Absolute-Smallest as the firm principle and the necessary vehicle of progressing knowledge.', Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 14

<sup>270</sup> 'The *several propositions* which are set up as *absolute laws of thought*, are, therefore, more closely considered, *opposed to one another*, they contradict one another and mutually sublate themselves. If everything is *identical* with itself, then it is not *different*, not *opposed*, has no *ground*. Or, if it is assumed that *no two things are the same*, that is, everything is *different* from everything else, then A is not equal to A, nor is A opposed to A, and so on. The assumption of any of these propositions rules out the assumption of the others. The thoughtless consideration of them enumerates them *one after the other*, so that there does not appear to be any relation between them...(it ignores) their other moment, *positedness* or their *determinateness* as such which sweeps them on into transition and into their negation.', Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, op. cit., 411

<sup>271</sup> 'For Cusanus, the law of contradiction itself qualifies God's freedom and omnipotence. By making God the *coincidence of opposites*, he nullifies the law of contradiction as a criterion for God's *potentia absoluta* and thereby extends his conception of God's absolute power beyond that of the scholastics.', Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, op. cit., 46-47

<sup>272</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* ('The Vision of God'), op. cit., 13,55, 705

Now, hot things are originated from the beginning of heat. Therefore, the beginning of heat is not hot. Now, in the cold I see that which belongs to the same genus (as does the hot) but which is not the hot. The situation is similar regarding other contraries. Therefore, since in the one contrary the beginning of the other contrary is present, their transformations are circular, and there is a common subject for each contrary. Thus, you see how it is that receptivity is transformed into actuality.<sup>273</sup>

Hegel wrote

Positive and negative are supposed to express an absolute difference. The two however are at bottom the same: the name of either might be transferred to the other. ...Positive and negative are therefore intrinsically conditioned by one another, and are only in relation to each other. ...In opposition, the different is not confronted by any other, but by its other.<sup>274</sup>

Both recognised that contradiction is the moving principle of the world<sup>275</sup>

as against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being; but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.<sup>276</sup>

Cusanus also preceded Hegel in recognising, better than Eckhart, 'how much depends on defining the *relation* between the terms and how little on the terms taken by themselves'<sup>277</sup>.

*Without* a theology of contradiction, God could only be worshipped as *Father*, not considered *philosophically* as infinitude. Since, for Cusanus and Hegel, *God* is the coincidence (the unity) of opposites and *God* is all things, all things *including* God could now be incorporated into their method - this considered ambivalently by Cusanus, the development of which consideration Hegel completed within idealism. As I have argued, they *illustrated* and conveyed *metaphorically and mytho-poetically* their Neoplatonic system through their use of the Trinitarian myth - Hegel doing so in an *overtly* non-Christian manner

For Cusanus, speculative philosophical thinking and the Christian faith merge into one. ...that which has been conceived in terms of philosophical speculation, and which Cusanus regards as consistent with the thinking of

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<sup>273</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* ('On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses'), op. cit., 46-47, 813

<sup>274</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 173

<sup>275</sup> 'Instead of speaking by the maxim of Excluded Middle (which is the maxim of abstract understanding) we should rather say: Everything is opposite. Neither in heaven nor in earth, neither in the world of mind nor of nature, is there anywhere such an abstract 'either-or' as the understanding maintains. Whatever exists is concrete, with difference and opposition in itself. ...Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world', *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>276</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 439

<sup>277</sup> Louis Dupré, 'The Question of Pantheism from Eckhart to Cusanus' in Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, op. cit., 74-88, 80

the Greek philosophers, is suddenly identified, as though this were the most natural thing in the world, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>278</sup>

Magee wrote of 'speculation' and 'dialectic'

Speculation, in fact, is reason in its 'positive' aspect. ...Dialectic, for Hegel, is reason in its 'negative' aspect: it identifies contradictions inherent in the understanding's view of things. What is involved in speculation, again, is insight into the whole - which is what actually makes possible the supersession of opposing terms, and of one standpoint (e.g a definition of the Absolute) by a more adequate one.<sup>279</sup>

Cusanus and Hegel knew that speculative truth can only be sought through contradiction

Hence, we notice here an important speculative consideration which, from the foregoing, can be inferred about the Maximum: viz., that the Maximum is such that in it the Minimum is the Maximum, and thus the Maximum infinitely and in every respect transcends all opposition.<sup>280</sup>

Cusanus considered how contradiction functions in the process of speculation, 'utterly failing' Aristotle on this point

Although more than all the other [philosophers] Aristotle is held to be the most careful and most acute reasoner, I think that he and all the others utterly failed in regard to one point. For since the beginnings are contraries, [those philosophers] failed to arrive at [a correct understanding of] that third, assuredly necessary, beginning [viz., privation]. This [failure occurred] because they did not believe it to be possible that contraries coincide in that [third] beginning, since contraries expel one another. Hence, from [a consideration of that] first principle which denies that contradictories can both be true at the same time, the Philosopher showed that, likewise, contraries cannot be present together.<sup>281</sup>

Not only are our concepts images of what God creates, speculative thought itself is a contracted reflection of infinite divine being.<sup>282</sup> Cusanus' exploration of concepts preceded Hegel's more dynamic and integrated process of *aufheben* (see 11.1.1). *Coincidentia oppositorum* is

a state or condition in which opposites no longer oppose each other but fall together into a harmony, union, or conjunction...a unity of contrarities

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<sup>278</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 145, 148

<sup>279</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 221

<sup>280</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,16,43, 25

<sup>281</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* ('On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses'), op. cit., 40, 810

<sup>282</sup> 'Our conjectures are said to arise in our mind, in the same way that the created external world arises in the infinite divine ground. Speculative thought is thus itself a contracted reflection of the infinite divine being.', Weeks, *German Mysticism - From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, op. cit., 115



overcoming opposition by convergence without destroying or merely blending the constituent elements...it...sets forth the way God works, the order of things in relation to God and to each other, and the manner by which humans may approach and abide in God<sup>283</sup>

Similarly, his neologism of God as ‘Not-other’, the aspects of which are both ‘negative’ (not one of finite, created others) and ‘positive’ (not other than any finite, created other or all of them *and* divine and infinite)

Not Other is not an other, nor is it *other* than any other, nor is it an other in an other—for no other reason than that it is Not Other, which can in no way be other, as if it something were lacking to it, as to an other. For an other which is *other* than something lacks that than which it is *other*. But Not Other, because it is not *other* than anything, does not lack anything nor can anything be outside it.<sup>284</sup>

Particularly, though ‘Not-Other’ can be *thought*, it cannot be *conceived* - like *coincidentia oppositorum*, it functions beyond the literal meaning of words.<sup>285</sup>

Redding linked Hegel to Cusanus in relation to the coincidence of opposites

(Hegel) *again* (my italics) follows a Neoplatonist precedent, that of Nicholas of Cusa: within ‘the One’ we have to think of opposites as *coinciding*.<sup>286</sup>

He adds in a note

Extracts from Bruno’s, *De la Causa*, which reproduced key arguments of Cusanus’ *On Learned Ignorance* concerning the identity of the absolute maxima and minima were appended to Jacobi’s *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, and this *seems* (my italics) to be the transmission route for the Cusan conception of ‘*coincidentia oppositorum*’ into German Idealism.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Bond, in *Nicholas of Cusa, Selected Spiritual Writings*, op. cit., 335-336

<sup>284</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De li non aliud* (‘On Not-Other’), 1461-2, 6,20, 1118, quoted by Clyde Lee Miller, ‘Cusanus, Nicolaus [Nicolas of Cusa]’, op. cit.

<sup>285</sup> ‘*Not-other* may be called the Absolute Concept, which is indeed seen mentally but which, notwithstanding, is not conceived. ...since every concept is not other than a concept, in every concept Not-other is whatever is conceived. But, without doubt, the concept *Not-other* remains inconceivable.’, Nicholas of Cusa, *De li non aliud* (‘On Not-Other’), 1461-2, 20,94, 1152-1153

<sup>286</sup> Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, op. cit., 153

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. Hegel used ‘coincidence’ in his philosophy: ‘the *inseparability* of the Notion’s determinations is *posited*; for as negation of the negation it contains their opposition and at the same time contains it in its ground or unity, the effected coincidence of each with its other.’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 620; ‘Truth...lies in the coincidence of the object with itself, that is, with its notion.’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, op. cit., 237

What Redding *failed* to add was that as well as discussing key aspects of Cusanus' philosophy in that text, Bruno also *referred to*<sup>288</sup> the 'divine' Cusanus ('the Cusan'), 'the inventor of geometry's most beautiful secrets', relying on him as his guide (see 13.4).

Both Cusanus and Hegel had the same profound appreciation for contradiction and both took the same pleasure in speculatively exploring its complexity and manifestation. Both saw it as not only the engine of the world but, together with 'speculative' philosophy, the method of knowledge.

Yet even though Cusanus was the Neoplatonist who most thoroughly explored, prior to Hegel, the relationship between contradiction, concepts and speculation and how to convey his 'conjectures' on that basis, positioning *coincidentia oppositorum* as the way to God, rather than those of silence, *apophysis* and predication, his philosophising remained *programmatically* rather than, as was Hegel's, *systematic*. Hopkins wrote

Nicholas advances considerations that cohere with his overall viewpoint in *De Visione Dei*, but these considerations do not connect into a chain in which each link of reasoning is presumed to depend necessarily upon the preceding links.<sup>289</sup>

and Jaspers

One defect in Cusanus' philosophising is that he does not distinguish between contradiction and such related concepts as difference, polarity, and opposition. Nor does he put his thinking to test categorically and systematically (we have to go to Hegel to gain clarity on this point). He sometimes identifies opposition (*oppositio*) with contradiction (*contradictio*).<sup>290</sup>

Hegel recognised that the systematic development of Cusanus' speculative use of *coincidentia oppositorum*, of his focus on the unfolding and enfolding of concepts in the triadic structure of the Neoplatonic model and his metaphorical style - mytho-poetic circumscription in Hegel's hands - was the way to best serve his own philosophical purposes, completing the growth within idealism of the potential of Neoplatonism and thereby preparing the epistemological ground for the continuation of its development within materialism.

In his ambition to be recognised as the master of reason, of *Vernunft*, Hegel was not averse to using the tools of *Verstand*. He wrote

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<sup>288</sup> As he also does in *The Ash Wednesday Supper/La Cena de le ceneri* in which he also cited *De docta ignorantia*. I repeat that Hodgson wrote Hegel was familiar with Bruno: 'Hegel was familiar with Bruno through Schelling's work as well as that of J.G.Buhle and F.H.Jacobi', Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 274. See 13.4.1

<sup>289</sup> Hopkins in *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism, Text, Translation and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, op. cit., 43

<sup>290</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, op. cit., 258

The *sylllogism*, which is also threefold, has always been recognised as the universal form of reason<sup>291</sup>

and gave a chapter of his *Science of Logic* over to it, yet his ‘sylllogism’ is nothing of the sort - it derives from Proclus’ triad of triads. When one reads that philosophy is a syllogism based on Logic, Nature and Mind<sup>292</sup> and that ‘God...is that Being in whom Spirit and Nature are united’<sup>293</sup>, that a *plant* is a syllogism comprised of three further syllogisms of universal, particular and individual<sup>294</sup>, that *everything* is a syllogism<sup>295</sup> or, to put it most simply, that the ‘absolute syllogism’ - ‘God as Spirit’ - addresses the unity of subject and object, of subject with *itself*<sup>296</sup>, surely one must ask “What is the ‘reason’, the ‘logic’ the ‘science’, the ‘*sylllogism*’ here?”

Two types of reason employ *two* triadic structures for reasoning which are used in completely different ways towards completely different ends - that of ‘analysis’ (Hegel’s *Verstand*) uses the syllogism as a means for the setting out and testing of formal logic, that of dialectic and ‘speculation’ (Hegel’s *Vernunft*) uses *the Neoplatonic triad* as a means for attaining and knowing God.

Hegel attributed the formal syllogism (that of ‘the understanding’) to Aristotle and distinguished such reasoning from Aristotle’s ‘*speculative*’ logic

Aristotle brought to light the ordinary logic of the understanding; his forms pertain only to the relationship of finite elements to one another. But it is notable that his own logic is not grounded in this, that he does not base it upon this relationship of the understanding, for he does not proceed according to these syllogistic forms. Had Aristotle taken this path, he would not be the speculative philosopher that we have recognised him to be. None

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<sup>291</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 837

<sup>292</sup> ‘(Philosophy is comprised of a syllogism) which is based on the Logical system as starting-point, with Nature for the middle term which couples the Mind with it. The Logical principle turns to Nature and Nature to Mind.’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 314

<sup>293</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 8

<sup>294</sup> ‘the process of the plant...splits up into three syllogisms, the *first*...is the universal process, the process of the vegetable organism within itself, the relation of the individual to itself in which the individual destroys itself, converts itself into its non-organic nature, and through this self-destruction comes forth into existence - the process of formation. *Secondly*, the organism has its other, not within it, but outside of it, as a self-subsistent other; it is not itself its non-organic nature, but it finds this already confronting it as object, an object which it seems to encounter only contingently. That is the specialised process towards an external nature. The *third* is the process of the genus, the union of the first two; the process of the individuals with themselves as genus, the production and the preservation of the genus - the destruction of the individuals for the preservation of the genus as production of another individual. The non-organic nature is here the individual itself, its nature, on the other hand, is its genus: but this too is also an other, its objective nature.’ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 321-322. Ideologues fail to recognise or, more likely, deliberately overlook the parallels between the ‘syllogistic’ processes of the plant and those of the ‘Trinitarian’ God - the requirement for ‘diremption’, thereby ‘coming forth into existence’ etc.

<sup>295</sup> ‘Everything is a *sylllogism*, a universal that through particularity is united with individuality; but it is certainly not a whole consisting of *three propositions*.’, Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 669

<sup>296</sup> ‘The import of the absolute syllogism...is that an object, a subject, or whatever it is, conjoins itself with itself - [and there results] a third element, which is the unity of the first two. God as Spirit is the [absolute] syllogism, or what conjoins itself with itself; [whereas] the syllogism of the understanding concludes from one determination to another. That [absolute] unity constitutes the essential moment of the speculative content, or the speculative nature of the rational syllogism.’, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 261

of his theses or any of those speculative ideas could be framed or asserted, nor could they be valid, if one were to keep to those forms of thinking that are accessible to the understanding. We certainly must not suppose that Aristotle thought, proceeded, or carried out demonstrations according to this [formal] logic of his, according to these forms in the *Organon*. Had he done so, he would not have arrived at any speculative thesis.<sup>297</sup>

Hodgson summarised *Hegel's* speculative thesis - his development of the Proclean triad of triads

The first figure of the syllogism, in which nature mediates between the logical idea and spirit, specifies the order of the philosophical system (logic, nature, spirit). In *a valid syllogism* (my italics - validity has no place in Neoplatonic logic), according to Hegel, each of the elements must in turn occupy the middle position. Thus in the second syllogism, spirit mediates between the logical idea and nature; and in the third, the logical idea mediates between nature and spirit. The basic assumption of Hegelian philosophy is that the logical idea functions as universal principle (*Allgemeinheit*) in the syllogisms, nature as particular quality (*Besonderheit*), and spirit as singularity or individuality (*Einzelheit*). The result is speculative or absolute idealism, as opposed to subjective idealism (for which finite spirit or mind is universal principle) and naturalism or materialism (for which nature is universal principle). Absolute spirit, or infinite subjectivity, encompasses and unifies all three figures of the syllogism.<sup>298</sup>

With its long history of development, a sustaining consistency identifies Neoplatonism - from Plotinus, who initiated it, to Hegel, who completed it:

- The Neoplatonic triad is a divine triad comprised of an ultimate principle, a principle of *nous* and a principle of nature or that which creates it
- the elements of that triad comprise three aspects of a single, 'true' reality referred to as one divinity
- each principle represents a step in a process of generation (the ultimate principle), division/outflow/unfolding (the second principle) and return to/enfolding and resolution in the source (the third principle)
- the elements of the triad each imply the others as cause or consequent
- each element predominates at a successive stage in the development, without excluding the others
- the 'secondary' triad of Proclus - the 'Trinity' of Cusanus and Hegel - has its origins in the *Enneads* which also addresses 'all things are in all things, but in each after its own fashion' (which Plotinus applied to the Forms in general). The development of this triad and that principle by later Neoplatonists exemplifies the development of Neoplatonism which Hegel completed within idealism.

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.; 'Aristotle was the first to observe and describe the different forms, or, as they are called, figures of syllogism, in their subjective meaning: and he performed this work so exactly and surely, that no essential addition has ever been required. But while sensible of the value of what he has thus done, we must not forget that the forms of the syllogism of understanding, and of finite thought altogether, are not what Aristotle has made use of in his properly philosophical investigations.', Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 247

<sup>298</sup> Hodgson in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F. Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 277

Plotinus' Divine Triad - each hypostasis of which is divine - is comprised of the One or First Existent, Divine Mind or First Thinker and Thought and All-Soul or First and Only Principle of Life - the eternal cause of the existence of the sense-grasped universe. This Triad is a unity the divinity of which is conveyed or approached via any one of the hypostases

The Three Hypostases of the Supreme-Being are...quite frequently spoken of collectively as one transcendent Being or one Divine Realm: sometimes, even, where one of the Three is definitely named, the entire context shows that the reference is not to the Hypostasis actually named but to the Triad collectively or to one of the two not named<sup>299</sup>

Each of the hypostases is intimately bound to the others - all overflow outwards in one continual streaming, the second generated from the first, the third created by the second. At the same time the second and third look back to the One and Intellectual-Principle in turn. As so much in the *Enneads* that is implicit, was open to or required clarification or development, the origins of Proclus' secondary triad in the second hypostasis lie there. Dodds wrote

The elaboration within this hypostasis of a subordinate triad...is in the main the work of (Plotinus') successors, though a tendency in this direction is already observable in one or two passages of the *Enneads* - cf. V.4.2 *init.* and esp. VI.6.8. The motives governing this development seem to have been (a) the recognition that reality is logically prior to thought, since the thinker, in order to think, must first exist; (b) the desire to arrange causes in an ontological order corresponding to their degree of universality; (c) the post-Plotinian theory that all intelligibles have a triadic structure, mirroring at every level the fundamental triad (Greek) (prop. 35 n.) or (Greek) (props. 89-90 n.)<sup>300</sup>

VI.6.8 reads

At the outset we must lay aside all sense-perception; by Intellectual-Principle we know Intellectual-Principle. We reflect within ourselves there is life, there is intellect, not in extension but as power without magnitude, issue of Authentic Being which is power self-existing, no vacuity but a thing most living and intellectual - nothing more living, more intelligent, more real - and producing its effect by contact and in the ratio of the contact, closely to the close, more remotely to the remote. If Being is to be sought, then most be sought is Being at its intensest; so too the intensest of Intellect if the Intellectual act has worth; and so, too, of Life.

