

On the Possibility of Mystery. Philosophy and Esotericism

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to show that the relation esoteric-exoteric is intrinsic to philosophy. For Hegel, mystery and esotericism are categories related to the finite and so, with the incomplete reflection of the spirit in himself. The speculative philosophy is oriented towards the ideal of complete (*vollständig*) revelation of the object and so, towards an intrinsic exoteric character of philosophical reflection.

Keywords: Hegel, esoteric philosophy, reflection, mystery, truth

1. The Place of Mystery

At the beginning of his book *Kabbalah and Interpretation*, Moshe Idel gives a definition of the hermeneutical practice which makes Jewish hermeneutics of the post biblical period possible; he speaks of *arcanization*, defined as a "secretive understanding of canonical texts understood as pointing to these realms in allusive ways: anagrammatic, numerical, allegorical or symbolic" (Idel 2002, 1). Two moments are the landmarks of this process. The former is that of "extending the relevance of the canonic text" to various domains: cosmology, psychology, theosophy, etc. The latter, which is the actual interpretive one, consists of developing complex hermeneutic techniques that master and account for this extended relevance. The hermeneutic presupposition of the Jewish post biblical tradition is the

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following: “Secrets are commensurable to the methods that will solve the enigma implied in the secrets” (Idel 2002, 2).

It is interesting to note that arcanization is seen in this particular context not as a simple interpreting game, but rather as a manner of creating tradition and, moreover, as a phenomenological mode of the sacred. According to M. Idel, a proliferation of the interpretive techniques is connected to a larger religious phenomenon, that of the “textualization” of religious life. During the post biblical age, revelation shifts from the emphasis on the level of the world to the level of the text. God expresses Himself through words, the sacred text becomes the place where religious life is put at stake. Hermeneutics thus becomes the privileged manner of assuming the connection with the sacred, while mystery is its fundamental category. On the one hand, it is a “systemic feature of the sacred”, a name given to the absolute of the sacred. The sacred retains its difference from the mundane by hiding itself, which results in the labyrinthine creation of the text. On the other hand, however, “the special status of a text is the feeling of necessity to adopt it in a later period and to adapt it to that period.” (Idel 2002, 6). Arcanization meets the need to open the text, of increasing not only its systemic relevance, but also its temporal relevance, in relation to the renewed question – and danger – that time carries in itself. Hence, there are two manners of arcanization mentioned by M. Idel, i.e. systemic arcanization, derived from “the nature” of the sacred, and critical arcanization, in relation with its historical condition.

The place where an explanation of the mystery and of the esoteric practices accompanying it can originate is the mystic tradition, that is the Jewish tradition in this case. Paradoxically, the consequence of arcanization is not a “weakening” of the interpreter, whose task is to reconstitute a meaning starting from its symptoms, but rather that of assuming an infinite horizon, in a progressive perpetuation and cohabitation with it.

On the contrary, another landmark of the hermeneutics of mystery is represented by Johannes Chladenius who belongs to the Western tradition. For this author, mystery is scantiness, not abundance. Firstly, the obscurity of the text derives from

the manner it is transmitted, and eliminated by the criticism exerted on it. Secondly, obscurity can persist through the inherent quality of the text placed in a horizon which is historically different from that of the interpreter. Understanding *the author's viewpoint (Sehe-Punkt)*, his world is actually the most important element of the hermeneutical exercise. This progresses through the accumulation of knowledge, through the explanation of implicit concepts that make the author express himself in a certain way. Interpreting is thus reduced to rendering in an explicit manner what the text contains implicitly; this implicit aspect, which is not uttered or assumed, is the element that differentiates it from any other. In the case of theology, when relying on the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, the general rules of interpreting are not applicable as they are in the case of lay texts. However, through interpretive exercise, they too can be brought closer to perfection and become useful in this manner, as Chladenius says in paragraph no. 189 of *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften* (Leipzig, 1742). For Chladenius and, as a matter of fact, for the entire tradition of Enlightenment hermeneutics, mystery, the obscure locus represents an obstacle. It is not assumed as such, while reduced to the difference between the world of the author (of the text) and the world of the interpreter. In the case of Biblical hermeneutics, in spite of the difference resulting from the fact that the sacred text is revealed, interpreting is reduced to the same task of diminishing historical difference. Interpreting is thus oriented not towards “living” within the horizon of the mystery, but rather towards reducing it for practical or theoretical purposes. According to Dannhauer, the good interpreter, is (considered through the stand point of mystical hermeneutics that was introduced in the beginning of this article) a weak interpreter.