First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Intellectual-Principle; then the Living-Form considered as containing all things: Intellectual-Principle, as the Act of Real Being, is a second.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> 'Extracts from the Explanatory Matter in the First Edition', Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xxxiv

<sup>300</sup> Dodds' commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 252-253

<sup>301</sup> VI.6.8 from: [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0204-0270\\_Plotinus\\_The\\_Six\\_Enneads\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0204-0270_Plotinus_The_Six_Enneads_EN.pdf) (Trans. MacKenna)

The significance of triads to the Neoplatonists of late antiquity, their belief that being is before the thinking subject and that ‘all things are in all things, but in each after its own fashion’<sup>302</sup> come together in Proclus’ triad of triads - Being, Life and Intelligence<sup>303</sup> which he suspended from the first, unparticipated hypostasis. He systematically explored in this triad the potential of all three terms in their inter-relationships. To repeat, Prop. 103 from his *Elements of Theology* is

*All things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature: for in Being there is life and intelligence; in Life, being and intelligence; in Intelligence, being and life; but each of these exists upon one level intellectually, upon another vitally, and on the third existentially.*<sup>304</sup>

Proclus’ argument for this proposition is

For since each character may exist either in its cause or as substantial predicate or by participation, and since in the first term of any triad the other two are embraced as in their cause, while in the mean term the first is present by participation and the third in its cause, and finally the third contains its priors by participation, it follows that in Being there are pre-embraced Life and Intelligence, but because each term is characterised not by what it causes (since this is other than itself) nor by what it participates (since this is extrinsic in origin) but by its substantial predicate, Life and Intelligence are present there after the mode of Being, as existential life and existential intelligence; and in Life are present Being by participation and Intelligence in its cause, but each of these vitally, Life being the substantial character of the term; and in Intelligence both Life and Being by participation, and each of them intellectually, for the being of Intelligence is cognitive and its life is cognition.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> “The general principle...that ‘all things are in all things, but in each after its own fashion’, is ascribed by Syrianus...to ‘the Pythagoreans’, and by Iamblichus to Numenius. ...it is explicitly laid down by Porphyry and from Iamblichus onwards is much resorted to. The later school saw in it a convenient means of covering all the gaps left by Plotinus in his derivation of the world of experience, and thus assuring the unity of the system: it bridged oppositions without destroying them...The formula was taken over by ps.-Dion. ...to be echoed at the Renaissance by Bruno, and later given a new significance by Leibniz.”, Dodds’ commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 254

<sup>303</sup> ‘Such, therefore, is the order of this triad; so that what is divine indeed is unmingled and ranks as the first; that which is immortal is the second; and that which is intelligible the third. For the first of these is deified being; the second is *life subsisting according to the immortality of the Gods* (my italics - cf. Hegel’s Nature); and the third is intellect, which is denominated intelligible in consequence of being replete with union.’, Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. I, Ch. XXVI. He wrote of the triads of this triad: ‘here the first triad is essence, life and intellect, with appropriate unities. For essence is suspended from the first deity [of this triad,] life from the second, and intellect from the third. And these three superessential monads, unfold the monads of the first triad. But again, the second triad after this, was in the intelligible order, a superessential unity, power, and intelligible and occult life. Here however, essence, life and intellect are all vital, and are suspended from the Gods who contain the one bond of the whole of this order. For as the first unities were allotted a power unific of the middle genera, so the second unities after them, exhibit the connective peculiarity of primarily efficient causes. After these therefore, succeeds the third triad, which in the intelligible order indeed was unity, power, and intelligible intellect; but here it consists of three superessential Gods, who close the termination of the intelligible and at the same time intellectual Gods, and begird all things intellectually, I mean essence, life and intellect.’, Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. IV, Ch. III.

<sup>304</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 93

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, Prop. 103, 93

Each term in the triad and each predominant term in the sub-triads *mediates* the other two terms which mirror it, bringing out an aspect of them such that they form a coherent triad or sub-triad.<sup>306</sup> The sub-triads are a yet more thorough means of exploring and determining the relations between the terms within the overall triad which, as previously stated, are not only to be regarded as three aspects of a single reality but three successive stages, predominating in turn, in the Neoplatonic process. This is how Hegel used his philosophical ‘syllogism’.

In *On the Theology of Plato* Bk IV, Ch. III Proclus wrote of the three gods Being, Life and Intelligence

All things therefore subsisting in these Gods...they are divided triply... Eternity, therefore, abides stably in the first triad. But the triad posterior to this, is the supplier to wholes [and therefore to all things,] of progression, motion, and life according to energy. And the third triad is the supplier of conversion to the one, and of perfection which convolves all secondary natures to their principles.<sup>307</sup>

He expanded on each sub-triad, comprised of ‘an appropriate peculiarity...an all-various multitude...of powers, and a variety of forms’

The intelligible and at the same time intellectual Gods therefore are, as I have said, triply divided. And essence indeed is that which ranks as first in them, but life is the middle, and intellect the extremity of them. Since however, each of these three is perfect, and participates of the intelligible monads, I mean of the essence which is there, of intelligible life, and of intelligible intellect, they are tripled according to the participation of primarily efficient causes. And the intelligible of life indeed possesses essence, intellect, and life intelligibly; but the intelligible and intellectual of it, possesses essence, life and intellect, intelligibly and at the same time intellectually; and the intellectual of it possesses these intellectually and intelligibly. And every where indeed, there is a triad in each of the sections, but in conjunction with an appropriate peculiarity. Hence three intelligible and at the same time intellectual triads present themselves to our view, which are indeed illuminated by the divine unities, but each of them contains an all-various multitude. ...Each triad therefore comprehends in itself a multitude of powers, and a variety of forms, producing intelligible multitude into energy, and unfolding into light the generative infinity of intelligibles. And we indeed, being impelled from the participants, discover the peculiarity of the participated superessential Gods.<sup>308</sup>

Proclus wrote of his triad of triads that

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<sup>306</sup> Dodds exemplified Proclus’ application of mediation to Being: ‘This may be expressed by saying that the triad is mirrored within each of its terms, so that while e.g. the first term has Being as its predominant character, it is at the same time Life and Intelligence *sub specie entitatis* (under the appearance/aspect of being). The scheme is elaborately worked out in *Th. Pl* IV. i-iii; its purpose, as we there learn, is to reconcile distinctness with continuity.’, Dodds’ commentary, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 254

<sup>307</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, op. cit., Bk. IV, Ch. III

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

according to the order of things, the intelligible and intellectual monads generate about themselves essences, and all lives, and the intellectual genera. And through these, they unfold the unknown transcendence of themselves, preserving by itself the preexistent cause of the whole of things.<sup>309</sup>

Hegel, as quoted in his discussion of Proclus' triad (11.3.6), recognised this

These three triunities make known in a mystical fashion the absolute cause of all things, the first substance.<sup>310</sup>

and made it the basis of his own philosophy. The same 'objective rationality', the same ordering of the terms, rebadged as Logic, Nature and Spirit, the same 'mediation' of the other two terms by the predominant one in, effectively, a triad of triads, occurs in Hegel's 'doctrine of the triple syllogism'<sup>311</sup>

In their objective sense, the three figures of the syllogism declare that everything rational is manifested as a triple syllogism; that is to say, each one of the members takes in turn the place of the extremes, as well as of the mean which reconciles them. Such, for example, is the case with the three branches of philosophy: the Logical Idea, Nature, and Mind. As we first see them, Nature is the middle term which links the others together. Nature, the totality immediately before us, *unfolds* (my italics) itself into the two extremes of the Logical Idea and Mind. But Mind is Mind only when it is mediated through nature. Then, in the second place, Mind, which we know as the principle of individuality, or as the actualising principle, is the mean; and Nature and the Logical Idea are the extremes. It is Mind which cognises the Logical Idea in Nature and which thus raises Nature to its essence. In the third place again the Logical Idea itself becomes the mean: it is the absolute substance both of mind and of nature, the universal and all-pervading principle. These are the members of the Absolute Syllogism.<sup>312</sup>

Cusanus' contribution to Neoplatonism, as discussed (13.6.2), was based on his overlay of the Trinitarian myth across Proclus' triad, which triad and adaptation Hegel used in *his* philosophy to

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 344

<sup>311</sup> Hodgson in Hodgson, Ed., *G.W.F.Hegel, Theologian of the Spirit*, op. cit., 277

<sup>312</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 250-251; Cf. *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 148 'Every divine order has an internal unity of threefold origin, from its highest, its mean, and its last term. For the highest term, having the most unitary potency of the three, communicates its unity to the entire order and unifies the whole from above while remaining independent of it (prop. 125). Secondly, the mean term, reaching out toward both the extremes, links the whole together with itself as mediator (prop. 132); it transmits the bestowals of the first members of its order, draws upward the potentialities of the last, and implants in all a common character and mutual nexus - for in this sense also givers and receivers constitute a single complete order, in that they converge upon the mean term as on a centre. Thirdly, the limiting term produces a likeness and convergence in the whole order by reverting again upon its initial principle and carrying back to it the potencies which have emerged from it (prop. 146). Thus the entire rank is one through the unifying potency of its first terms, through the connective function of the mean term, and through the reversion of the end upon the initial principle of procession.', Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 131



both disguise and illustrate the stages of the Neoplatonic process, better anchoring Neoplatonism in the world, to maximise the mytho-poetic potential of his philosophy for the optimal conveyance of its content and to fully explore its potential in language.<sup>313</sup>

Just as Hegel discussed the syllogism in his *Science of Logic*, Cusanus did so in *De venatione sapientiae*

This art [of the syllogism] the master-inventor handed down to an obedient student and gave instruction that he construct syllogisms in accordance with all the modes set before him. To some extent, perhaps, the artistry of the world is like this.<sup>314</sup>

It would appear from this that Cusanus subscribed to *ratio* - Hegel's *Verstand*. Further, Hopkins wrote in a note to this

Every complete syllogism consists of three propositions: two premises and a conclusion. Each of the propositions has both a subject-term and a predicate-term. The two premises must have one term in common (either both subject-terms or both predicate-terms or the subject-term of one and the predicate term of another) so that altogether there are only three different terms. ...<sup>315</sup>

Yet in the second last paragraph of the final chapter - Chapter 39, 'Summarising conclusion', Cusanus indicated how different from scholastic analysis was the nature of his reasoning

All men, not unjustifiably, praise the great Plato, who ascended [inferentially] from the sun unto wisdom by way of a likeness. Thus too [proceeded] the great Dionysius, who ascended [inferentially] from fire unto God, and from the sun unto the Creator, by means of likenesses-of-properties which he expounds. Likewise also Gregory the Theologian, in his theological orations against the Eunomians, urges that [this ascent] be made, because in this present world—where we know in part and prophesy in part—we must ascend by means of a mirror and a symbolism, as the divine Paul reports.<sup>316</sup>

Cassirer correctly wrote that

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<sup>313</sup> Magee wrote: 'Hegel claims that the results of theology (true theology) turn out to be indistinguishable from those of philosophy: God is revealed to be the Absolute, and the Christian Trinity to be a figurative way of speaking about the three moments of the Absolute: Logic (or the account of the Absolute Idea), nature and Spirit.', Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 245-246; again, 'The Trinity, for Hegel, is a kind of mystic representation of the three moments of speculative philosophy.', *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>314</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* ('On the Pursuit of Wisdom'), 1462-3, op. cit., 10,4, 1286. The Chapter title is 'How one is aided by an example from the art of logic.'

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 25, 1359-1360

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 115,39, 1349

(To formal logic Cusanus objected that the absolute and unconditioned can never be caught in the net of syllogistic logic. ...On this basis) every kind of 'rational' theology is refuted - and in its place steps 'mystical theology'.<sup>317</sup>

Weeks' point that the tri-unity of God is fundamental to German mysticism<sup>318</sup> can be seen in Cusanus' triad - modelled on that of Proclus

Divinity is Infinite Oneness, Infinite Equality, and Infinite Union—in such a way that in the Oneness there are Equality and Union, in the Equality there are Oneness and Union, and in the Union there are Oneness and Equality.<sup>319</sup>

The triads of Proclus, Cusanus and Hegel - as does Plotinus' Intellectual-Principle in its working - all conclude in a perspectival cultus. While absolute truth is beyond one person's grasp, an infinity of finite 'minds' embodies it. It is not we ourselves who know, but rather it is God who knows in us. Cusanus wrote towards the end of *De docta ignorantia*

Therefore, this union is a church, or congregation, of many in one—just as many members are in one body. each member existing with its own role. (In the body, one member is not the other member; but each member is in the one body, and by the mediation of the body it is united with each other member. No member of the body can have life and existence apart from the body, even though in the body one member is all the others only by the mediation of the body.) Therefore, as we journey here below, the truth of our faith can exist only in the spirit of Christ—the order of believers remaining, so that in one Jesus there is diversity in harmony. ...The church cannot in some other way be more one. For "church" bespeaks a oneness of many [members]— each of whom has his personal truth preserved without confusion of natures or of degrees; but the more *one* the church is, the greater it is; hence, this church—[viz.] the church of the eternally triumphant— is maximal, since no greater union of the church is possible. ...<sup>320</sup>

Hegel wrote towards the end of his *Encyclopaedia Logic*

Every individual being is some one aspect of the Idea...It is only in (individuals) altogether and in their relation that the notion is realised.<sup>321</sup>

Of the Idea he wrote

The idea as a process runs through three stages in its development. The first form of the idea is Life: that is, the idea in the form of immediacy. The

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<sup>317</sup> Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, op. cit., 12-13

<sup>318</sup> Weeks, *German Mysticism - From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, op. cit., 34

<sup>319</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis* ('On Speculations'), op. cit., II,173,17, 252

<sup>320</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., III,256,12, 146

<sup>321</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 275

second form is that of mediation or differentiation; and this is the idea in the form of Knowledge, which appears under the double aspect of the Theoretical and Practical idea. The process of knowledge eventuates in the restoration of the unity enriched by difference. This gives the third form of the idea, the Absolute Idea: which last stage of the logical idea evinces itself to be at the same time the true first, and to have a being due to itself alone.<sup>322</sup>

Being, Life, Intellect; *Logic* (Being, Essence, Concept), *Philosophy of Nature* (Mechanics, Physics, Organics), *Philosophy of Mind/Spirit* (Subjective Mind/Spirit, Objective Mind/Spirit, Absolute Mind/Spirit); emanation, development and perspectival return. The roots of the ‘syllogism’ of the German Proclus are not traced through any structure of formal validity but through Cusanus’ Trinity and Proclus’ triad of triads to Plotinus’ contemplation on the relation between Being, Intellectual-Principle and Living-Form.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 279

<sup>323</sup> Of Hegel’s ‘divine triangle fragment’ of 1804-5 Magee wrote: ‘It seems clear that in this fragment...Hegel is developing the outlines of his philosophical system. And to do so, he is employing the language and style of Boehme. Hegel’s first triangle, “God the Father,” is analogous to the later *Logic* (with its threefold structure of Being-Essence-Concept), while the second triangle, of *the Son or earth* (my italics), corresponds to the *Philosophy of Nature* (Mechanics-Physics-Organics). And the relationship between the two triangles is strikingly similar to the relationship between Hegel’s Logic and Nature: it is the *telos* of Idea to become embodied as the natural world. (In Hegel’s words, the “Idea of God” becomes “the universe of God.”) In the third triangle, God intuits *the Son, or earth*, (my italics) as himself, and achieves self-consciousness, a moment that approximates the role played by Spirit in Hegel’s mature system. Spirit—human Spirit—brings the system, and reality itself, to completion when it recognises that it itself is the embodiment of Idea, and that all of nature (as well as history) is intelligible as a kind of progressive unfolding of its own being.

What is particularly odd about the triangle fragment is that it is so close to Hegel’s own description in the *Lectures* of Boehme’s Trinity. We know that during roughly the same period in which he wrote the triangle fragment, Hegel altered his philosophical system from four divisions to the familiar triad of Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit—the same triad seemingly depicted in mythic, Boehmean style in the fragment. I would like to suggest the possibility that Hegel’s study of Boehme’s Trinity played a role in helping him to formulate his system as tripartite. I do not mean that Hegel got from Boehme merely the idea of a three-part system. Rather, I am suggesting that it may have been Boehme’s peculiar interpretation of the Trinity that helped Hegel to see specifically *how* his own system could be unified in a tripartite form.

To put things in the starkest possible terms (and at the risk of repetition), the tripartite system that Hegel eventually arrived at in Jena:

1. begins with the *Logic*, which expresses a self-related Idea that is nevertheless mere Idea; an inchoate reality (“God in himself”), which then,
2. “freely releases itself” as nature, a scale of forms (described in *The Philosophy of Nature*), imperfectly expressing or embodying Idea, culminating in,
3. Spirit (the subject of *The Philosophy of Spirit*), which understands itself as the final flower of all that has gone before—as the fully adequate embodiment of Idea; self-related Idea made flesh in the form of living, human self-awareness.’, Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, op. cit. Magee’s description of Hegel’s triangle fits the order and philosophical development of both Proclus’ triad and Cusanus’ *De docta ignorantia* - both of which *Neoplatonic* parallels Magee, in his determination to argue the influence of Böhme on Hegel, ignored. I will discuss Magee’s views regarding Hegel, Böhme and Hermeticism next.

## 14. Magee on Hermeticism, Böhme and Hegel

### 14.1 Magee's misrepresentation of the *Hermetica*

My writing in this section is premised on my thesis to this point - that Neoplatonism underwent significant development within both pagan and Christian cultures and that the most complex and thorough expression of that development is the philosophy of Hegel.

*Prior* to my reading the *Hermetica*<sup>1</sup> I have given Magee high praise for arguing that Hegel was not only *influenced* by mysticism - the evidence abundant and the influence decisive<sup>2</sup> - but that he *was* a mystic. Magee correctly wrote that it should no longer be possible to treat Hegel as an arch-rationalist, 'let alone to read him in a non-metaphysical or anti-theological manner.'<sup>3</sup> His discussion of Hegel's mytho-poetic circumscription is insightful and accurate. Magee's philosophical position is all the more notable given that he is an academic - the great majority of philosophy academics still dutifully parrot the ideological line that Hegel is the patriarch of conceptual reason.

The evidence Magee details of Hegel's interest in Hermeticism<sup>4</sup> throughout his career is undeniable, long-overdue and excellent but the very charge that he makes of other academics, that they wilfully distort and misrepresent that evidence, seeing what they want to see<sup>5</sup> applies equally to him in his argument that Hegel's mysticism is Hermeticist. Magee's writing on the subject exemplifies the academic ignorance of and hostility towards Neoplatonism and the developments within it, deliberately and grossly misrepresents the *Hermetica* in order to shoehorn Hegel into the status of 'Hermeticist' and fails to recognise the deeply ethical aspect of the *philosophies* of both Neoplatonism and Hermeticism.

Magee begins *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* with a simple, striking and challenging assertion

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<sup>1</sup> 'before the eleventh century...there is no sign of the *Corpus* as such, although individual treatises were evidently in use as early as the third century CE.', Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, op. cit., 70; 'The Greek *Perfect Discourse (Logos teleios)* that became the Latin *Asclepius*...seems to have been written in the latter part of the period in which scholars generally locate the theoretical *Hermetica*, 100 to 300 CE; most would put C.H. I toward the beginning of that time.', *Ibid.*, 73

<sup>2</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 253

<sup>3</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 17

<sup>4</sup> Magee quoted Antoine Faivre having written that 'Hermeticism' has come to be used 'to designate the general attitude of mind underlying a variety of traditions and/or currents beside alchemy, such as Hermetism (the religion of the *Corpus Hermeticum*), Astrology, Kabbalah, Christian Theosophy, and *philosophia occulta* or *magia*', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., Note, 8

<sup>5</sup> 'Scholars seize on the negative things Hegel says about Boehme (e.g. that he was a "barbarian") and assert that Hegel "decisively rejects" him. This really amounts to a wilful distortion. It's an instance of seeing what one wants to see.', Magee in an interview by Stanislav Panin, posted 28.12.16, <https://academia.fzrw.info/archives/1107>; Magee begins an essay by making the point that Hegel scholars have often been eager to minimise Hegel's strong interest in Böhme 'and have, in some cases, misrepresented the available evidence', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 527

Hegel is not a philosopher. He is no lover or seeker of wisdom - he believes he has found it. ...Hegel claims to have arrived at Absolute Knowledge, which he identifies with wisdom. Hegel's claim to have attained wisdom is completely contrary to the original Greek conception of philosophy as the love of wisdom, that is, the ongoing pursuit rather than the final possession of wisdom<sup>6</sup>

He dramatically states

Hegel's thought is not a part of the history of philosophy. It represents an altogether different standpoint, one that represents *completed wisdom*, not the search for wisdom. Hegel is a wise man offering not *Philosophie* but *Wissenschaft*, *scientia*, *episteme*. He calls this science of wisdom "speculation" and opposes it to reflection (*Reflexion*).<sup>7</sup>

and

Hermeticism replaces the love of wisdom with the lust for power. As we shall see, Hegel's system is the ultimate expression of this pursuit of mastery.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of problems in the above for Magee. Not only has he repeatedly referred to 'Hegel's philosophy' and to Hermeticism as philosophy in his writing,<sup>9</sup> Magee fails to recognise that the Greek 'love of wisdom' was never the arcane abstract divorced from the world so beloved of modern philosophy academics, but that it was *centred* on their thinking about the world. The 'first Greek philosopher' Thales modelled this - the root of 'wisdom' is 'knowledge'.

To lay claim to '*absolute knowledge*' - capitalised or not - is a philosophical position no less than is a claim to be *pursuing* 'wisdom' or to be the proud possessor of it. Each must be defended. According to his argument, Magee not only implies that one philosophical school - Hermeticism - is the mere expression of a lust for power, he also rejects the *system* of Neoplatonism, according to *my* argument and with parallels to Hermeticism from the history of philosophy - a school described by Hegel as the *consummation* of Greek philosophy and Proclus as its *culmination*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 1

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 120

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>9</sup> 'Hegel's major objection to Boehme is that he expresses ideas in "sensuous" form. In Hegel's philosophy, this is called *Vorstellung* (or *das vorstellende Denken*), often translated into English as "picture thinking"', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 540; 'The divisions of Hegel's philosophy follow a pattern that is typical of many forms of mystical and Hermetic philosophy.', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 4

<sup>10</sup> 'The third [epoch of the first] period takes the shape of Alexandrian philosophy (Neoplatonism, but likewise Neo-Aristotelian philosophy too). The consummation of Greek philosophy as such, it established the realm of noumena, the ideal realm. This philosophy therefore incorporated all earlier forms of philosophy within it. Plotinus lived in the third century and Proclus in the fifth. By choosing to regard Proclus as the culmination of this philosophy, the entire period of Greek Philosophy then amounts to about one thousand years.', Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 202

By implication, Magee is denying that what Hegel wrote reflecting the ‘*world within*’ of consciousness is a complex and deeply subtle philosophical enquiry - a position I do not believe he holds. Again, Magee fails to appreciate the ethical nature of both Neoplatonism and Hermeticism - both of which are focused on the Good as a fundamental principle and a pinnacle of their systems. Both schools contain reflections on the physical world in relation to their world of consciousness.

Magee argues that what he *claims* is Hermeticism describes Hegel’s system. That he charged Hegel with replacing philosophy with *theosophy* is particularly noteworthy

Hegel displays the essential characteristic of Hermeticism: the doctrine that God alone is not complete, that He lacks self-knowledge, and that He therefore creates the world as the mirror in which he recognises Himself, specifically through the speculative activity of the Hermetic adept, who by knowing God, allows God to know himself. Hegel claims to be such an adept, having replaced the love of wisdom with the possession of wisdom, philosophy with theosophy.<sup>11</sup>

Magee repeats this claim over and again<sup>12</sup> But in doing so, he deliberately and grossly distorts Hermeticism - specifically, the philosophy in the *Hermetica* (both the *Corpus Hermeticum* which he quotes and the *Asclepius* to which he referred). The following quotation states why Magee thinks Hegel was an Hermeticist

Hermeticists not only hold that God requires creation, they make a specific creature, man, play a crucial role in God’s self-actualisation. Hermeticism holds that man can know God, and that man’s knowledge of God is necessary for God’s own completion. Consider the words of *Corpus Hermeticum* 10: “For God does not ignore mankind; on the contrary, he recognises him fully and wishes to be recognised. For mankind this is the only deliverance, the knowledge of God. It is ascent to Olympus.” *Corpus Hermeticum* 11 asks, “Who is more visible than God? This is why he made all things: so that through them all you might look on him.” As Garth Fowden notes, what God gains from creation is recognition: “Man’s contemplation of God is in some sense a two-way process. Not only does Man wish to know God, but God too desires to be known by the most glorious of His creations, Man.” In short, it is man’s end to achieve knowledge of God (or “the wisdom of God,” theosophy). In so doing, man realises God’s own need to be recognised. Man’s knowledge of God becomes God’s knowledge of himself. Thus the need for which the cosmos is created is the need for self-knowledge, attained through recognition. Variations on this doctrine are to be found throughout the Hermetic tradition.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 255

<sup>12</sup> ‘As a Hermeticist...Hegel regards God before creation as incomplete. To complete himself, God must know himself, and the immediate self-cognition God possesses before creation is not self-knowledge. Self-knowledge requires mediated re-cognition. It requires that the self see itself reflected in another and recognise itself there.’, *Ibid.*, 257

<sup>13</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 9-10

According to the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, God does *not* require creation for his completion - *he is complete* (which is expressed in several ways). Mankind plays *no* role in God's 'self-actualisation'; mankind's knowledge of God is necessary for *mankind's* 'completion' - return to divinity. Magee's partial quotations from *Corpus Hermeticum* X and XI deliberately misrepresent Hermetic philosophy. Regarding the first quotation, God does not ignore mankind and wishes to be recognised *because of his goodness*, not from need. 'Recognition' (knowledge) of God is mankind's only deliverance - *from evil*. The full, substantiating quote reads

For god does not ignore mankind; on the contrary, he recognises him fully and wishes to be recognised. For mankind this is the only deliverance, the knowledge of god. It is ascent to Olympus. *A soul becomes good only in this way*, (my italics) though it is not good <forever> but becomes evil. By necessity it becomes so.'

"What do you mean, O Trismegistus?"

"Envision the soul of a child, my son, which has not yet accepted its separation from itself; its body has not yet attained its full bulk, {of which it has only a little as yet}. How beautiful it is to look at, from every point of view, not yet sullied by the passions of the body, still depending closely from the soul of the cosmos. But when the body gets its bulk and drags the soul down to the body's grossness, the soul, having separated from itself, gives birth to forgetting, and it no longer shares in the beautiful and the good. The forgetting becomes vice.<sup>14</sup>

Likewise with Magee's second quote - the full text, echoing the point of my first quotation reads

And do you say, "god is unseen"? Hold your tongue! Who is more visible than God? This is why he made all things: so that through them all you might look on him. *This is the goodness of god, this is his excellence* (my italics): that he is visible through all things.<sup>15</sup>

Magee has quoted from the *Corpus Hermeticum* in such a way as to *incorrectly identify* a basis for Böhme's theosophy and on the back of that, to define Hegel's mysticism as Hermetic.

The parallels between Neoplatonism and Hermeticism are several. Neoplatonism and Hermeticism are both built on emanation from and return to a source. In both the *Enneads* and the *Asclepius* that source is 'motion motionless'. Where the *Enneads* have the three hypostases (the One, Intellectual-Principle and All-Soul) and Proclus' more developed triad within the second hypostasis comprising Being, Life and Intelligence reflected, as I have argued, in the structure of Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia* and then Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, the *Corpus Hermeticum* speaks of God, the cosmos as son, and human. In both Neoplatonism and Hermeticism there is that same move from first principle to existence to intellect which is the means of return again to a 'community'.

A significant step towards the possibility that the One, which Plotinus described as 'that self-intellection which takes place in eternal repose',<sup>16</sup> could be known is Proclus' triad in which one

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<sup>14</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, op. cit., 234-235

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 252

<sup>16</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., xciv, V.4.2

Being is fully a part of the process of knowledge. Cusanus, following him, theorised the knowing of God (13.6.6). Furthermore and again contrary to Magee's distinction between Plotinus' One and Hermeticism's God - a most important point - the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* speak of the knowledge of God as *ineffable*, the latter of the *limited* capacity of our consciousness to see 'great things'.

Both philosophies recognise the centrality of contradiction and change, the fundamental difference overall between them being that Hermeticism is philosophy as myth and aphorism and Neoplatonism philosophy as analysis and argument.

In order to show how and the degree to which Magee misrepresented Hermeticism and the *Hermetica* (I include here as did Copenhaver in his translation both the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*) and to illustrate the parallels between Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, I include quotations from those texts, with my summaries in italics above them. I have used two translations for each, the first two by Copenhaver, the second two in turn by Everard (published twenty six years after Böhme's death) and Mead's, published in 1906.

*Hermetica*, Brian P. Copenhaver, 2000

*Corpus Hermeticum*

I

*Concerns how to be saved*

II

*God gives everything and receives nothing*

"God has one nature - the good. In god and the good together there is but one kind, from which come all other kinds. The good is what gives everything and receives nothing; god gives everything and receives nothing; therefore, god is <the> good, and the good is god."

III

*The divine (without mention of 'human') is wisdom, a beginning and completion*

'God is the glory of all things, as also are the divine and the divine nature. God, as well as mind and nature and matter, is the beginning of all things that are since he is wisdom meant to show them forth. The divine is also a beginning, and it is nature and energy and necessity and completion and renewal.'

*The gods created humans to contemplate and know (not complete) divine power*

'...The gods sowed the generations of humans to know the works of god...And through the wonder-working course of the cycling gods they created every soul incarnate to contemplate heaven, the course of the heavenly gods, the works of god and the working of nature; to examine things that are good; to know divine power...'

IV

*God sent man to earth because god is good; man recognised, in astonishment, its maker*

'Because he is good, it was <not> for himself alone that he wished to make this offering and to adorn the earth; so he sent the man below, an adornment of the divine body, mortal life from life immortal. ...The man became a spectator of god's work. He looked at it in astonishment and recognised its maker.'



*If a man develops his mind he will be drawn up to god*

V

*Pray to the father for the grace to enable you to understand god (i.e. god gives one the grace to understand him)*

‘You then, Tat, my child, pray first to the lord, the father, the only, who is not one but from whom the one comes; ask him the grace to enable you to understand so great a god, to permit even one ray of his to illuminate your thinking.’

*There is nothing that god is not - god gives everything and takes nothing*

‘so great is the father of all. ...there is nothing in all the cosmos that he is not. He is himself the things that are and those that are not. ...There is nothing that he is not, for he also is all that is... You give everything and take nothing. For you have it all, and there is nothing that you do not have. ... you are whatever I am; you are whatever I make; you are whatever I say. You are everything, and there is nothing else; what is not, you are as well. You are all that has come to be; you are what has not come to be; you are the mind who understands, the father who makes his craftwork, the god who acts, and the good who makes all things.’

VI

*God, the good has an energy that is perfectly complete*

‘The good, Asclepius, is in nothing except in god alone, or rather god himself is always the good. If this is so, the good must be the substance of all motion and generation (for nothing is abandoned by it), but this substance has an energy about it that stays at rest, that has no lack and no excess, that is perfectly complete, a source of supply, present in the beginning of all things. When I say that what supplies everything is good, I also mean that it is wholly and always good.’

*God lacks for nothing*

‘God lacks for nothing...Nothing is stronger than god...<nothing is more beautiful.> to cause desire in him...nothing is wiser, to make him jealous.’

*God is the good*

‘The good is in god alone, then, or god himself is the good.’

*We need to be reverent and to know god - we have need of the good and the beautiful - of what god is - i.e., we need god, not he us*

‘Only one road travels from here to the beautiful - reverence combined with knowledge. ...Such, Asclepius, are the good and the beautiful for humans, things we can neither shun nor hate. Hardest of all to bear is that we have need of them and cannot live without them.’

VII

*The greatest evil in mankind is ignorance concerning god*

*God wishes to be seen*

‘The greatest evil in mankind is ignorance concerning god’

‘seek a guide to take you by the hand and lead you to the portals of knowledge. There shines the light cleansed of darkness. There no one is drunk. All are sober and gaze with the heart toward one who wishes to be seen...But first you must rip off the tunic that you wear, the garment of

ignorance...Such is the odious tunic you have put on. It strangles you and drags you down with it so that you will not...look up and see the fair vision of truth and the good that lies within'

## VIII

'god begins, contains, and composes all things.'

## X

*God wishes to be seen because he is good but we are not strong enough to open our minds' eyes and look; the knowledge of god is ineffable*

'the good can come to be in none other than him alone who receives nothing but wills all things to be.'

'god also wishes this seeing to happen...For being recognised is characteristic of the good. ...the vision of the good...illuminates to the extent that one capable of receiving the influence of intellectual splendour can receive it. ...we are not yet strong enough to open our mind's eyes and look on the incorruptible, incomprehensible beauty of that good. *In the moment when you have nothing to say about it, you will see it, for the knowledge of it is divine silence and suppression of all the senses.* (my italics)'

*When soul has looked on the beauty of the good it is drawn upwards and deified.*

*God wants to be recognised so that we may acquire knowledge and become divine*

'The vice of soul is ignorance. ...The virtue of soul, by contrast, is knowledge; for one who knows is good and reverent and already divine.'

*Everything is the result of contradiction*

'everything must be the product of opposition and contrariety, and it cannot be otherwise.'

*The human, too, is not good and because he is mortal, he is evil as well.*

*There are three - god the father, the cosmos (son) and the human (the son of the son)*

'There are these three, then: god the father and the good; the cosmos; and the human. And god holds the cosmos, but the cosmos holds the human. And the cosmos becomes the son of god, but the human becomes the son of the cosmos, a grandson, as it were.'

*God wishes to be recognised so that mankind may be delivered (may ascend) from evil through his knowledge of god*

'For god does not ignore mankind; on the contrary, he recognises him fully and wishes to be recognised. For mankind this is the only deliverance, the knowledge of god. It is ascent to Olympus. A soul becomes good only in this way, though it is not good <forever> but becomes evil. By necessity it becomes so.'

'What do you mean, O Trismegistus?'

'Envision the soul of a child, my son, which has not yet accepted its separation from itself; its body has not yet attained its full bulk, {of which it has only a little as yet}. How beautiful it is to look at, from every point of view, not yet sullied by the passions of the body, still depending closely from the soul of the cosmos. But when the body gets its bulk and drags the soul down to the body's grossness, the soul, having separated from itself, gives birth to forgetting, and it no longer shares in the beautiful and the good. The forgetting becomes vice.'

'the human, because he moves and is mortal, is evil.'

‘when mind has entered a reverent soul, it leads it to the light of knowledge. Such a soul as this never has its fill of hymning and praising, always blessing all people and doing them good in every deed and word, in memory of its father.

Therefore, my child, one who gives thanks to god must pray to acquire a good mind. ... There is a community of souls: the souls of the gods commune with souls of humans, those of humans with souls of unreasoning things. The greater take charge of the lesser... God stands above all things and watches over them.’

*Mind unites humans to the gods and all things exist by action of the one*

‘The greater take charge of the lesser: gods of humans, humans of living things without reason, and god takes charge of them all. For he is greater than all of them, and all are less than he. Thus the cosmos is subject to god, mankind to the cosmos and unreasoning things to mankind. God stands above all things and watches over them. And energies are like rays from god, natural forces like rays from the cosmos, arts and learning like rays from mankind. Energies work through the cosmos and upon mankind through the natural rays of the cosmos, but natural forces work through the elements, and humans work through the arts and through learning. And this is the government of the universe, dependent from the nature of the one and spreading through the one mind. Nothing is more godlike than <mind>, nothing more active nor more capable of uniting humans to the gods and gods to humans; mind is the good demon. Blessed is the soul completely full of mind, wretched the soul completely empty of it.’”

‘we must dare to say that the human on earth is a mortal god but that god in heaven is an immortal human. Through these two, then, cosmos and human, all things exist, but they all exist by action of the one.’”

XI

*God’s power does not come from humans, humans exist because of him - they are images of him*

‘god’s energy is an insuperable power, not comparable to anything human or divine. ... Because he is an energetic power, his autonomy does not come from things that come to be; those that come to be exist by his agency.’

‘God... is what he makes. ... All things come to be by the agency of god’

*The human is, ultimately, an image of god.*

*God makes the good necessarily because it is god’s life and movement*

‘Just as a human cannot live apart from life, neither can god exist without making the good. For in god this making is life and movement’

‘All things are in god’

‘And do you say, “god is unseen”? Hold your tongue! Who is more visible than God? This is why he made all things: so that through them all you might look on him. This is the goodness of god, this is his excellence: that he is visible through all things.’

XII

(because of mind and reason) ‘humans are mortal gods’

‘And god, who is energy and power, surrounds everything and permeates everything’

*God is all and the all permeates everything and surrounds everything*

‘in the all there is nothing that he (god) is not. ... For god is all. And the all permeates everything and surrounds everything.’

### XIII

*Concerned with the means for purification and rebirth. It discusses the singing of a hymn of praise to god the one.*

### XIV

*God is all-powerful, not impotent*

‘we must understand these two things: what comes to be and who makes it. Between them there is nothing, no third thing.’

‘(Those who do not know god) profane him greatly by imputing to him conditions of disdain and impotence. ...in god there is only one condition, the good, but one who is good is not contemptuous or impotent. This is what god is, the good, all power to make all things.’

### XVI

*God is master, maker, father and container. He is one and all*

‘I shall open the discourse by invoking god, the master, maker, father and container of the whole universe, the all who is one and the one who is all. For the plenitude of all things *is* one and *is in* one, not because the one duplicates itself but because both are one.’

*Permanence is change*

‘the permanence of every body is change’

*God is all things and his making all things is ceaseless*

‘all things are parts of god. But if all things are parts of god, then all things are god, and he makes himself in making all things. His making can never cease because he is ceaseless. And as god has no end, so his making has neither beginning nor end.’

### XVIII

*We praise god to confess our father’s limitless power*

‘Moreover, this very fact contributes to god’s renown: that he is greater than his own progeny, and that the preface, beginning, middle and end of our praises are to confess our father’s limitless power and limitless extent. Praising god is in our nature as humans because we happen to be in some sense his descendants’

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*Asclepius*

*Why were humans put in the world?*

In the reply to the question ‘Why then, Trismegistus, should humans have been put in the world?’ is the reply: ‘so great and so good was (god) that he wanted there to be another to admire the one (another god) he had made from himself, and straightaway he made mankind, imitator of his reason and attentiveness. God’s will is itself perfect achievement since willing and achievement are complete for him at one and the same moment of time. After he <had made> mankind *ousiōdēs* (a divine likeness) and noticed that he could not take care of everything unless he was covered over with a material wrapping, god covered him with a bodily dwelling and commanded that all humans be like this, mingling and combining the two natures into one in their just proportions. Thus god shapes mankind from the nature of soul and of body, from the eternal and the mortal, in other words, so that the living being so shaped can prove adequate to both its beginnings, wondering at heavenly beings and worshipping them, tending earthly beings and governing them.’

‘god...has two images, world and mankind.’

*Spirit supplies the world and is subject to the will of god*

‘Spirit supplies and invigorates all things in the world; like an instrument or a mechanism it is subject to the will of the supreme god.’

*The one, the supreme governor, always begets what he wishes*

‘And the whole of it complies with that supreme governor, the master, so that really there are not many, but rather one. In fact, all depend from one and flow from it...he is one and all...god, the only and the all...ever pregnant with his own will, always begets whatever he wishes to procreate.’

*God is completely full of all things and wills all that he has*

‘God wills nothing in excess since he is completely full of all things and wills what he has. He wills all that is good, and he has all that he wills. All things are good that he considers and wills. Such is god, and the world is his image - <good> from good.’

*God is everywhere and surveys everything*

‘seated atop the summit of the highest heaven, god is everywhere and surveys everything all around.’

*God shows himself by illuminating people with the understanding of mind*

‘the father and master of all, who alone is all, shows himself freely to all - not *where* as in a place nor *how* as through some quality nor *how much* as in a quantity but by illuminating people with the understanding that comes only through mind.’

*Nothing is stable or fixed other than god who is whole and perfect*

‘Nothing in this situation is stable, nothing fixed, nothing immobile among things that come to be in heaven and earth: the lone exception is god, and rightly he alone, for he is whole, full and perfect in himself and by himself and about himself.’”

*Our consciousness and capacity to see the things that are in heaven are limited*

*we humans see the things that are in heaven as if through a mist, to the extent that we can, given the condition of human consciousness. When it comes to seeing great things, our concentration is quite confined,* (my italics) but once it has seen, the happiness of our awareness is vast.’

*God is everything - all things are from and in him*

‘god is everything; everything comes from him; everything depends on his will. ...Without god there was nothing, nor is, nor will be, for all things are from him, in him and through him’

*Here below, it is the gods who help US*

‘here below our gods render aid to humans as if through loving kinship’

*The Asclepius concludes with a prayer to god*

‘Asclepius asked: “Tat, do you think we should suggest that your father tell them to add frankincense and spices as we pray to god?”

When Trismegistus heard him, he was disturbed and said: “A bad omen, Asclepius, very bad. To burn incense and such stuff when you entreat god smacks of sacrilege. For *he wants nothing who is himself all things or in whom all things are.* (my italics) Rather let us worship him by giving thanks, for god finds mortal gratitude to be the best incense.”

“We thank you, supreme and most high god, by whose grace alone we have attained the light of your knowledge; holy name that must be honoured, the one name by which our ancestral faith blesses god alone, we thank you who deign to grant to all a father’s fidelity, reverence and love, along with any power that is sweeter, by giving us the gift of consciousness, reason and understanding...”