2. Philosophy between the Esoteric and the Exoteric. Hegel

The two manners in which mystery can be assumed – as the “transcendental element” and as the horizon of the hermeneutic task, can also be discussed from the point of view of two

concepts pertaining to the “philosophy” that accompanies them. Once philosophy – at the end of modernity – understands its task from the point of view of the process of interpretation and not from that of substantiation, the relation between the exoteric and esoteric principle is reopened. One does no longer speak about a cultural relation, defined by the interconnection between philosophy and its “public”, but rather about a systematic relation which starts from the “role” mystery plays in the horizon of the text. Philosophy takes on either of the two positions related to the mystery of the word that have been drafted in the previous section.

A good instance of author in this respect is Hegel. As a critic of the Enlightenment, which he understands as a cultural form placed under the sign of abstract intellect, Hegel places himself in a paradigm that opposes mystery. With Hegel, the idea of philosophy is linked to that of “clarity”. In the history of philosophy, for instance, Hegel speaks about spirit as a universal spirit whose substantiation is neither nature, nor the forms of individual conscience, as in the case of the finite spirit, but rather the rational form that the historical world, art or a people’s religion takes. Under all these shapes, the spirit becomes an object for itself and returns to itself through philosophy, seen as a form of knowledge of this substantial spirituality. Consequently, “philosophy is the thought of its age”. “The determined form of a philosophy is contemporary to a certain form to the peoples from which this philosophy emerges (...)” (Hegel 1971, 73) In other words, the form that a philosophy takes depends on the stage in the evolution of the spirit it “fulfills”. Considering that the substantial form of an age is its content, philosophy becomes the specific form that this content takes, when it sees itself as having a spiritual content. The essentially historical nature of philosophy can thus be explained: it is the historical form of an age, “adopted” by thought and assumed at a spiritual level. Hegel speaks of philosophy as of the central element of an age which captures its inner logic, thus allowing to be transcended. “Therefore philosophy is an already subsequent feature of the spirit, it is the inner birthplace of the spirit which will later move on to truly creative activity.” (Hegel 1971, 75). Defined as knowledge

of spiritual substantiality, philosophy becomes a locus of the passage from one age to the next, from one historical world to the next.

The same idea also appears in *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where Hegel speaks about the death of a nation: this can only occur when the nation starts to “be creative in philosophy”, becoming aware of its own spiritual principle as an impulse of its own history and opposed to this very principle. As for the definition of philosophy in *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, it is convenient to remark that, by considering philosophy to be the knowledge of the spiritual principle of a world, of an age, Hegel also considers it as the linking element between the forms of the spirit, completing a world, but at the same time also containing the principle of a new world: “We shall thus see that the essence of Hellenistic philosophy was actualized in the Christian world.” (Hegel 1971, 75).

In the lectures that I refer to, the concept of *philosophy* is, therefore, related by Hegel to a certain configuration of a historical world. On the one hand, this configuration is not defined outside history, the thought is not unrelated to the context in which it is formed – in this case, it would be abstract, i.e. a representation of the intellect and not a concept pertaining to reason (*Logic*) – it is rather in a provisional explanation, the intelligible form of the historical world. On the other hand, this form is not an instantaneous replication of the data of a world at the level of thinking, but a denial of these data, a reflex that opposes its immediate character through problematization, thus projecting them beyond their level. “Although philosophy, seen as thought, as understanding (*begreifen*) of the spirit of its age, has an *a priori* nature, and it is also a result to the same extent; thought ensures, is a product, a live activity that produces itself. This activity contains in itself the essential instance of a negation: to create equal means to destroy.” (Hegel 1971, 71). This idea belonging to Hegel is self-obvious. The “great” philosophies in the course of history occur in times of decadence for people. Hegel also states that “taking refuge in thought” begins when the substantial forms of the spirit of the world enter a crisis, when they can no longer offer support to activities in that world. Philosophy, as Hegel remarks, repre-

sents the reconciliation within the ideal world, beyond the forms of substantial life. The Greek philosophers – Hegel’s reference is uncertain at this point – no longer take part in the life of the community, hence the public imputations associated with their activity. This reconciliation within the world of thought is not abstract, however, it is not an alternative to the real world. If it were so, then philosophy would result from an alien principle, different from the one which governs the other spiritual creations of that age. However, as we have seen, Hegel is in favor of the opposite position. “For this reason, the relationship between political history, state institutions, art, religion, etc. and philosophy is not a cause-effect type of relation, meaning that these forms are not rational for philosophy or, on the contrary, philosophy is not their foundation, but they all have a common root, i.e. the spirit of the age.” (Hegel 1971, 74). The problem raised here is to specify the connection between philosophy and the other forms of the spirit of the age, so that this connection explains, on the one hand, how it becomes inseparable from these forms and how it transcends them, on the other hand. The instance that Hegel discusses most extensively is the relationship between philosophy and religion.