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*The Corpus Hermetica*, John Everard, 1650

I

*The order of existence*

v ‘*First, God; Secondly, the World; Thirdly, Man.*’ (my italics)

vi ‘God is good, Man is evil.’

viii ‘Things upon Earth do nothing advantage those in Heaven, but all things in Heaven do profit and advantage the things upon Earth’

‘What is God? The immutable or unalterable Good. What is Man? An unchangeable Evil.’

II

xxi ‘Holy art Thou Whom Nature hath not Formed. Holy art Thou that art Stronger than all Power. Holy art Thou, that art Greater than all Excellency. Holy art Thou, Who art Better than all Praise. ...’

III

xxiii ‘For there were in the Chaos, an infinite darkness in the Abyss or bottomless Depth, and Water, and a subtle Spirit intelligible in Power; and there went out the Holy Light, and the Elements were coagulated from the Sand out of the moist Substance.’

IV

xxvi ‘it is the property of Good to be known’

*The God of Hermeticism is ineffable*

xxvii ‘for the present we are less intent to the Vision, and cannot yet open the eyes of our minds to behold the incorruptible, and incomprehensible Beauty of that Good; *But then shall we see it, when we have nothing at all to say of it. For the knowledge of it, is a Divine Silence,* (my italics) and the rest of all the Senses; For neither can he that understands that understand any thing else, nor he that sees that, see any thing else, nor hear any other thing, nor in sum, move the Body.’

*The God of Hermeticism is ineffable*

xxviii ‘*For God, and the Father, and Good, is neither spoken nor heard.*’ (my italics)

xxxi ‘For God is not ignorant of man, but knows him perfectly, and will be known by him. This only is healthful to man; the Knowledge of God: this is the return of Olympus; by this only the Soul is made good, and not sometimes good, and sometimes evil, but of necessity Good.’

xxxvi 'Wherefore we must be bold to say, That an Earthly Man is a Mortal God, and That the Heavenly God is an Immortal Man. Wherefore, by these two are all things governed, the Word and Man; but they and all things else, of that which is One.'

V

*There is nothing that God has not or is not*

xli 'all things are in thee; all things from thee, thou givest all things, and takest nothing; for thou hast all things and there is nothing that thou has not.'

xlii 'thou art what I am, thou art what I do, thou art what I say. Thou Art All Things and there is Nothing Else Thou art not. Thou Art Thou, All that is Made, and all that is not Made.'

VI

*God wants for nothing*

xliii 'And this Essence hath about or in himself a Stable, and firm Operation, wanting nothing, most full, and giving abundantly.'

'the Good...is present to none, but God alone; for *he wanteth nothing*, (my italics) that he should desire to have it, nor can anything be taken from him...'

*It is mankind that needs*

xlvi 'Mankind has need of the Good (i.e. of god) and cannot live without it.'

VIII

The Eighth Book. 'That The Greatest Evil In Man, Is The Not Knowing God.'

X

lxxix 'it is the greatest evil, not to know God.'

XIII

*From God comes the World and from the World comes man*

'God is the Father of the World, but the World is the Father of things in the World. And the World is the Son of God, but things in the World are the Sons of the World.'

XVII

cxxi 'He (God) is stronger, and One, and only knowing all things indeed, as not having any thing more ancient than himself.'

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*The Perfect Sermon (The Asclepius)*, George Robert Stowe Mead, 1906

VIII

*God made man to contemplate the world and the things in heaven*

xvii

'(God made the second god [the world/his son]). Accordingly, in that He (God) was so mighty and so fair, He willed that some one else should have the power to contemplate the One He had made from Himself. And thereon He made man, - the imitator of His Reason and His Love.'

'The Will of God is in itself complete accomplishment; inasmuch as together with His having willed, in one and the same time He hath brought it to full accomplishment.'

xviii

*'(God made man so that he could) admire and worship things in heaven, and cultivate and govern things on earth.'* (my italics)

xix "'Tis in the admiration, adoration [and] the praise of men, and [in their] acts of worship, that Heaven and Heaven's hosts find their delight.'

X

*The three Gods of Hermeticism*

xxi 'The Lord of the Eternity is the first God; the second's Cosmos; man is the third.'

XX

*God is all-complete*

xl 'He (God), then, alone, yet all-complete in the fertility of either sex, ever with child of His own Will, doth ever bring to birth whatever He hath willed to procreate.'

XXII

*God helps man to hope and effort*

xliv 'as for man, He (God) doth distinguish him from all the other animals by reason and by discipline alone; by means of which men can remove and separate their bodies' vices, - He helping them to hope and effort after deathlessness.'

XXX

*God is full and perfect*

lxi 'Immoveable [is] God alone, and rightly [He] alone; for He Himself is in Himself, and by Himself, and round *Himself, completely full and perfect.* (my italics) He is His own immoveable stability.'

XXXI

lxii 'God, then, hath [ever] been unchanging...'

*God is motion motionless*

lxiii 'For that (God's) stability is in His vastness motion motionless; for by His vastness is [His] law exempt from change.'

*The God of Hermeticism is known to none*

*For where, and when, and whence, and how, and what, He is, - is known to none.* (my italics) ...His stability is in Himself [alone]

XXXII

*We perceive the things in heaven as through a mist*

lxvi And thus it comes to pass for men, that *we perceive the things in Heaven, as it were through a mist, as far as the condition of the human sense allows.* (my italics)

XLI

*God has need of nothing*

lxxx ...*naught is there of which He (God) stands in need,* (my italics) in that He is all things, or all are in Him.



XLI

lxxxix (in a prayer addressed to God) ‘Sire, who (endowed us)...with reason that we may track Thee out from the appearances of things; with means of recognition that we may joy in knowing Thee. Saved by Thy Power divine, let us rejoice that Thou hast shown Thyself to us in all Thy Fullness. ...For this is the sole festival of praise worthy of man - to know Thy Majesty. ...For in the whole of this our prayer in worship of Thy Good, this favour only of Thy Goodness do we crave; - that Thou wilt keep us constant in our Love of knowing Thee, and let us ne’er be cut off from this kind of Life.’

#### 14.2 But wait! Shockingly, there’s more!<sup>17</sup>

Magee wrote

In the preceding section, I implicitly drew a distinction between two types of mysticism. One strain of mysticism emphasises the ineffable mystery of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and stops there. The other strain, exemplified by Boehme, actually seeks positive knowledge of the nature of the divine, usually through some method of articulating the different ‘aspects’ of God.<sup>18</sup>

Six pages prior to this he had written

When Hegel discusses mysticism in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, he is emphasising the *coincidentia oppositorum* as characteristic of mysticism<sup>19</sup>

These two quotes exemplify Magee’s confusion and problem.<sup>20</sup> Not only have I shown, with quotations from the *Hermetica*, that, according to the key Hermetic texts, god is complete and perfect, that our consciousness and capacity to see the things that are in heaven are *limited* and our knowledge of god is *ineffable*, I have argued that contradiction - what Cusanus named *coincidentia oppositorum* - is at the heart of Neoplatonic dialectics and is considered philosophically in a way and with a thoroughness that is entirely *absent* from the *Hermetica*.

Further and again as I have argued (13.6.6), the cardinal Cusanus explored *beyond* the walls of paradise to the possibility of knowing God. Hegel *rightly* emphasised *coincidentia oppositorum* as ‘characteristic of mysticism’ - the mysticism of *Neoplatonism* - the current of which he was its consummate proponent.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘But there is more. Hermeticists not only hold that God requires creation, they make a specific creature, man, play a crucial role in God’s self-actualisation.’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 9; ‘Shockingly, Boehme claims that apart from or prior to creation God is not yet God.’, Magee, ‘Hegel and Mysticism’, op. cit., 257.

<sup>18</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel and Mysticism’ op. cit., 277

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 271

<sup>20</sup> *When* Hegel began reading Böhme is uncertain. Magee gave different periods - in *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (2001) he wrote that Hegel appears to have become conversant with the works of Böhme, Eckhart and Johannes Tauler in the period 1793-1801 (when he tutored first at Berne then at Frankfurt) (3) and ‘Hegel could have encountered Böhme’s work as early as the mid to late 1790’s’ (48). In ‘Hegel and Mysticism’ (2009) he wrote ‘H.S.Harris is “inclined to believe in Boehme’s influence upon Hegel from 1801 onwards.”’ (257) and in ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’ (2014) he wrote “It seems likely that Hegel took up Boehme for the first time in Jena in the period 1801-07.’ (529)

Magee wrote that Böhme represented a crucial shift in Christian philosophy -

from the idea of all reality as moving toward God to the idea of God himself as part of the movement of reality as well. This is the core of Böhme's Hermeticism: the conception of God not as transcendent and static, existing "outside" the world, impassive and complete, but as an active *process* unfolding within the world, within history.<sup>21</sup>

Not only is the god of the *Hermetica complete* - it is *man* who undergoes development in his return to divinity. But the process to which Magee refers is explained by my developmental account of Neoplatonism, built on a current of thought thinking itself which, as I have indicated Hegel subscribed to (12.3.3), runs from Aristotle through Neoplatonism, Christianity and the 'modern' philosophy of Descartes.

Proclus wrote of the second element of his triad Being, Life, Intelligence (Intellect)

While Intellect is only participated in by beings capable of cognition, life pertains even to those that have no share in knowledge whatsoever; for we say of plants that they are alive. Accordingly, beyond Intellect we need to place the plane of Life which gives rise to a greater number of effects, irradiating its own gifts into more beings than Intellect does.<sup>22</sup>

Those 'gifts' are irradiated into and unfolded in the world generally, and therefore in its history.

Magee continues, asking

What initiates this process in the first place? Böhme held that God is moved by the desire to reveal Himself to Himself, but that *this self-revelation is psychologically impossible* (my italics) unless an *other* stands opposed to Him.<sup>23</sup>

Here is the key to understanding Böhme's *theosophical* take on Neoplatonism - in addition to his interweaving it with the *mythology* of the Trinity, he further '*psychologised*' the Trinity. He addresses the Devil as 'blackguard' and 'detestable tormenter'<sup>24</sup>

Hegel quoted him on God

God is...an all powerful, all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-smelling, all-tasting one who exists within himself as mild, cheerful, sweet, merciful, and joyful, indeed as joy itself<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 38

<sup>22</sup> Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, quoted in Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 97

<sup>23</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 38

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 96

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

wrote of his Son that he is

the emanation of the will, which makes the One peaceably divided. The Son is the heart pulsating in the Father, the kernel in all energies, the cause of the burgeoning joy in all<sup>26</sup>

and quoted him again on Spirit, that it is

an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-smelling, all-hearing, all-feeling, all-tasting spirit.<sup>27</sup>

Magee wrote that it

seems quite plausible that Hegel was positively influenced by Boehme, and in a significant way.<sup>28</sup>

and that

This Hermetic doctrine of the “circular” relationship between God and creation and the necessity of man for the completion of God is utterly original. It is not to be found in earlier philosophy. But it recurs again and again in the thought of Hermeticists, and it is the chief doctrinal identity between Hermeticism and Hegelian thought.<sup>29</sup>

The originality and recurrence in thought are Magee’s. He has all but ignored the relationship between Hermeticism and Neoplatonism, the interest that those who subscribed to one had in the other and therefore their influence on each other, particularly by the latter on the former, and he has ignored the influence of Christian Neoplatonists such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena on medieval and later German philosophy and Christian theosophy. Magee cannot excuse himself by writing

Hermeticism is the tradition that grew up around these texts (the *Hermetica*) over the course of centuries. Many different influences came together to create the Hermetic tradition, until, in fact, it had drifted considerably beyond the ideas expressed in the *Hermetica*.<sup>30</sup>

because not only did he note of his argument that Hegel was significantly influenced by Böhme that

Of course, there are serious difficulties with (it)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 100

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>28</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, op. cit., 596

<sup>29</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 10

<sup>30</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel and Mysticism’ op. cit., 278

<sup>31</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, op. cit., 596

he twice quoted the *Corpus Hermeticum*, both times in a misleading manner, to *anchor* his claim that God requires the philosopher for his ‘actualisation’, for his completion, and that he sent his Son into the world for that purpose.

Magee wrote ‘Hegel’s philosophy of religion is from the beginning indebted to Eckhart’s mysticism’<sup>32</sup> - a mysticism which conceived God as the coincidence of opposites<sup>33</sup> - and that ‘No one has demonstrated direct Hermetic influences on Eckhart, but his thought exhibits certain “Hermetic” features’.<sup>34</sup> Magee exemplifies what he thinks is a key feature of Eckhart’s Hermeticism

At one point in the *Lectures*, in fact, (Hegel) quotes the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-c. 1328): ‘The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one and the same. In righteousness I am weighed in God and he in me. If God did not exist nor would I; if I did not exist nor would he’ (LPR 1, 347-348)<sup>35</sup>

He quotes Eckhart and adds

“If I had not been, there would have been no God” (Sermon 4). Human self-reflection is the actualisation of God.<sup>36</sup>

Having dismissed ‘the ineffable mystery of the *coincidentia oppositorum*’, Magee approves of the mutual vision between and common existence of God and philosopher as symbolising ‘positive’ Hermetic knowledge of the divine.

But although sight and vision are fundamental to both Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, they are addressed differently in the two systems - in the former, seer and seen are philosophised abstractly as a mutually dependent unity and in a way that minimises reference to the material world

Now comes the question: what sort of thing does the Intellectual-Principle see in seeing the Intellectual Realm and what in seeing itself?  
We are not to look for an Intellectual realm reminding us of the colour or shape to be seen on material objects: the intellectual antedates all such things...In the pure Intellectual...the vision and the envisioned are a unity; the seen is as the seeing and seeing as seen.<sup>37</sup>

In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, that relationship is set out as a mythical narrative which always uses the material world for context and illustration

Poimandres said to me, “Have you understood what this vision means?”  
“I shall come to know,” said I.

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<sup>32</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 226

<sup>33</sup> ‘Like so many mystics, Eckhart conceived God as the “coincidence of opposites.”’, Ibid., 24

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>35</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 250

<sup>36</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 25

<sup>37</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.8

“I am the light you saw, mind, your god,” he said, “who existed before the watery nature that appeared out of darkness. The lightgiving word who comes from mind is the son of god.”

“Go on,” I said.

“This is what you must know: that in you which sees and hears is the word of the lord, but your mind is god the father; they are not divided from one another for their union is life.”<sup>38</sup>

“Such then, Tat, is god’s image, as best I have been able to sketch it for you. If your vision of it is sharp and you understand it with the eyes of your heart, believe me, child, you shall discover the road that leads above or, rather, the image itself will show you the way. For the vision of it has a special property. It takes hold of those who have had the vision and draws them up, just as the magnet stone draws iron, so they say.”<sup>39</sup>

Eckhart’s Christianity is redolent *not* with Hermeticism, but Neoplatonism - God is One, perfect, infinite and complete

‘God is one.’...God is infinite in his simplicity and simple in his infinity. Therefore he is everywhere and is everywhere complete. He is everywhere on account of his infinity, and is everywhere complete on account of his simplicity. Only God flows into all things, their very essences. Nothing else flows into something else. God is in the innermost part of each and every thing, only in its innermost part, and he alone is *one*.<sup>40</sup>

all things are contained in the One, by virtue of the fact that it is one, for all multiplicity is one and is one thing and is in and through the One. ...note that the One in its most proper sense refers to perfection and to the whole, for which reason, again, it lacks nothing.<sup>41</sup>

(God) is perfect in knowledge and power, he is perfect too in his speaking.<sup>42</sup>

Eckhart believed that energised by his Neoplatonic abundance, God sent his Son to the world because of his Christian love for mankind, *not* for his own ‘actualisation’ and completion

Scripture says: ‘Before the created world, I am’ ...The Father gives birth to the Son and derives such peace and delight from this birth that the whole of his nature is consumed within it. For whatever is in God, moves him to give

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<sup>38</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, op. cit., *Corpus Hermeticum* I, 177

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., *Corpus Hermeticum* IV, 209-210

<sup>40</sup> Latin Sermon 2 (*Deus unus est*), Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, Trans., Oliver Davies, Penguin, London, 1994, 258

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 259

<sup>42</sup> German Sermon 12, Ibid., 156

birth; the Father is driven to give birth by his ground, his essence and his being.<sup>43</sup>

All that God does and all that he teaches, he does and teaches in his Son. All that God does he does in order that we may become his only begotten Son. When God sees that we are his only begotten Son, then God presses so urgently upon us and hastens towards us and acts as if his divine being were about to collapse and become nothing in itself so that he can reveal to us the whole abyss of his Godhead, the abundance of his being and his nature. God urgently desires that this should become ours just as it is his.<sup>44</sup>

...martyrdom and death of our Lord Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son, which he suffered for our salvation.<sup>45</sup>

To rise up to the intellect, subordinating ourselves to it, is to be united with God. To be united, to be one, is to be one with God. ...in the domain of the intellect where, in so far as they are intellect and nothing else, all things are without doubt in all things.<sup>46</sup>

Magee appropriated Cusanus to Hermeticism in the same way he did Eckhart, writing ‘Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) is another mystic whose influence on the Hermetic tradition was important.’<sup>47</sup> He again overlooked Neoplatonism to write

In *De Visione Dei* (1453) Cusa takes advantage of the ambiguity of the phrase “the vision of God” to make a truly mystical point, very much in line with Eckhart and also with the Hermetic tradition.<sup>48</sup>

But the thought of Cusanus, too, bore that same tension between God as perfect and complete and an ultimate principle Being, which functioned within a developing Neoplatonic system of knowledge

just as an infinite sphere is most simple and exists in complete actuality, so the Maximum exists most simply in complete actuality. And just as a sphere is the actuality of a line, a triangle, and a circle, so the Maximum is the actuality of all things. Therefore, all actual existence has from the Maximum whatever actuality it possesses; and all existence exists actually insofar as it

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<sup>43</sup> German Sermon 10, *Ibid.*, 147

<sup>44</sup> German Sermon 16, *Ibid.*, 176

<sup>45</sup> Sermon 10, Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, Trans. and Ed., Maurice O’C. Walshe, Herder and Herder, New York, 2009, 92

<sup>46</sup> Latin Sermon 2, Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writing*, op.cit., 262

<sup>47</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 26

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

exists actually in the Infinite. Hence, the Maximum is the Form of forms and the Form of being, or maximum actual Being.<sup>49</sup>

Magee asserted that Böhme, along with Eckhart, Cusanus and Hegel thought that nature is the equivalent of the Son.<sup>50</sup> In mysticism, such an apparently simple equation is anything but. In the writing of the above, *four* meanings of ‘nature’ are used

- the natural world or universe and its phenomena
- the ‘inner’ world
- different qualities (divine nature, human nature, intellectual nature)
- the body of God

The equivalence between son and cosmos is Hermetic - it is stated in both the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, as I have quoted above.<sup>51</sup> The *Hermetica* clearly distinguishes between the three gods (god the father, his son as cosmos, and man, son of the son or grandson<sup>52</sup>) and there is no requirement in it either for the son to return to his father or for god to be completed by mankind as Magee claims. It is neither Neoplatonic nor Christian - irrespective of whether one defines ‘nature’ as either the natural or ‘inner’ world. Neither Eckhart nor Cusanus as I will show and again contrary to Magee, used it. Hegel, as I have quoted,<sup>53</sup> used it in his *Philosophy of Nature* and it is plausible that his source for this may have been Böhme.

Magee wrote

In his tenth sermon, Eckhart preached that just as a son requires a father to give him existence, so the father is not father without the son. Similarly, God would not be God without creation: God must create to actualise His nature. (This is one of the innovations of the *Hermetica*.) Just as in Hegel more than five hundred years later, God the Father is conceived as “abstract” and “incomplete” apart from nature. Nature or creation is the Son. The “return” of the Son to the Father is the Holy Spirit and, again as in Hegel, this specifically denotes mankind.<sup>54</sup>

But there is no hint of God being incomplete or his Son being nature in Eckhart’s words

St. John says, "God's love was disclosed to us in this, that He sent His Son into the world that we should live through him," and with him. And thus our

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,23,70

<sup>50</sup> '(Böhme believed that) Nature is the “body of God”...Along with Eckhart, Cusa, and Hegel, Böhme reads the second person of the Trinity, the “Son,” as equivalent to nature.', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 39

<sup>51</sup> Copenhaver, *Corpus Hermeticum*, X; Everard, *The Corpus Hermetica*, XIII; Mead, *The Asclepius*, VIII

<sup>52</sup> Mead, *The Asclepius*, X and ‘the cosmos becomes the son of god, but the human becomes the son of the cosmos, a grandson, as it were.’, Copenhaver, *Corpus Hermeticum*, X; Being, Life and Intelligence are the three gods of Proclus’ triad.

<sup>53</sup> See 11.3.7, 13.6.2.4, 13.6.6

<sup>54</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 24-25

human nature has been immeasurably exalted because the Highest has come and taken on human nature.<sup>55</sup>

Of the world to which God sent his Son, Eckhart wrote

"God sent His only-begotten Son into the world." You should not take this to mean the external world, as when he ate and drank with us, but you should understand it of the inner world. As surely as the Father in His simple nature bears the Son naturally, just as surely He bears him in the inmost recesses of the spirit, and this is the inner world. Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground."<sup>56</sup>

Eckhart *counterposed* the 'inner world' to the natural world

Whatever of the soul is in this world or looks into this world, whatever is attached to her and looks out, that she should hate. A master says that the soul at her highest and purest is above the world. ...A master says the soul in her own nature has as little to do with all that is in the world as the eye has to do with song, or the ear with colour.<sup>57</sup>

He echoed Plotinus' metaphor of the sculptor hewing his soul

A man who wants to make a pot takes a little clay; that is the material he works with. Then he gives it a form, which is in himself, and is finer in him than the material. By this I mean that all things are immeasurably nobler in the intellectual world, where the soul is, than they are in this world.<sup>58</sup>

In Chapter 25 of Book I of *De docta ignorantia* - titled 'The pagans named God in various ways in relation to created things' - Cusanus wrote that

(one of the names the pagans gave God was) Cupid because of the unity of the two sexes (for which reason they also called Him Nature, since through the two sexes He conserves the species of things).<sup>59</sup>

yet he *still* did not take this opportunity to equate the Son with nature and give his reason for doing so. The structure of *De docta ignorantia* shows why. Book I deals with God, the Absolute uncontracted Maximum, Book II with the world - the *contracted* Maximum, and Book III (not book II) with the *Absolute and contracted* Maximum - Christ. Not only did Cusanus believe Christ and the world to be qualitatively different and not only did he believe Christ to be God and man (the union of divine and human natures)<sup>60</sup> not God and cosmos, the cosmos for him *as was everything*,

<sup>55</sup> Sermon 13 (a), Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, op. cit., 104

<sup>56</sup> Sermon 13 (b), Ibid., 109

<sup>57</sup> Sermon 21, Ibid., 149

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 150

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., I,25,83

<sup>60</sup> Chapter 4 of Bk III is titled 'Blessed Jesus, who is God and man, is the [contracted maximum individual].'



was comprised of a Trinity based on Proclus' triad *of triads* - Böhme was *not* the first to think that the Trinity is in everything, which Hegel wrote<sup>61</sup> and Magee accepts - and which, as I believe Hegel knew very well, Böhme *wasn't*

...[in the case of the universe] the three mutual relationships—which in God are called persons—have actual existence only collectively in oneness.

We must consider the foregoing points carefully. For in God the perfection of Oneness, which is Trinity, is so great that the Father is actually God, the Son actually God, and the Holy Spirit actually God, the Son and the Holy Spirit are actually in the Father, the Son and the Father [are actually] in the Holy Spirit, and the Father and the Holy Spirit [are actually] in the Son. But *in the case of what is contracted, a similar thing cannot hold true; for the mutual relationships exist per se only conjointly.* (my italics) Therefore, it cannot be the case that each distinct relationship is the universe; rather, all the mutual relationships [are] collectively [the universe]. Nor is the one [of them] actually in the others; rather, they are most perfectly contracted to one another (in the way in which the condition of contraction permits this), so that from them there is one universe, which could not be one without that trinity. For there cannot be contraction without (1) that which is contractible, (2) that which causes contracting, and (3) the union which is effected through the common actuality of these two.<sup>62</sup>

Cusanus *defined* 'nature': 'nature is the enfolding (so to speak) of all things which occur through motion.'<sup>63</sup>

Magee described the position of Böhme and Hegel on the creation of nature in Neoplatonic terms

Böhme holds that nature is an unfolding of the dynamic "eternal nature" contained within God<sup>64</sup>

The *Philosophy of Nature* shows how the Absolute Idea or "God before creation" is "embodied." Notoriously, Hegel employs Neoplatonic emanation imagery to describe the transition from *Logic* to *Philosophy of Nature*, saying that the Idea "freely releases itself." This sort of approach is to be found in Eckhart as well.<sup>65</sup>

Hegel's own description begins with the Hermetic notion of nature as the son of God and merges this with Christian Neoplatonism

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<sup>61</sup> 'Jacob Boehme was the 1st to recognise the Trinity in another manner, as universal.', Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 289

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* ('On Learned Ignorance'), op. cit., II,7,127-128 ('The trinity of the universe')

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, II,10,153

<sup>64</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 168

<sup>65</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 266

Nature is the son of God, but not as the Son, but as abiding in otherness - the divine Idea as held fast for a moment outside the divine love...in Nature, Spirit lets itself go (*ausgelassen*), a Bacchic god unrestrained and unmindful of itself...God is subjectivity, activity, infinite actuality, in which otherness has only a transient being<sup>66</sup>

Plotinus wrote most highly of nature, almost giving it the status of an hypostasis in his tractate 'Nature, Contemplation, and the One', translated by Creuzer in 1805<sup>67</sup>

And Nature, asked why it brings forth its works, might answer if it cared to listen and to speak: "It would have been more becoming to put no question but to learn in silence just as I myself am silent and make no habit of talking. And what is your lesson? This; that whatsoever comes into being is my vision, seen in my silence, the vision that belongs to my character who, sprung from vision, am vision-loving and create vision by the vision-seeing faculty within me. The mathematicians from their vision draw their figures: but I draw nothing: I gaze and the figures of the material world take being as if they fell from my contemplation."<sup>68</sup>

The relation between nature and divinity is one (and most important) aspect of the issue, the other was embodied by Proclus in his triad Being, Life and Intelligence reflected in the organisation of the Books of Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia* (God/World/Christ) and those of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* (Logic/Nature/Spirit). Being by itself is abstract and for there to be Intelligence, there must be 'Life'. For all three, the first element must posit the second so that it, in turn, can posit the third - the means of return.

Magee writes of Hegel's application of this with a Christian patina

Hegel states in the *Philosophy of Nature*, "God as an abstraction is not the true God; His truth is the positing of His other, the living process, the world, which is his Son when it is comprehended in its divine form" (*PN* #246). ...On its own, logic (or the logos) is formal and one-dimensional. To be fully realised, the Idea must "express itself" in the world of space and time. Thus, the *Logic* must be supplemented by the *Philosophy of Nature*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, op. cit., 14

<sup>67</sup> Plotinus used 'Absolute' repeatedly as a noun in this tractate. 'the All has its One, its Prior but not yet the Absolute One; through this we reach that Absolute One, where all such reference comes to an end.', Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., III.8.10. Inwood and Magee are incorrect in claiming that Cusanus was the first to apply it to the ultimate principle.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., III.8.4; Magee wrote of Hegel 'By showing humanity a God who expresses Himself (in part) in nature, (Hegel) hoped to reconnect science with the experience of the divine, and specifically with the concrete presence of the divine. ...Hegel's system is an attempt to "re-enchant" the world, to re-invest nature with the experience of the numinous lost with the death of the mythical consciousness.', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 97

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 190

Hegel used Proclus' triad *of triads* (which is in *neither* Hermeticism *nor* Böhme's theosophy<sup>70</sup>) as his philosophical basis, and, following Cusanus, overlaid the Trinity across it, matching the key elements of the triad with those of the Trinity in the same sequence of outflow and return and also made, for a richer and more anchored mytho-poetic purpose, the Hermetic notion of son as cosmos the conjunction between Being and Intelligence, God and Spirit.

Hegel not only gave very high praise to Böhme for his recognition of the Trinity as a universal principle and of the necessity of 'contrariety', he also repeatedly made the strongest criticisms of his theosophy, for two fundamental reasons - Böhme's failure and *inability* to appreciate the *conceptual* nature of philosophy, manifest in his dependence on sensory imagery<sup>71</sup> - a claim which could equally be made of Hermeticism

(Böhme's articulation of his main thoughts) is unmistakably barbarous, and in order to put his thought into words he employs powerful, sensuous images such as *Salitter*, *Tincture*, *Essence*, *Qual*, *Schrack*, and the like.<sup>72</sup>

and, on this conceptual basis, Böhme's primitive grasp of the nature of contradiction

Böhme grasps the antitheses in the harshest, crudest fashion<sup>73</sup>

Magee, following Hegel, also made the same fundamental criticisms of Böhme,<sup>74</sup> further writing

Hegel treats the parallels between his thought and Boehme's as merely, it would seem accidental: Boehme anticipates much in modern, speculative philosophy. But Hegel never once says anything that would indicate that he is indebted to Böhme or that Böhme in some way influenced him.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 'In the same period (1804-05), Hegel produced a work that has come to be called the "divine triangle fragment." The original text no longer exists, but Hegel's early biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, quotes from it and describes it at length. ... (Magee quotes Rosenkranz) "To express the life of the idea, [Hegel] constructed a *triangle of triangles*, which he suffered to *move through one another* in such a way that each one was not only at one time extreme, and at another time *middle* generally, but also it had to go through this process internally with each of its *sides*." ... It seems clear that in this fragment... Hegel is developing the outlines of his philosophical system. And to do so, he is employing the language and style of Boehme.', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 592-593. Magee concludes the section with 'Of course, there are serious difficulties with such a claim. ... It remains an open question as to whether Hegel has simply read himself into Boehme. If so, then it is entirely possible that Hegel arrived at the basic form of his system (described above) quite independently of his encounter with Boehme and that he is simply viewing Boehme in a distorted manner, through the lens of that system.', Ibid., 596. My contention is that it is *Magee* who is doing the reading-into and viewing Hegel in a distorted manner. Magee himself wrote 'As we shall see, Boehme's Trinity works differently from Hegel's', Ibid., 586

<sup>71</sup> Magee commented on both of these - '(Hegel believed) Philosophy is purely conceptual, whereas religion uses "picture-thinking": myths, allegories, images, and the like.', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 580 and 'Hegel is unambiguous in sharply rejecting Boehme's "picture thinking."', Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 258

<sup>72</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 103

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> 'Böhme does not present philosophical arguments.', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 45; 'Boehme's methodology is to argue by analogy from human psychology to theology', Magee, 'Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy', 539

<sup>75</sup> Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 589

Despite these criticisms and Hegel's never once acknowledging any debt to Böhme, Magee persists in arguing for that debt and, as he sees it, its extent, but completely fails to explore and expand on his most significant references to Cusanus - another whom Hegel not only never expressed any debt to but even knowledge of, despite the far greater number of parallels between their work (see 13.6 for a summary of them), including their equal emphasis on the abstract, conceptual nature of philosophy, their exploration of contradiction on that basis, their equal regard for Proclus and their Trinitarian triad of *triads*, none of which are Hermetic or in Böhme's theosophy.

Magee cites Rosenkranz having pointed out Hegel's interest in medieval German Christian mystics, starting from his time in Berne,<sup>76</sup> and Magee over and over again positions Schelling as the link of influence between Böhme and Hegel

Schelling was, of course, an enthusiastic reader of Böhme and Oetinger and likely encouraged Hegel's interest in theosophy.<sup>77</sup>

But with regard to the relationship between Schelling and *Cusanus*, and the possibility of a far greater significance to *Hegel* of Cusanus than Böhme, Magee, simply quoting Beck,<sup>78</sup> made this extraordinary comment

‘Schelling...we know, was actually influenced by reading Nicholas (my italics).’ Beck also makes the claim that the *Naturphilosophie* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as theosophy and Protestant mysticism, have their roots in Cusa.<sup>79</sup>

Other than Beck and Magee, all the academics tell us that neither Hegel nor any of the German idealists knew of Cusanus - then suddenly, *en passant*, Magee tells us that Schelling not only knew of him and read him, but was *influenced* by him! *How*, logically, might his then close friend *Hegel* and their intellectual milieu which Schelling was at the centre of have been influenced as a result of Schelling's reading of Cusanus? Magee doesn't even question this - he only offers us a *further*

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<sup>76</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 106; “David Walsh writes that Jena in Hegel's day ‘had become the focal point of the German Romantic movement, and many of its greatest figures were assembled there, including Tieck, Novalis, Schelling, F. Schlegel, and A.W. Schlegel. Within that company an intense centre of interest was formed by their rediscovery of the German mystical tradition. For the first time the works of the great medieval and Reformation mystics were becoming widely available within their native land.’”, Ibid., 133

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 134; ‘Schelling himself was an avid reader of Böhme and Oetinger, and likely encouraged Hegel's interest.’, Ibid., 3 etc.; Magee's stance, revelatory of his class perspective, on the degree of parental significance he attributes to Böhme - both with regard to a resulting bastardy and modernity - is exemplified by the following: ‘Boehmean ideas were communicated to Hegel by Schelling in Jena, and they exercised a strong influence on him. Arguably it is through Hegel - whose bastard children include Marxism, existentialism, and certain strains of modern conservatism - that Boehme has had his greatest influence: not just on the history of ideas, but on the formation of the modern world.’, ‘Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy’, op. cit., 525-526

<sup>78</sup> ‘(Cusanus') theory of the polarity but unity of man, God, and nature is elaborated by Schelling (who, we know, was actually influenced by reading Nicholas).’, Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, op. cit., 71. Also, as previously quoted, ‘when Nicholas of Cusa made God the coincidence of opposites, (he) set a pattern which Böhme accepted and Hegel rationalised (my italics) by seeing the Absolute as itself a dialectic process, not an Eleatic product of dialectic.’, Ibid., 156. Beck's position on the influence of theosophy and Protestant mysticism directly contradicts Magee's: ‘theosophy, and Protestant mysticism...this stream did not lead to the most significant work in philosophy.’ Ibid., 71

<sup>79</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 28

enticement in a footnote.<sup>80</sup> Simply...nothing more. Why so profuse on Böhme and so brief on Cusanus?

It should have been all the more pressing for Magee to investigate this relationship between Schelling and Cusanus since he named Cusanus in his discussion of speculation - a core concept for Hegel - writing not only that Cusanus associated the word with the Latin 'speculum', for mirror,<sup>81</sup> that 'Schelling and Hegel...picked up the term (from whom?) and both use it in a positive sense',<sup>82</sup> but that in *his* use of the concept, Hegel

has in mind precisely the thought of figures like Cusa, who sought knowledge of God through an overcoming of dichotomous, either-or thinking.<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, Cusanus' use of Absolute in his philosophy

Schelling's use of 'Absolute' is remarkably similar to Cusa's. For Schelling, the Absolute is the 'indifference point' beyond the distinction of subject and object, or any other distinction.<sup>84</sup>

It is as though Schelling's (and Hegel's) use of 'Absolute' as a noun is nothing but a 'remarkable' coincidence to Cusanus' use of it. Despite incorrectly attributing the first use of 'Absolute' as a noun, in reference to the ultimate principle, to Cusanus (instead of Plotinus),<sup>85</sup> Magee himself implies a continuum from Cusanus through Schelling to Hegel

Hegel accepts Schelling's conception of the Absolute as beyond the subject-object distinction<sup>86</sup>

Of *Hegel's* approach to 'Absolute' Magee wrote

I believe that Hegel was aware of the fact that Boehme's doctrine was unique in the history of mysticism, precisely in its rejection of God as an ineffable Absolute.<sup>87</sup>

This rejection of the ultimate principle as an ineffable Absolute had been explored throughout the long, developmental history of Neoplatonism, from Plotinus onwards, as I have shown. Cusanus

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<sup>80</sup> 'David Walsh notes that although there is no evidence that Hegel ever read Cusa, he was indirectly influenced by him through J.G.Hamann and Giordano Bruno. See Walsh, *Boehme and Hegel*, 326.', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 28

<sup>81</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 80

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 221

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>85</sup> 'Like Eckhart, Cusa would teach that God is the coincidence of opposites. (He was also the first author to refer to God as *Absolutum*.)', Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 26

<sup>86</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 273

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 272

was one who had done this and I have argued that Hegel was well-acquainted with his work. It would be far easier for such a supremely ambitious and political (as Magee has shown, both re-Hegel's interest in Hermeticism and in his discussion of Hegel's relations with Baader) person as Hegel was to acknowledge and focus attention on one of far lesser ability (Böhme) than on another also of genius (Cusanus) - to whom, given the parallels in their philosophies, he knew he was greatly indebted.<sup>88</sup>

Magee compounds his errors in his discussion of 'the true is the whole'

Immediately after writing "The true is the whole," Hegel states: "But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development." The developmental, organic understanding of the nature of the Absolute was, as far as Hegel and the other idealists knew, original with Jakob Boehme and his school.<sup>89</sup>

If he has any concern for historical accuracy and giving credit where it is due - particularly with regard to one of the West's greatest and most influential philosophers, rather than constructing a fanciful moat of uneducated Teutonic purity around one of Plotinus' countless derivatives,<sup>90</sup> Magee should make the time to study the *Enneads*. Not only, as I have indicated, did Plotinus repeatedly use 'Absolute' in reference to the ultimate principle - which Hegel called *both* 'God' and 'the One' - in his tractate 'Nature, Contemplation, and the One', translated by Creuzer in 1805, he wrote of Intellectual-Principle (Divine Mind, Divine-Intellection), 1300 years before Böhme took first breath

(In) the true and first universe (of Intellect)...each part is not cut off from the whole; but the whole life of it and the whole intellect lives and thinks all together in one, and makes the part the whole and all bound in friendship with itself, since one part is not separated from another and has not become merely other, estranged from the rest; and, therefore, one does not wrong another, even if they are opposites. And since it is everywhere one and complete at every point it stays still and knows no alteration; for it does not make as one thing acting upon another. For what reason could it have for making, since it is deficient in nothing?<sup>91</sup>

Armstrong wrote

Plotinus's World of Forms is an organic living community of interpenetrating beings which are at once Forms and intelligences, all "awake and alive," in which every part thinks and therefore in a real sense is the whole; so that the relationship of whole and part in this spiritual world is quite different from that in the material world, and involves no sort of

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<sup>88</sup> I will address the influence of Neoplatonism on Hermeticism and on Böhme soon.

<sup>89</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', op. cit., 276

<sup>90</sup> '(Böhme's) thought is, as Hegel observed, genuinely Germanic and (as Faivre points out) owes nothing to classical sources. It is thoroughly Teutonic in character; earnest and unsophisticated, utterly lacking in irony or literary pretensions of any kind.', Magee, 'Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy', op. cit., 526.

<sup>91</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, Trans., A.H.Armstrong, op. cit., vol. III, III.2.1

separation or exclusion. This unity-in-diversity is the most perfect possible image of the absolute unity of the One<sup>92</sup>

Magee cites Böhme and Hegel using other Cusan and Neoplatonic terminology - 'Böhme holds that nature is an unfolding of the dynamic "eternal nature" contained within God',<sup>93</sup> "Böhme wrote of the 'contracted being' of God";<sup>94</sup> Magee quotes Hegel using the expression 'point of contraction' - "the Ego is 'contracted' into its primordial self-relation" adding "This brings to mind the doctrine of the 'coincidence of opposites' in Eckhart, Cusa, and other mystics"<sup>95</sup>

Magee is continually *pushing* for his claim to be accepted:

The 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* introduce a doctrine of the 'immanent Trinity' *clearly inspired by* Böhme's initial triad of 'source-spirits.' ...In sum, *all the evidence indicates* that Hegel's Hermeticism was no mere folly of youth, abandoned with maturity (my italics).<sup>96</sup>

*What is so striking* (in his early writing) is *how indebted Hegel obviously is* to Hermeticism. *The chief debt is clearly* to Böhme (my italics).<sup>97</sup>

Hegel did go on to employ some Boehmean expressions and *now and then what can be characterised as a vaguely Boehmean 'style'* (my italics).<sup>98</sup>

But of the details, nature and extent of the direct influence Magee tells us Cusanus had on Schelling, he shows not the least interest in pursuing.

### 14.3 The influence of Neoplatonism

On the profound influence Neoplatonism has had and continues to have on Western culture, Wildberg wrote

It is an undeniable fact, although nowadays rarely acknowledged, that the general outlook and the principal doctrines of the Neoplatonists proved exceedingly influential throughout the entire history of western philosophy. ...During the Renaissance, ancient Greek learning, and Neoplatonism in particular, experienced a dramatic revival in the West in the wake of the work of Gemistus Plethon (1355–1452), Bessarion (1403–1472) and, above all, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), whose translation and interpretation of Plato and Plotinus in the second half of the 15th century influenced not only

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., vol. I, xxi

<sup>93</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 168

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 163

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 256

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 110

<sup>98</sup> Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 590

the philosophy, but also the art and literature of the period. It may even be true to say that even more than the writings of Plato and Aristotle themselves Neoplatonic ideas have continued to influence Western thinkers of the idealist persuasion, such as the Cambridge Platonists (who were really Neoplatonists), Leibniz, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin, to name but a few.<sup>99</sup>

With regard to the influences on the *Hermetica*, van den Broek wrote

the philosophical *Hermetica* were all written in the first centuries of our era, under a strong influence of Greek philosophy and Jewish and Egyptian mythological and theological speculation.<sup>100</sup>

Chlup expanded

The distinction between the highest principle and Intellect as the first hypostasis derived from it originally appeared in Speusippus, re-surfacing in Platonism around the first century AD possibly under the influence of Neopythagorean speculations (cf. Whittaker 1969 and 1973). Extensive, though thoroughly unsystematic use of this idea was made by the platonising Hermetic treatises (e.g. *Corp. Herm.* II 14; XI 4; XII 1; XII 14), most of which probably originated in the second century AD.<sup>101</sup>

In Bruno's *The Ash Wednesday Supper* we read

the *Hermetica* attributed to (Hermes Trismegistus) are certainly of late Alexandrian origin, dating from the time of the Neoplatonists and the Gnostics (i.e., the second to the fourth century A.D.). This correct dating of

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<sup>99</sup> Christian Wildberg, 'Neoplatonism', <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoplatonism/>; 'Porphyry's edition of Plotinus' *Enneads* preserved for posterity the works of the leading Platonic interpreter of antiquity. Through these works as well as through the writings of Porphyry himself (234 – c. 305 C.E.) and Iamblichus (c. 245–325 C.E.), Plotinus shaped the entire subsequent history of philosophy. Until well into the 19th century, Platonism was in large part understood, appropriated or rejected based on its Plotinian expression and in adumbrations of this.

The theological traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all, in their formative periods, looked to ancient Greek philosophy for the language and arguments with which to articulate their religious visions. For all of these, Platonism expressed the philosophy that seemed closest to their own theologies. Plotinus was the principal source for their understanding of Platonism.

Through the Latin translation of Plotinus by Marsilio Ficino published in 1492, Plotinus became available to the West. The first English translation, by Thomas Taylor, appeared in the late 18th century. Plotinus was, once again, recognised as the most authoritative interpreter of Platonism. In the writings of the Italian Renaissance philosophers, the 15th and 16th century humanists John Colet, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Thomas More, the 17th century Cambridge Platonists, and German idealists, especially Hegel, Plotinus' thought was the (sometimes unacknowledged) basis for opposition to the competing and increasingly influential tradition of scientific philosophy. This influence continued in the 20th century flowering of Christian imaginative literature in England, including the works of C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams.', Lloyd Gerson, 'Plotinus,' Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/#2>

<sup>100</sup> Roelof van den Broek, 'Hermetism and Gnosticism' in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, op. cit. 201

<sup>101</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., Note, 14



the *Hermetica*, accomplished by Isaac Casaubon in 1614, accounts for the heavily Platonic and Neoplatonic tone of the Hermetic corpus.<sup>102</sup>

*Magee* also acknowledged a significant influence of Neoplatonism on Hermeticism

(Plotinus claimed) that we possess an astral or aetherial *body*, which was to become a major tenet of the later Hermetic philosophy and of the contemporary “New Age.”<sup>103</sup>

In *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, to which *Magee* contributed an essay, there are a number of references to the influence of Neoplatonism on Böhme and theosophy

These resonances, in conjunction with perceived pantheistic elements, have prompted suggestions that Boehme drew ultimate inspiration from an ancient theology that embraced currents of Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Christian adaptations of the Jewish Kabbalah.<sup>104</sup>

Taken together, these mediated and directly encountered textual and oral sources explain the other-wise problematic presence in the corpus of a non-university educated shoemaker of sophisticated mystical, apocalyptic, alchemical, astrological, and seemingly Gnostic, Neoplatonic, and Kabbalistic ideas<sup>105</sup>

Just as writings under the name Paracelsus may have been a conduit for Gnostic vestiges, so too did they channel streams of Neoplatonism. Running from Plotinus through the Florentine Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), this Neoplatonic current may, in its appropriation and adaptation, partially account for Boehme’s elaboration of a process of emanation during the creation as well as what certain commentators regard as a pantheistic imbued conception of nature.<sup>106</sup>

The notion of divine powers in nature is Neo-Platonic and patristic. ...Nor are Boehme’s multiple worlds new. Nicholas of Cusa, Johannes Reuchlin and Agrippa von Nettesheim could have served as precedents<sup>107</sup>

It is clear that his (Böhme’s) writings can be located within broader currents: alchemy and alchemical medicine; apocalypticism and prophecy;

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<sup>102</sup> Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner in Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (La Cena de le Ceneri, London, 1584), op. cit., 105

<sup>103</sup> *Magee*, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 118

<sup>104</sup> Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei, ‘Introduction: Boehme’s Legacy in Perspective’ in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, op. cit., 30-79, 33

<sup>105</sup> Ariel Hessayon, ‘Boehme’s Life and Times’, *Ibid.*, 80-178, 146

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

<sup>107</sup> Andrew Weeks, ‘Radical Reformation and the Anticipation of Modernism in Jacob Boehme’, *Ibid.*, 179-262, 197-198

astrology; heterodox writings; utopian literature; mystical theology, with a particular emphasis on Neoplatonic authors; and spiritual contemplation.<sup>108</sup>

On the subject of Hegel's Idea 'freely releasing itself', Magee quotes Schelling having implied that the inspiration for this came from Böhme

most amusingly, we must note the words of Schelling. In a lecture given in the 1830s, Schelling remarks disdainfully, "Jacob Boehme says: divine freedom vomits itself into nature. Hegel says: divine freedom releases nature. What is one to think of this notion of releasing? This much is clear: the biggest compliment one can pay to this notion is to call it 'theosophical.'"<sup>109</sup>

Surely *less* amusing for Magee if he were to consider it - particularly given the singular force of his argument - should be his own view - that we must equally note

Notoriously, Hegel employs Neoplatonic emanation imagery to describe the transition from *Logic* to *Philosophy of Nature*, saying that the Idea "freely releases itself." This sort of approach is to be found in Eckhart as well.<sup>110</sup>

Redding recognised the importance and long-standing influence of Neoplatonism in Germany prior and up to Hegel's time. He writes of a commentary by the nineteen-year old Schelling on Plato's *Timaeus*

This work, only recently discovered, has added weight to the thesis of the importance of Platonism and Neoplatonism for the development of the post-Kantian idealism of Schelling and Hegel. ...popular forms of Christianity in the German states had long had a deep-running Neoplatonic pantheistic-tending stream which had found expression in heterodox thinkers like Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and Jacob Böhme (1575-1624)...In the 1780s Böhme had been taken up by the Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader, and in the 1790s Plotinus himself was being read under the urging of Novalis, who had stressed the proximity of Plotinus' views to those of Kant and Fichte (Beierwaltes 2004: 87-88).<sup>111</sup>

In a similar vein, Chlup wrote

Proclus also influenced the American Transcendentalists, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82).

Even more interesting was the development in Germany, where Proclus caught the attention of the great idealist philosophers Hegel (1770-1831) and Schelling (1775-1854), who both absorbed some of his metaphysical

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<sup>108</sup> Ariel Hessayon, 'Jacob Boehme's Writings During the English Revolution and Afterwards: Their Publication, Dissemination, and Influence', *Ibid.*, 344-434, 374

<sup>109</sup> Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', *op. cit.*, 1024

<sup>110</sup> Magee, 'Hegel and Mysticism', *op. cit.*, 266

<sup>111</sup> Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, *op. cit.*, 126

principles - most notably the cycle of remaining, procession and reversion, which reappears in both Hegel and Schelling as the basic principle of their triadic dialectic. Hegel saw Proclus' system as the culmination of Greek thought (1894: 451): 'in it the world of thought has, so to speak, consolidated itself...for the sensuous world has disappeared and the whole been raised into spirit, and this whole has been called God and His life in it. Here we witness a great revolution, and with this the first period, that of Greek philosophy, closes.' It is not surprising that Victor Cousin in 1821 dedicated his edition of Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* precisely to Hegel and Schelling. The legacy of German Idealism has been used as a clue to understanding Neoplatonism by the twentieth century German scholar Werner Beierwaltes, whose classic Proclus monograph (1979) is very Hegelian in its selection of topics.<sup>112</sup>

On the relationship between Romanticism and Neoplatonism Hannak wrote

In their search for a deeper dimension of being not beyond but rather within reality itself, the Romantics were fascinated by Hermetic, Neoplatonic, and Kabbalistic texts as well as by contemporary Mesmerism.<sup>113</sup>

#### 14.4 If not the *Hermetica*, what is the source for God as process?

There are five approaches to 'god' under discussion in this thesis: the Neoplatonic, that of the *Hermetica*, the Christian, the Böhmean and the Hegelian. I have shown through my use of quotations (14.1, 14.2) that the gods of the *Hermetica* and Christianity (of Eckhart and Cusanus) are complete - that although in these belief systems god *creates* process - the means of our acquiring knowledge and of our return to divinity - he, perfect and requiring nothing, is not part of that process other than being its desired goal. But the god of Böhme and Hegel is not only part of that process, he *is* the process. My argument in this thesis is that the source for this in Hegel's philosophy (as in Böhme's theosophy) could only be Neoplatonism, which itself was always a work in progress.

One reason for warranting its recognition as the greatest school of Greek philosophy is both the willingness and capacity of those who subscribed to it to absorb into and unite with it the thought of other schools and philosophers from across the breadth of Greek philosophy and beyond and to rework Neoplatonism itself. In addition to the primary influences of Plato and Aristotle<sup>114</sup> on Plotinus (as on Hegel), Henry tells us

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<sup>112</sup> Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 284

<sup>113</sup> Kristine Hannak, 'Boehme and German Romanticism' in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, op. cit., 701-776, 726

<sup>114</sup> '(Plotinus) followed his own path rather than that of tradition, but in his writings both the Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines are sunk; Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, especially, is condensed in them, all but entire. ...At the Conferences he used to have treatises by various authors read aloud - among the Platonists it might be Severus or Cronius, Numenius, Gaius, or Atticus; and among the Peripatetics Aspasius, Alexander, Adrastus, or some such writer, at the call of the moment.', Porphyry, 'On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work' in Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., cii-cxxv, cxii. Porphyry tells a tale exemplifying Plotinus' strong disagreement with the position that a student of philosophy should unreservedly submit to their teacher, Ibid., cxiii

From all his adversaries, Peripatetics, Stoics, Middle-Platonist eclectics, even from the Gnostics, (Plotinus) borrows what he is perhaps overconfident in thinking that he can accommodate within his own restrained and concordant system.<sup>115</sup>

Hegel also recognised this willingness to absorb, describing Plotinus equally as a Neoplatonist and a Neoaristotelian<sup>116</sup> and Neoplatonism as an ‘eclectic school’.<sup>117</sup> While Neoplatonism was itself absorbed into Christianity,<sup>118</sup> particularly, as Dodds noted, in the form of Proclus’ triad,<sup>119</sup> it never lost its Greek rationality, retaining a key conceptual difference between the first element of that triad (Being) and the God of Christianity - where the sub-triad of the former is only completed at the end of the process of emanation and return, the latter is always the eternally perfect and complete goal of the process which He created.

Magee implicitly recognised the developmental nature of Neoplatonism<sup>120</sup> then wrote that

(For Plotinus) the One is in no way completed by the return. Proclus, however, follows the *Hermetica* in teaching that the One must emanate creation in order to be complete.<sup>121</sup>

Neither any requirement for god’s completion nor even mention of Proclus’ triad (*of triads*) is in the *Hermetica* - both these points exemplify Proclus’ obsession with and use of triadic conceptual

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<sup>115</sup> Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,’ op. cit., lxxv

<sup>116</sup> ‘We can call Plotinus a Neoplatonist and, with equal justification, call him a Neoaristotelian. With him we find multiple elucidations of one and the same main idea, quite in the Aristotelian manner. ... The main thing is that we must not take him as being opposed to Plato and Aristotle. He also drew upon the thinking and the *logos* of the Stoics.’ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 334

<sup>117</sup> ‘It is customary to use the name ‘eclectic school’ expressly for this Alexandrian school. ... Neoplatonic or Alexandrian philosophy does not constitute one particular school over against the others; instead it united all principles within itself, but in a higher, authentic, way.’, Ibid., 330; ‘The third [epoch of the first] period takes the shape of Alexandrian philosophy (Neoplatonism, but likewise Neo-Aristotelian philosophy too). The consummation of Greek philosophy as such, it established the realm of noumena, the ideal realm. This philosophy therefore incorporated all earlier forms of philosophy within it. Plotinus lived in the third century and Proclus in the fifth. By choosing to regard Proclus as the culmination of this philosophy, the entire period of Greek Philosophy then amounts to about one thousand years.’, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. I, 202

<sup>118</sup> ‘At the same time (Plotinus) is a mystic, and as such perhaps a greater inspiration for Western philosophy and for the Christian religion than even Plato himself. His whole *oeuvre* is infused with the powerful dynamism of “the desire of the soul for God”. This he may owe to the strong religious *ethos* of the time, partly to Near-Eastern influence, partly again to the pantheistic and “devout” trends in Stoicism... It was left to the Christian Church, the authentic heir to what is best in Plotinus’ teaching, to combine harmoniously in reflective thought the Biblical revelation, Plato’s interest in man as a member of society, and Plotinus’ interest in him as a person proceeding from God and striving towards oneness with the One.’, Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought,’ op. cit., lxxv

<sup>119</sup> ‘The triad immanence - procession - reversion had a considerable history. Ps. Dion. applies it to the divine love (*Div. Nom.* 4. 14); Psellus to the Christian Trinity (*C.M.A.G.* VI. 165. 36 ff.)’, Dodds’ commentary to Prop. 35, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, op. cit., 221. Prop 35 reads ‘Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it. For if it should remain without procession or reversion, it will be without distinction from, and therefore identical with, its cause, since distinction implies procession. And if it should proceed without reversion or immanence, it will be without conjunction or sympathy with its cause, since it will have no communication with it. ...’

<sup>120</sup> ‘Hegel admires Proclus as a “profoundly speculative man” and states that with him the Neoplatonic philosophy “has at last reached a more systematic order” (*LHP* 2:434, 435; *Werke* 19:468, 469). What Hegel seems to admire chiefly in Proclus is his use of the dialectic and the triadic form.’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 21

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

structure (which Hegel retained) and the influence, as Chlup has argued, of the eastern Neoplatonists. Again, Magee repeats Hegel's *error* in his discussion of Proclus on the one and the many<sup>122</sup> - an *error* which, as I have argued (7.ff.), indicates what *Hegel* did in his own Neoplatonism (repeatedly referring to Being as the One and God and making it not merely the primary creative element in the second hypostasis as did Plotinus but, by conflating the first hypostasis into the second, the primary creative element in his all-encompassing system of knowledge). Proclus, however, followed Plotinus in keeping the first hypostasis *distinct* from the second, the One distinct from the many, as I have shown (7.2).

Even though Magee wrote both that Hegel (correctly) believed he had *not* modelled his philosophy on the Trinity, it being a 'sensuous image' and anticipation of true philosophy, as Böhme's theosophy also was to him, and that Hegel 'saw much of himself in Proclus'<sup>123</sup> (as did Feuerbach<sup>124</sup>), he still weakly concluded

Of course, this may be an instance (of which there are many) of a philosopher failing sufficiently to understand himself.<sup>125</sup>

At every stage of god as process, what is *recounted* and *asserted* in the *Hermetica* and *theosophised* by Böhme is *speculatively philosophised* in Neoplatonism.<sup>126</sup> Magee wrote "Nothing may be revealed to itself without opposition," Boehme tells us.<sup>127</sup> Hegel quoted Böhme

You should know that all things consist of Yes and No, that the One as the Yes is energy and life - it is the energy of God and is God himself. But this truth would itself be unknowable without the No. The No is a counterstroke to...the eternal love. Nevertheless the Yes is not sundered from the No; they are not two things alongside one another, but only *one thing*. ...Without them both, all things would be nothing and would stand still. Without them

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<sup>122</sup> 'Proclus attempts to demonstrate, according to Hegel, "the many as one and the one as many,"', Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> 'In short, Hegel sees much of himself in Proclus.', Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> 'What is imagination and fantasy with the neo-Platonists, Hegel has merely transformed into the concept, or in other words, rationalised. Hegel is not the "German or Christian Aristotle"; he is the German *Proclus*. "*Absolute philosophy*" is the *reborn Alexandrian philosophy*. According to Hegel's explicit characterisation, it is not the Aristotelian nor the ancient pagan philosophy in general, but that of the Alexandrian school that is absolute (although still resting on abstraction from concrete self-consciousness) and Christian philosophy (albeit mixed with pagan ingredients).', Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 1843, Part II: Critique of Hegel, §29 Abstract and Concrete, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/future/future1.htm>

<sup>125</sup> 'Hegel believed that he himself had not modelled his philosophy on the Trinity. He held that the true form of philosophy resembles the Trinity simply because the Trinity is an anticipation of true philosophy, in the form of a sensuous image. Of course, this may be an instance (of which there are many) of a philosopher failing sufficiently to understand himself.', Magee, 'Hegel's Reception of Jacob Boehme', op. cit., 584. Magee's contradictions abound: despite claiming that Hegel's philosophy is Hermetic, he also wrote '(For Hegel the primary triad is Logic-Nature-Spirit) which in turn is patterned after the Christian Trinity.' Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op. cit., 178

<sup>126</sup> 'unlike the ancient theologians of Israel and Egypt, the Neoplatonists did not think that the universe could spring from the deity directly and in a way that surpasses all understanding, for example by being thought and spoken into existence. Their more refined view was that reality emerged from "the First" in coherent stages, in such a way that one stage functions as creative principle of the next.', Christian Wildberg, 'Neoplatonism', <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoplatonism/> op. cit.; 'the Plotinian path is indeed a philosophy, and not only a form of mysticism, insofar as this process of purification is an arduous intellectual and ethical path', Gwenaëlle Aubry, 'Plato, Plotinus, and Neoplatonism', *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, op. cit., 191-222, 209-210

<sup>127</sup> Magee, 'Jacob Boehme and Christian Theosophy', op. cit., 532

there is no understanding, for understanding originates in distinctiveness within multiplicity.<sup>128</sup>

But Hegel knew that someone else had not only told us this but had discussed it in a detailed, speculative manner in his tractate ‘The Knowing Hypostases and the Transcendent’, 1300 years before Böhme. Plotinus begins by asking a question

Are we to think that a being knowing itself must contain diversity, that self-knowledge can be affirmed only when some one phase of the self perceives other phases, and that therefore an absolutely simplex entity would be equally incapable of introversion and of self-awareness?<sup>129</sup>

He then states the problem

Either we must exhibit the self-knowing of an uncompounded being - and show how that is possible - or abandon the belief that any being can possess veritable self-cognition.<sup>130</sup>

and, after consideration, wrote

The intellective power, therefore, when occupied with the intellectual act, must be in a state of duality, whether one of the two elements stand actually outside or both lie within: the intellectual act will always comport diversity as well as the necessary identity, and in the same way its characteristic objects (the Ideas) must stand to the Intellectual-Principle as at once distinct and identical.<sup>131</sup>

In this discussion is not only the basis of Böhme’s and Hegel’s ‘distinctiveness within multiplicity’ (which *Plotinus* expanded into thought on subjectivity<sup>132</sup>) and of their casting of a

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<sup>128</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 102

<sup>129</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., V.3.1

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., V.3.10

<sup>132</sup> ‘Then, again, in the assertion “I am this particular thing”, either the “particular thing” is distinct from the assertor - and there is a false statement - or it is included within it, and, at once, multiplicity is asserted: otherwise the assertion is “I am what I am”, or “I am I”.’, Ibid. See 8.4.2. Magee relayed Hegel’s discussion of Böhme’s theology on this point: ‘The Son is the great Separator, who takes the qualities and powers that are bound into one within God the Father and “separates” them so that God comes face-to-face with himself. ... (quoting Hegel) “This is the highest profundity of thought of Jacob Boehme. ... Indeed Boehme has here penetrated into the entire depth of the divine being; evil, matter, or however it is called, is the I=I, the being-for-self - this is the true negativity.”’, Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, 587-588; Magee wrote ‘As a Hermeticist...Hegel regards God before creation as incomplete. To complete himself, God must know himself, and the immediate self-cognition God possesses before creation is not self-knowledge. Self-knowledge requires mediated re-cognition. It requires that the self see itself reflected in another and recognise itself there.’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 257; again, ‘Fichte, in his *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797), argued that opposition is a necessary condition of self-consciousness—specifically the opposition of other self-conscious human beings. So, it is unlikely that Hegel derived this view from Böhme’, Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, op. cit., 586-587. Magee elsewhere claimed that Fichte and Hegel ‘are merely Böhme’s followers in this regard’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 138

tripartite theme into many forms<sup>133</sup> but the source of mystical negation and speculative development.

Hegel placed great importance on ‘speculative’, thinking this of his philosophy and defining it as

the positively rational (apprehension of) the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition.<sup>134</sup>

As previously stated, he *equated* it with ‘mystical’. He also used the concept in relation to the philosophies of Plato<sup>135</sup> and Aristotle<sup>136</sup> - the same influences of equal importance to his own philosophy as to Plotinus’ - and in relation to the Neoplatonists.<sup>137</sup> Conceptual philosophical speculation, however, was what he thought Böhme’s ‘crude’, ‘barbaric’ theosophy reflected a profound *craving for*.<sup>138</sup>

Hegel believed that speculative logic in its dialectical, conceptual unfolding is the true vehicle for the account of the Absolute and therefore of self-knowledge. Magee wrote of this ‘science’

(Hegel’s) Logic requires a new form of conceptual thought that even avoids ‘applying’ concepts to real-world examples, striving instead to understand concepts and their relations in as pure a manner as possible.<sup>139</sup>

That Hegel believed reason is both a faculty of ‘mind’ and objective in the world has its most abstract expression in this ‘system of pure reason, the realm of pure thought’<sup>140</sup> which can be summarised as ‘the conceptual development of God within, manifest in his world without’. As Cusanus wrote in *Idiota de mente* (‘The Layman on Mind’)

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<sup>133</sup> ‘Boehme says: “Heaven and Hell are as far from each other as are *Ichts* and nothing (*ens* and *non ens*), as day and night.” He casts this theme into many forms’, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. III, 101. The Note adds ‘Hegel...probably has in mind Philo and Plotinus’, Ibid., Note 46

<sup>134</sup> Magee, ‘Hegel and Mysticism’, op. cit., 268

<sup>135</sup> ‘Plato’s speculative dialectic - something that originates with him - is the most interesting but also the most difficult [element] in his work; those who study Plato’s writings often do not become versed in it.’, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6*, op. cit., vol. II, 198

<sup>136</sup> ‘this is where Aristotle becomes properly philosophical and at the same time highly speculative.’, Ibid., 233; ‘This, then, is the pinnacle of the Aristotelian metaphysics - the most speculative thought there can be.’, Ibid., 254

<sup>137</sup> When discussing the philosophy of Proclus Hegel wrote ‘In its proper sense “mystical” means “speculative”. The mystical or speculative [task] consists in comprehending as a unity these distinctions (i.e. Proclus’ three triunities) that are defined as totalities, as gods. The expression “mystical” does in fact occur frequently in the Neoplatonists for whom (Greek word) means none other than “to consider speculatively”. The religious mysteries too are secrets to the abstract understanding, and it is only for rational, speculative thinking that they are object or content.’, Ibid., 344-345; ‘Hegel here has in mind precisely the thought of figures like Cusa, who sought knowledge of God through an overcoming of dichotomous, either-or thinking.’ Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 80.

<sup>138</sup> ‘we cannot fail to see the profound craving for speculation which existed in this man.’, quoted in Magee, ‘Hegel’s Reception of Jacob Boehme’, op. cit., 589; ‘Hegel...stated in print that he and Baader shared the goal of translating Böhme’s eccentric, sensualistic theosophy into “scientific” terms.’, Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 48

<sup>139</sup> Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 189

<sup>140</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, op. cit., 50

The Divine Mind's Conceiving is a producing of things; our mind's conceiving is a conceptualising of things. ...If all things are present in the Divine Mind as in their precise and proper Truth, then all things are present in our mind as in an image, or a likeness, of their proper Truth. That is, they are present conceptually, *for knowledge comes about on the basis of [conceptual] likeness* (my italics).<sup>141</sup>

Hegel's linking of 'philosophy', 'science', 'theology', 'religion' and 'reason', finding its culminating expression in the closing quotation from the *Metaphysics* in his *Encyclopaedia*<sup>142</sup> and his seamless move from a focus on 'substance' to one on 'subject'<sup>143</sup> reflects the influence of Aristotle *within* Neoplatonism, and comparatively very little - primarily the illustrative use of son as nature - that of the *Hermetica* and the theosophy of Böhme.

Hegel's structuring his philosophy on Proclus' triad of triads within a school always open to development, the equal significance to him and Neoplatonism of 'speculative' philosophy and the equal significance, again, to him and Neoplatonism of Plato and Aristotle all identify him as of that school, not, as Magee argues, of Hermeticism.

Even Hegel's description in his *Encyclopaedia Logic* of his system as one of conceptual circles of reason

Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle rounded and complete in itself. In each of these parts, however, the philosophical Idea is found in a particular specificity or medium. The single circle, because it is a real totality, bursts through the limits imposed by its special medium, and gives rise to a wider circle. The whole of philosophy in this way resembles a circle of circles.<sup>144</sup>

echoes Plotinus' description of his own system

The total scheme may be summarised in the illustration of The Good as a centre, the Intellectual-Principle as an unmoving circle, the Soul as a circle in motion, its moving being its aspiration: the Intellectual-Principle possesses and has ever embraced that which is beyond being; the Soul must seek it still<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* ('The Layman on Mind'), 1450, in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, Trans., Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 531-589, 72, 543

<sup>142</sup> "Hegel speaks of Absolute Idea as 'the Idea that thinks itself' (EL #236), and he explicitly likens it to Aristotle's concept of God. 'This is the *noesis noeseos* [thought thinking itself] which was already called the highest form of the Idea by Aristotle (EL #236 A).", Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 100

<sup>143</sup> 'In Absolute Knowing the drive to totally grasp the object, and to annul the subject-object distinction will be realised. Absolute Knowing will be the total grasp of the only true, unique individual there is: the Absolute. In Aristotelian terms, it is the grasp of true being or substance. But in Hegel's thought substance has become subject: "what seems to happen outside of [the self], to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and substance shows itself to be essentially subject" (Miller, 21; PG, 28).', *Ibid.*, 171

<sup>144</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., §15

<sup>145</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* (Abridged), op. cit., IV.4.16



Hegel, again echoing Plotinus, with his ‘flight of the alone to the Alone’, believed that ‘nobler natures’ should ‘flee into ideal regions’<sup>146</sup> and practise in a religious community of philosopher priests, apart from the world (see 9.8). Magee wrote

Another parallel between Hermeticism and Hegel concerns the (Hermetic) initiation process...(whereby) initiation seems to fall into two parts, one dealing with self-knowledge, the other with knowledge of God. It can easily be shown, simply on a theoretical level, that these two are intimately wedded. To really know one’s self is to be able to give a complete speech about the conditions of one’s being, and this involves speaking about God and His entire cosmos.<sup>147</sup>

But here, too, Chlup puts the *Neoplatonic* position, writing that the main function of their theurgy was initiatory.<sup>148</sup> Of Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* he stated

One scholar (Rappe 2000: 170-1) has even attributed an initiatory quality to the text: ‘the system that it supposedly conveys is more like a ritual invocation or theurgic rite than a handbook of metaphysics...Like the statues of the theurgists, this text is meant to become enlivened through the invocations of the gods that form its itinerary.’<sup>149</sup>

*Why* has Magee argued as he has, misrepresenting the *Hermetica* and utterly refusing to consider the possibility that Hegel may have been other than an Hermeticist, a *Neoplatonist*? Hegel’s philosophy, though (as Magee wrote) mytho-poetic, is far more than myth - its range and the *Logic* are evidence of this. It fully develops and fleshes out the system of conceptual artistry that is the *Enneads*, drawing on the same Greek philosophical tradition of detailed rationality.

Magee’s use of the time-worn description of Marxism as Hegel’s ‘bastard’ points to a motive - that Neoplatonism *always* was the school that best explicates the world of change - prior to Marx, that in consciousness and after, in objective reality. *I* will pass, *Magee* will pass, the bourgeoisie that employs him will pass - individually and as a class. Nothing remains but material change...and nothing can stop it.

The heyday of those stages of capitalist ideology known as ‘Modernism’ and ‘post-modernism’ (equally aimed at undermining our trust in our senses and in our knowledge of the world through their engagement in *praxis*) have passed and the ideologues of the bourgeoisie have been forced, under the very pressure of change that produced Hegel and saw the absorption of his philosophy into materialism, now dialectical, to address mysticism. Hermeticism and other similar

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<sup>146</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 143

<sup>147</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 10-11

<sup>148</sup> ‘Conspicuous as the external theurgic operations might have been, for the Neoplatonists they were the less significant part of their hieratic art. Its main function was transformative and initiatory. Theurgy played a part in the ascent of the soul, allowing the induction of higher states of consciousness unattainable by pure philosophy.’, Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 173

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

‘esoteric’ belief systems<sup>150</sup> offer them yet another way out - philosophy as myth, as account, as subjectivity, as sacred, ancient authority - philosophy still suffused with ‘God’, still focussing on consciousness, on what is secondary.

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<sup>150</sup> “‘Esotericism’ refers to a number of theories, practices, and approaches to knowledge united by their participation in a premodern, largely pagan worldview. ...Further, esotericists typically believe that (their) truths and practices are of the greatest antiquity - perhaps once widely disseminated and openly proclaimed, but now (and for a great many centuries) hidden and preserved by a few special individuals or schools. Discovery in esotericism is almost always rediscovery.’, Magee, Editor’s Introduction, *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, op. cit., 19-83, 57-58

## 15. Conclusion

Recognising Hegel to have been a Neoplatonist is to take the first step in recognising the philosophical current that ran and underwent continual and ultimately profound development from Plotinus to Marx and Engels. The next step is to review the entirety of that current in order to further develop it as the method for knowledge.

Neoplatonism was never a fixed set of beliefs - rather, it was always a 'work in progress' which absorbed every philosophical influence that could contribute to the aims and development of the unsystematic *Enneads*.

Plotinus set down the original beliefs in his fifty four tractates - his was literally the 'big vision'. Proclus gave that vision detailed triadic structure and definition and in so doing, advanced it. Cusanus explored the subtleties of contradiction and wrote that knowledge results from our conceptualising, which reflects God's productive activity - but he wrote of these in static relations, not in their dialectical development. Hegel combined the work of all three, systematically developing every aspect of Neoplatonism on the basis of its unity, dynamism and vitalism.

Just as Hegel regarded Christianity as the consummate religion in the sense that it brought the concept of religion to consummation and completion, so *he* did with Neoplatonism.<sup>1</sup> Its development could not be taken any further within idealism. Marx and Engels then took what Hegel had achieved and stood it on its material feet, making materialism dialectical and *praxis* fundamental in cognition.

Redding stated that after Hegel's death his supporters split into two camps - those who thought he was advocating a traditional Christian view of existence and those who thought he was advocating a secular humanist view of human existence. He added 'But it might be that Hegel was introducing an entirely new perspective on human existence that is reducible neither to traditional theism or modern atheism. This view is a consequence of his key concept of "recognition".<sup>2</sup> Not only was Hegel's fundamentally an *ancient* perspective on human existence, reducible neither to traditional theism nor modern atheism, his key concept of 'recognition' was *also* a consequence of *it* - of Neoplatonism.

Hegel's 'Trinity' is not a Christian Trinity - it is Proclus' triad, the development of which appears in Cusanus' theology. Yet the Trinity served Hegel's Absolute and Cusanus' Absolute Maximum equally well. As Buhle astutely observed of Cusanus

The divinity to Nicholas, as to Ficino, was really the logical concept of the highest order...He must surely have suspected that notwithstanding all his

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<sup>1</sup> Nussbaum wrote 'Hegel's philosophy...has been aptly described as "the crowning achievement of Neoplatonism."', Charles O. Nussbaum, *The Musical Representation, Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, 266

<sup>2</sup> Slide for University of Sydney lecture 04.10.10

purges, the understanding yet cannot conceive the maximum bereft of material attributes as something real, for without them the concept dissolves into nothingness.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel advocated the intellectualist humanism of Neoplatonism, a belief in human worth and a perspectival unity, which unity he saw as the solution to a perceived lack of community. Yet his *lived* solution, following the recommendation of Plotinus, was the ‘flight of the alone to the Alone’, to a community of philosopher-priests (see 9.8).<sup>4</sup>

As Proclus did to Plotinus’ philosophy, so ‘the German Proclus’ did to both of theirs - as he did to that of Cusanus. Both drawing on and responding to what they had philosophised and achieved,<sup>5</sup> he developed to its furthest point within idealism a tremendously rich, dynamic and dialectical system with creativity at its core - which current has made such an enormous contribution to all aspects of Western culture, including science.

Both Marx and Engels referred to Hegel’s philosophy as mystical. Because of their hostility to mysticism, neither had any interest in recognising that it was the consummate achievement of a long process of development *within* Neoplatonism.<sup>6</sup> For them, it was simply Hegel’s mystical philosophy, the dialectic of which suffered *because of* its mysticism.

Marx acknowledged his great debt to Hegel - and thereby, to Neoplatonism. He also put his finger on why the ideologues of the bourgeoisie - particularly in philosophy - have been and are so fearful of acknowledging this current, now materialist, and of according it its rightful position as our method of knowing

I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker...The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel’s hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.

In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a

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<sup>3</sup> Buhle, *Geschichte*, op. cit., vol. 2.1. See 13.4.1

<sup>4</sup> ‘And - so Hegel concludes - philosophic thought has no choice but to become a “separate sanctuary,” inhabited by philosophers who are an “isolated order of priests.” They cannot “mix with the world, but must leave to the world the task of settling how it might find its way out of its present state of disruption.” What an incredible, what a shattering turn of thought!’; Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought*, op. cit., 235; also, to illustrate how profoundly the notion of ‘flight’ is associated with Neoplatonism: ‘From so fragmented a world (as that of the twentieth century) the Hegelian philosophy would be *forced* to flee, as surely as Neoplatonism was forced into flight from Imperial Rome. Only thus could it maintain itself as a serene unity of thought free of fragmentation.’, *Ibid.*, 236; ‘Whether the ethics of the Neoplatonic sage had a Proclean or Plotinian form, it always created a clear divide between philosophers and laymen. ...No doubt the sage could still significantly influence the actions of laymen: his superhuman moral integrity turned him into a powerful ethical model that others could admire and imitate at least partially and imperfectly.’, Chlup, *Proclus, An Introduction*, op. cit., 247

<sup>5</sup> To exemplify, I recommend reading the Chapter Titles of the Books of Cusanus’ *De docta ignorantia*

<sup>6</sup> ‘dialectics has so far been fairly closely investigated by only two thinkers, Aristotle and Hegel.’, Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, 43

scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.<sup>7</sup>

In his *Dialectics of Nature* Engels summarised what was involved in his and Marx's inversion of Hegel's philosophy

This mystical in Hegel himself, because the categories appear as pre-existing and the dialectics of the real world as their mere reflection. In reality it is the reverse: the dialectics of the mind is only the reflection of the forms of motion of the real world, both of nature and of history.<sup>8</sup>

Cyril Smith wrote importantly that Marx had demystified mysticism *without rejecting it*.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Marx had demystified mysticism *by retaining and using what had been developed within it*.

In his eleven short *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1845, Marx discussed fundamental materialist precepts, distinguishing between them and idealism. In the first, he distinguished between contemplative activity and sensuous activity/practice. He wrote

the *active* side, in contradistinction to materialism, was set forth by idealism - but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such.<sup>10</sup>

Neoplatonism, with its emphasis on creativity and dynamic, dialectical development was 'perfectly' suited to 'set forth the active side' within idealism.

In his second thesis, Marx wrote that the question of truth is a practical question

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, Postface to the Second Edition 1873, Penguin, London, 1982, 103. Redding wrote of Marx's 'inversion' of Hegel's mystical philosophy of history '(Hegel) is perhaps most well-known for his teleological account of history, an account that was later taken over by Marx and "inverted" into a materialist theory of an historical development culminating in communism.', Redding, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/>, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, op. cit., 203

<sup>9</sup> 'In demystifying mysticism without rejecting it, Marx shows how humanity can bring about its own emancipation.', Cyril Smith, *Karl Marx and Human Self-creation*, 2002, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/alteration/ch06.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, First thesis, 'Theses on Feuerbach', 1845 in *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, 618

practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question.<sup>11</sup>

In his eighth thesis Marx wrote that the solution to questions of mystical theory is to be found in practice and in the comprehension of this practice.<sup>12</sup>

Materialist dialectics is a philosophical method for investigating nature and society.<sup>13</sup> It holds practical activity to be the basis of our relations with the world and therefore of cognition. *Praxis* is thus a criterion of knowledge. Only when practical activity confirms the coincidence of ideas and hypotheses with reality can it be said that they are true. Since practical activity is relative to the level of technological development, truth can never be that absolute ardently sought and equally trembled before by the idealists, rather, it is a deepening relative in relation to an absolute which can only ever be theoretical. Lenin wrote

From living perception to abstract thought, *and from this to practice*, such is the dialectical path of the cognition of *truth*, of the cognition of objective reality. Kant disparages knowledge in order to make way for faith: Hegel exalts knowledge, asserting that knowledge is knowledge of God. The materialist exalts the knowledge of matter, of nature<sup>14</sup>

Contradiction is the chief category of materialist dialectics. It expresses the inner source of all motion and development and is the essence of objects, the basis of their self-development.

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts... is the *essence* (one of the “essentials,” one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features) of dialectics. ...The correctness of this aspect of the content of dialectics must be tested by the history of science.<sup>15</sup>

Every concept and category is historical by nature and therefore warrants investigation.

Engels put the excellent argument that scientists should know dialectics

Until the end of the last century, indeed until 1830, natural scientists could manage pretty well with the old metaphysics, because real science did not go beyond mechanics...Now, however, everything is quite different. Chemistry, the abstract divisibility of physical things, bad infinity - atomistics. ...and finally the identity of the forces of nature and their mutual convertibility, which put an end to all fixity of categories. Nevertheless, the bulk of natural scientists are still held fast in the old metaphysical categories

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.’, Ibid., 620

<sup>13</sup> ‘dialectics...offers...the method of explaining, the evolutionary processes occurring in nature, inter-connections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another.’, Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, op. cit., 41

<sup>14</sup> V.I.Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol., 38 (Philosophical Notebooks), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., ‘On the Question of Dialectics’, 357-361, 357

and helpless when these modern facts, which so to say prove the dialectics in nature, have to be rationally explained and brought into relation with one another. ...Dialectics divested of mysticism becomes an absolute necessity for natural science<sup>16</sup>

In standing the philosophy of the consummate Neoplatonist on its material feet, Marx and Engels enabled the fruits of that current's long development to flourish, not least those of its perspectival unity - a development from the unity-in-multiplicity of Plotinus' ideal second hypostasis to the unity-in-multiplicity of Cusanus' ideal Christian cultus to the unity-in-multiplicity of Hegel's ideal philosophical cultus to the unity-in-multiplicity of the brains of an infinite number of finite individuals

Just as the infinity of knowable matter is composed of the purely finite things, so the infinity of the thought which knows the absolute is composed of an infinite number of finite human minds, working side by side and successively at this infinite knowledge, committing practical and theoretical blunders, setting out from erroneous, one-sided, and false premises, pursuing false, tortuous, and uncertain paths, and often not even finding what is right when they run their noses against it.<sup>17</sup>

In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of Classical German Philosophy* Engels wrote that just as idealism went through development, major discoveries in science necessitate the development of materialism - he discussed its progress from mechanical to dialectical<sup>18</sup> - and that those developments in turn open up new areas of knowledge

idealism underwent a series of stages of development, so also did materialism. With each epoch-making discovery even in the sphere of natural science, it has to change its form; and after history was also subjected to materialistic treatment, a new avenue of development has opened here, too.<sup>19</sup>

Just as Marx and Engels applied the achievements of Hegel's Neoplatonic study of consciousness to an understanding of the universe as a dialectical process, so the work being done in the knowledge

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<sup>16</sup> Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, op. cit., 203-204

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 234

<sup>18</sup> 'The materialism of the last century was predominantly mechanical, because at that time, of all natural sciences, only mechanics, and indeed only the mechanics of solid bodies — celestial and terrestrial — in short, the mechanics of gravity, had come to any definite close. Chemistry at that time existed only in its infantile, phlogistic form. Biology still lay in swaddling clothes; vegetable and animal organisms had been only roughly examined and were explained by purely mechanical causes. What the animal was to Descartes, man was to the materialists of the 18th century — a machine. This exclusive application of the standards of mechanics to processes of a chemical and organic nature — in which processes the laws of mechanics are, indeed, also valid, but are pushed into the backgrounds by other, higher laws — constitutes the first specific but at that time inevitable limitations of classical French materialism.

The second specific limitation of this materialism lay in its inability to comprehend the universe as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development. This was in accordance with the level of the natural science of that time, and with the metaphysical, that is, anti-dialectical manner of philosophising connected with it.', Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, op. cit., Part 2: Materialism, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch02.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

of our brains (the organ that devised this method) - particularly of consciousness, of what it is to reason, of our emotions and of the brain's wholistic functioning - now warrant a further review of the materialist theory of knowledge. The dialectical method should be used to guide science and structure its discoveries, and those ever deepening, more complex and contradictory discoveries require that this method reflect *them*.

In the *Philosophy of Mind* Hegel wrote that we are always thinking<sup>20</sup> yet he believed that 'thought proper' can only be done consciously, with words.<sup>21</sup> Marx (who, in his dissertation, described mysticism - the philosophical source of his epistemology - as 'unfree'<sup>22</sup>) and Engels retained this same patriarchal commitment to the relationship between reason and words. Both Neoplatonism and modern research expose the inadequacy of this position.

Firstly, Neoplatonism has shown the necessity of the perspectival. No word or concept - however apparently tightly defined - can be divorced from it. To use a word or concept *is* to have a perspective on it - we have *chosen* that word or concept rather than any other. The *personal* is the aspect of a definition that completes that definition.

Secondly and related to this, the thinking that we are always engaged in subconsciously is the ground in our *brains'* functioning on which our reason using words and concepts is based. What finds expression in words and concepts has usually undergone a long, *subconscious process of non-linguistic thought*. One can *deliberately* use this process to better inform that done consciously.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 'it is also inadequate to...(say) vaguely that it is only in the waking state that man *thinks*. For thought *in general* is so much inherent in the nature of man that he is always thinking, even in sleep. In every form of mind, in feeling, intuition, as in picture-thinking, thought remains the basis.', Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 69

<sup>21</sup> 'Intellect and Reason, the modes of thought proper, are active only in the waking state.', Ibid., 'To want to think without words as Mesmer once attempted is...a manifestly irrational procedure', Ibid., 221

<sup>22</sup> 'everything collapses that is transcendently related to human consciousness and therefore belongs to the imagining mind. On the other hand, if that self-consciousness which knows itself only in the form of abstract universality is raised to an absolute principle, then the door is opened wide to superstitious and unfree mysticism.', Karl Marx, 'The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature.', 1841, Part II, Chapter 5, <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1841/dr-theses/ch08.htm>

<sup>23</sup> I was asked to explain my use of 'contemplation'. After I gave a reply that I was not happy with, I decided to think about my response non-linguistically by consigning the issue to my subconsciousness, by *giving up control* of the process (through language) and just 'sitting with it', letting it run its course. Several times my thoughts on the subject 'rose' into my consciousness (as shards and snippets, very likely due to my conditioned desire to control the process) but I stopped them from forming beyond single words, immediately sending those shards and snippets back into the workings of my subconscious brain. I simply got on with my day. I *focused* on other matters. I knew that the process was developing and could *feel* it was so - intellectually (I *knew*, by the briefest glimpses, as though quickly opening an oven door the slightest amount, that my thoughts were taking shape) and, inseparable from this, *emotionally* (I felt good that I could deliberately initiate and be conscious of this *subconscious* process). I left the process to itself. The next night I sat down at my computer, brought to my consciousness what had developed in my subconsciousness by considering in language how to explain my use of 'contemplation', composed and again posted my reply. My response which a day before had seemed so difficult to express and inadequate, came easily. 'Sitting with it' in one's *subconsciousness* is no less a form of *thought*, of *reason* than is *conscious* reason using language - the reason of patriarchy and control ('Here-comes-a-sentence-that-can-be-written-down-now.'). Yet the former is far more fluid and creative, in which the impossible is possible - to draw from Zamyatin, it is a process in which trotting chairs and fluttering wings can freely mingle. It is a form of reason (delicate, dynamic, intuitive, sensitive, poetic, profoundly rich and complex - historically, in the West, consigned to '*the feminine*') that is active all the time. *This* is the 'thinking all the time' that Hegel referred to, which linguistic reason can easily dominate, *drown out but never silence*, precisely because the latter *has to be* defined, measured, structured - *limited*. It is most probably the same as what we employ when we have a problem and 'sleep on it', waking at 4am at the 'Eureka!' moment - 'I have spent ages thinking about this problem (linguistically) and couldn't solve it - but now, in my sleep, I have!'. Lucid dreaming also has this potential for non-linguistic reason in sleep. The *test* of any form of reason is *praxis*.



Philosophising conceptually is at the heart of Hegel's claim to the mastery of 'reason'. His belief that this be done 'speculatively', which, as noted previously, he equated with 'mystically',<sup>24</sup> rather than *undermining* that claim, carries the worth of his philosophy beyond his conceptually-based justification for it - Magee has pointed to Hegel's mytho-poetic circumscription, which I have discussed throughout this thesis. Inseparable from this are both intuition which I have also discussed (see 9.4), pointing out the parallels between Plotinus and Hegel on the subject<sup>25</sup> and to Hegel's understanding of its application, leading to 'a completely developed cognition'<sup>26</sup> and the ineffable, the felt awareness of the unity of all things, of which Hegel wrote

what is ineffable is, in truth, only something obscure, fermenting, something which gains clarity only when it is able to put itself into words. Accordingly, the word gives to thoughts their highest and truest existence. ...Just as the true *thought* is the very thing itself, so too is the *word* when it is employed by genuine thinking.<sup>27</sup>

Hofmannsthal addressed the relationship between the 'mere fermentation' of the obscure ineffable and words in 'The Letter of Lord Chandos'

You were kind enough to express your dissatisfaction that no book written by me reaches you any more, 'to compensate for the loss of our relationship.' Reading that, I felt, with a certainty not entirely bereft of a feeling of sorrow, that neither in the coming year nor in the following nor in all the years of this my life shall I write a book, whether in English or in Latin: and this for an odd and embarrassing reason which I must leave to the boundless superiority of your mind to place in the realm of physical and spiritual values spread out harmoniously before your unprejudiced eye: to wit, because the language in which I might be able not only to write but to think is neither Latin nor English, neither Italian nor Spanish, but a language none of whose words is known to me, a language in which inanimate things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'Speculative truth, it may also be noted, means very much the same as what, in special connection with religious experience and doctrines, used to be called Mysticism. ...the reason-world may be equally styled mystical', Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, op. cit., 121

<sup>25</sup> Both made the same distinction between 'mindless' (sensuous consciousness) and 'mindful' (thinking religiously) intuition, both referred to the latter as 'mental vision', both wrote of thinking's 'pure unity with itself... (which) can also be called pure *intuition*... such that between the subject and object there is no [difference]... *Thinking* is simply *knowing*.' Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., vol. III, 190

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 200; 'Dialectical materialism regards intuition as immediate knowledge, as living contemplation in its dialectical connection with the mediated knowledge and rejects any attempts to treat it as a super-rational, mystical cognitive ability. Intuition must not be considered as a kind of fundamental deviation from the usual ways of knowing the truth; it is a natural form of their manifestation based on logical thinking and practice. Behind the ability "suddenly" to grasp the truth, are, in reality, accumulated experience and knowledge acquired before. The psychological mechanism of intuition is not studied enough', *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Ed., I. Frolov, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984, 201.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, op. cit., 221

<sup>28</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Ein Brief*, ('The Letter of Lord Chandos'), 1902, [http://depts.washington.edu/vienna/documents/Hofmannsthal/Hofmannsthal\\_Chandos.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/vienna/documents/Hofmannsthal/Hofmannsthal_Chandos.htm)

as did Hegel, no less, in the concluding words of his *Phenomenology* - his adaptation from Schiller's *Die Freundschaft*,

from the chalice of this realm of spirits  
foams forth for Him his own infinitude.<sup>29</sup>

Engels, failing to recognise Hegel's Neoplatonism, wrote

(Hegel) was compelled to make a system and, in accordance with traditional requirements, a system of philosophy must conclude with some sort of absolute truth. Therefore, however much Hegel, especially in his *Logic*, emphasised that this eternal truth is nothing but the logical or the historical process itself, he nevertheless finds himself compelled to supply this process with an end, just because he has to bring his system to a termination at some point or other.<sup>30</sup>

Yet he pointed to a profound contradiction in that system

the whole dogmatic content of the Hegelian system is declared to be absolute truth, in contradiction to his dialectical method, which dissolves all dogmatism. Thus the revolutionary side is smothered beneath the overgrowth of the conservative side.<sup>31</sup>

This contradiction is sourced in the tension between Plotinus' first and second hypostases, between the greatest activity and stillness of the One Absolute and the dialectical unity-in-multiplicity of Intellectual-Principle. Hegel's conflation of the first and second hypostases and use of Proclus' triad Being-Life-Intelligence as his 'reason-world', in a superficially Christian model, both compounded and concentrated the problem. Being, the first element of the triad of triads now became One, God and Absolute.

This Absolute entails 'the end of history', an expression which, contrary to Magee's claim,<sup>32</sup> Hegel used three times in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*,<sup>33</sup> and 'the end of philosophy'.<sup>34</sup>

With all philosophers it is precisely the 'system' which is perishable; and for the simple reason that it springs from an imperishable desire of the human

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<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 493

<sup>30</sup> Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, op. cit., Part 1: Hegel, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch01.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> 'Today, Kojève is most famous for his so-called "end of history" thesis, which he claimed to find in Hegel (a claim disputed by many Hegel scholars).', Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 7, 'as many Hegel scholars have pointed out, there is little basis for the idea that there is an "end of history" in Hegel's texts', Ibid., 107

<sup>33</sup> 'the true nature of the ultimate end of history, the concept of the spirit.', G.W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, Trans., H.B.Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, 74, 'From the point of view of religion, the aim of both natural existence and spiritual activity is the glorification of God. Indeed, this is the worthiest end of the spirit and of history.', Ibid., 149-150, 'World history travels from east to west; for Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia was the beginning.', Ibid., 197

<sup>34</sup> 'Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is...the spontaneous becoming of itself.', Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 11

mind — the desire to overcome all contradictions. But if all contradictions are once and for all disposed of, we shall have arrived at so-called absolute truth — world history will be at an end. And yet it has to continue, although there is nothing left for it to do — hence, a new, insoluble contradiction. As soon as we have once realised — and in the long run no one has helped us to realise it more than Hegel himself — that the task of philosophy thus stated means nothing but the task that a single philosopher should accomplish that which can only be accomplished by the entire human race in its progressive development — as soon as we realise that, there is an end to all philosophy in the hitherto accepted sense of the word. One leaves alone ‘absolute truth’, which is unattainable along this path or by any single individual; instead, one pursues attainable relative truths along the path of the positive sciences, and the summation of their results by means of dialectical thinking. At any rate, with Hegel philosophy comes to an end; on the one hand, because in his system he summed up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even though unconsciously, he showed us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive knowledge of the world.<sup>35</sup>

Hegel, Marx and Engels *all* used dialectic with regard to the future - Hegel by implication, wrote of the present in relation to it (that self-knowledge had been attained in his time),<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels of the future in relation to the present (socialist revolution and communism) - on this, too, I disagree with Magee.<sup>37</sup>

Plant, pointing to the fundamental contradiction in Hegel’s system, argued that it is impossible to give an ‘absolute’ characterisation - one which would be closed to future analysis - of any period of history

If Hegel’s philosophy is supposed to embody an Absolute standpoint in which *Geist* comes to full self-consciousness this would seem to require the claim to be true that nothing which happens in the future will fall outside the conceptual structure which Hegel has developed. Everything which happens subsequently can be rendered fully intelligible in terms of the concepts articulated in Hegel’s philosophical system. This claim, to be true, must require in some sense the foreclosure of the future. As such it embodies a

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<sup>35</sup> Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, op. cit., Part 1: Hegel, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch01.htm>

<sup>36</sup> ‘Hegel believes that he stands at a privileged point in history - able to look back at the course of human events and see that they were aiming at a goal which, to all intents and purposes, has been reached in his own time: self-knowledge’, Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 165.

<sup>37</sup> ‘It is worth noting that one of the most important ways in which Marx departs from Hegel is in insisting that dialectic can be used as a tool to predict the next phase of history.’, Ibid.

particular judgement about the nature of the future which many would regard as absurd<sup>38</sup>

Further

such a view of history is incompatible with the freedom and self-transcendence with which Hegel credits human nature<sup>39</sup>

As Hegel used the Neoplatonic Absolute to justify ‘the end of history’, so he did with ‘the end of philosophy’ - an ‘end’ on which he, Marx and Engels were in agreement, for different reasons. Where Magee wrote that Hegel aimed to end philosophy by capturing all reality in a circular speech<sup>40</sup> (claiming this ‘speech’ is Hermetic), Marx wrote that ‘philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought’ and to be condemned.<sup>41</sup>

Plant wrote

Unless dialectical change comes to an end the achievement of Reason will always be a mere ought to be<sup>42</sup>

The contextualisation and clearest understanding of the contradictions, problems and qualities of Hegel’s philosophy are impossible without recognising both that it is the consummate expression of Neoplatonism and that those contradictions, problems and qualities were bound in Neoplatonism through the long history of its development. Again, since this is the philosophy Marx and Engels used to make materialism dialectical, that contextualisation and clearest understanding are also necessary to the further development of materialism.

The willingness to let go of all definitions, to negate all its own formulations, opens thought to what is moving within it, beyond or beneath

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<sup>38</sup> Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 233; ‘To arrest the process of dialectical development in history...is itself undialectical in the sense that it is inconsistent with the absolute or infinite negativity of the dialectic. The whole tendency of the dialectic is to dissolve and negate every fixed content’, Ibid., 237. Hegel himself must have recognised what Plant referred to as ‘a deep inconsistency’ (239) when he described America as ‘the world of the future’, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, op. cit., 215

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 237

<sup>40</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, op.cit., 13; ‘philosophy, for Hegel, is at one and the same time self-knowledge and knowledge of the whole. Thus it satisfies the two classical Greek definitions of wisdom. ...The ultimate consummation of the love of wisdom occurs when, as discussed earlier, self-knowledge and knowledge of the whole become one and the same in a philosophy that demonstrates that self-knowledge is the purpose of existence itself. Of course, an implication of this claim is that Hegel’s system constitutes, in a real sense, the end of philosophy. Although Hegel does not say this outright, he makes remarks which come close to it, and such a claim is a clear implication of his thought.’, Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 177-178.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Feuerbach’s great achievement is: (1) The proof that philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form and manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; hence equally to be condemned’, Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Plant, *Hegel, An Introduction*, op. cit., 238; ‘But how can any thought be final? Is not the very life of thinking invested in constant displacements of every achieved formulation?’ William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2014, 159; Verene shows that Hegel *fundamentally* contradicted himself at the ending of his *Phenomenology* ‘with an image, an image of the inability of the divine to bring its own creation and its own being to a point of rest.’, Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., 7

the definitive grasp of words and concepts. Philosophy at this level is not merely cognitive but also shades into and merges with other dimensions of human experience and being, such as the affective and conative. In the ancient world, notably among the Neoplatonists, philosophy was so understood as a spiritual exercise involving all the human faculties of intellection and sensibility and *praxis*.<sup>43</sup>

With the decline of modernism followed by that of postmodernism, a profound shift is taking place in the ideology of the bourgeoisie - a growing preparedness to consider the impact of mysticism - fundamental to both modernism and post-modernism - on Western culture. Particularly, the primary Western form - Neoplatonism - has been treated by generations of academics as the pornography of modern Western philosophy, even as its Siren call has met an eager response.

The task of the ideologues, while maintaining the façade of a smooth continuum in 'scholarship', is to explore mysticism without undermining gods, exposing lies, damaging the reputations and careers of those who were and are complicit in *denying* the pervasive influence of mysticism on their culture - *in rationalising it* - and to do so without laying bare a cultural arrogance and mass self-delusion that we in the West are the champions of reason, while others stare at their navels or are obsessed with filial piety - not a good look with the rise of Asia and the growing dominance of China. The consummate Neoplatonist Hegel, author of the *Science of Logic* and upholder of Western supremacism,<sup>44</sup> is one such 'god'.

The response by generations of learned spokespeople to Plotinus' philosophy and to the current he initiated is a most unforgivable failure of scholarship. *Why* this failure? Because of its *revolutionary dialectical core, explored by the Neoplatonists*, and because of its *all-embracing implications* - brought by Marx and Engels from the subjective world within to the objective world without. Of its relevance for science Casarella wrote

Cusanus derives by a strictly speculative form of argumentation a new idea of the cosmos...In its implications Cusanus's idea is much more far-reaching than the physical models of Copernicus and Galileo. Einstein with his theory of relativity will be the first to develop a physical model of the universe that also denies every centre of the universe.<sup>45</sup>

This 'new idea', like so many others, was *Plotinus' not Cusanus'*. The denial of every centre as of every claim to permanence other than the absolute of change are in the *Enneads*. This most powerful philosophy, now the materialist method of knowledge reflecting objective reality is also the most complex, subtle and aesthetic - reflecting what *flows eternally*, as Hegel wrote, from 'inner life and self-movement'. It is a current with the deepest belief in human potential, perspective and creativity.

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<sup>43</sup> Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, op. cit., 200

<sup>44</sup> See 1.1

<sup>45</sup> Regine Kather, 'The Earth is a Noble Star', in Casarella, Ed., *Cusanus, The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, op. cit., 226-244, 236

Magee<sup>46</sup> and Smith<sup>47</sup> wrote of Hegel's and Marx's achievements regarding our self-creation but *this* recognition, too, was not Hegel's and Marx's to claim but that of one to whom their debt was equally immeasurable

But how are you to see into a virtuous Soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> '(Hegel believed he was) the first philosopher to discover the rational order within history...history is the tale of our gradual self-creation, and of our realisation that it is our nature to be self-creating.', Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, op. cit., 106

<sup>47</sup> 'Those old mystics had probed the contradictory structure of self-creation, but only in its heretical-religious form. How could they do anything more under the conditions of their time? Hegel took this much further, attempting to systematise that knowledge. Marx, living in the last stage of alienation, is able, in his critiques of religion, the state, philosophy and political economy, to pose the problem in the form in which its practical solution can be discerned: the communist revolution. Instead of the mystical loop, 'God making humanity making God', Marx must express an even more sharply contradictory movement, that of 'human activity or self-change': humans make their own conditions of life, which in turn make humanity what it is. In its estranged shape, labour produces capital, which in turn enslaves labour.', Cyril Smith, 'Karl Marx and Human Self-creation', 2002, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/alteration/ch06.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, I.6.9, op. cit., 54

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