From a historical point of view, the relationship between philosophy and religion can be considered to have several configurations, dialectically ordered by Hegel. An initial instance is that of oriental religions. In their case, philosophy and religion are inseparable, since both focus on absolute rationality seen as a “wisdom”, a soteriologic technique. The unmediated relation between philosophy and religion accounts for the persistence, within a religion, of a set of “philosophemes”, statements and concepts that are the domain of philosophy, but which can be found now as religious representations. An example is the theme of Mithras the intercessor and the relation between Good and Evil as an opposite pair of divine principles in the Persian religion. However, such a relation between philosophy and religion cannot be considered as ground for understanding the nature of philosophy. The mythological form taken by the religious idea is not indifferent to the content, but it alters it: the finite form of the representations obscures the thought instead of revealing it. “The presentation of thought in a sensitive form

always is inadequate...” (Hegel 1971, 103). The second historical form of the relation, occurring in several versions, is that of philosophy being defined as opposed to religion. An example is the Greek philosophers’ attitude towards popular religion. Christianity brings along other configurations of this opposition. First of all, the “historical pattern” that Hegel uses at this point is that of succession, i.e. scholastic philosophy – the philosophy of Enlightenment – German idealism. This succession repeats – in terms of the Western world – the logic of the history of religion in general. The first stage – Scholastic philosophy – corresponds to Eastern religion as far as the relationship between religion and philosophy is concerned: they are in a relation of abstract identity, which does not facilitate the complete understanding of either term. The Enlightenment raises the problem that absorbed Hegel’s attention as early as the Jena papers; it is the relation between faith and reason and the opposition between them to be more precise which he argued by using the instruments of both philosophy and theology. Within this relation, thought is conceived according to the fashion of the intellect, the faculty of finite knowledge. Hegel also remarks that, in this manner, neither philosophy, nor theology are in agreement with their own nature. The criticism of Enlightenment from previous works is a proof. The third position is that of “thinking which knows in itself what the Church admits as being the truth” (Hegel 1971, 113). It is the position of speculative idealism, which also justifies Hegel’s view on philosophy. A feature of this instance is the fact that philosophy appears as a “testimony of the spirit” in the content of religion. The rational element is the link between the two modes of the spirit. The difference lies in the form of this rationality: in the case of philosophy, this form is the concept, while religion takes the form of the unmediated modes of thought: representation, feeling, piety, etc. As Hegel further on remarks, the difference is not abstract: philosophy makes use of representations – the speculative concept can be only conceived as meditation on representation, as shown in *The Logic* – while in the case of religion, thought cannot be said to be totally absent.

To Hegel, the genuine difference is a discrimination among the various phases of the truth and not the act of opposing these phases for bearing the seeds of conflict. The

central phrase of this debate is that of “testimony of the spirit”, which I will only outline here to return extensively to in the following section. “Man must embrace a religion. Which is the fundament of his belief? Christianity states: the fundament is the testimony of the spirit on this content.” (Hegel 1971, 93). In its turn, the testimony of the spirit is achieved only within the concept. The concept is the entity that unifies the two sides of religious conscience: an understanding of the absolute as external and objective, on the one hand and the participation to the “Last Supper” (Hegel 1971, 94-5). through cult and piety, on the other hand. The truth of religion expressed in the form of mysteries – also called dogmas in Christianity – essentially separates the religious community from other communities and creates its identity within this opposition. The opposition is reproduced at another level, too: at the same time, it becomes an opposition between thought regarded as abstract intellect and pure faith expressing adherence to dogmas. Hegel’s concept of *philosophy* transcends this opposition between faith and the intellect, an opposition which lies at the basis of all tensions that especially define the modern era.

Within the context of the present paper, the text from *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* can be rightfully called upon, since it is a model regarding the manner in which the philosophical concept operates, the way in which it works within the framework of Hegel’s discourse. History is the context which limits and defines “conceptualization” or, better still, the concept as a figure of the discourse of speculative philosophy: in fact, this operation is the *self-suspension* of the positive nature of the forms of the spirit regarded as forms of history. “The testimony of the spirit” fully achieved by the philosophical concept is identical with the process of removing the positive character from the finite representations of conscience as forms of the “objective” spirit (in Hegel’s terms from *The Encyclopedia*) that provides them: religion, art, science. How can this process of “*de-positivization*” of representation in the concept be further understood? An appeal to *The Logic* is inevitable at this point.

As Hegel points out in the first part of the *Encyclopedia*, the representation is the unmediated form of thought, fundamentally marked by two features: singularity and reciprocal

exteriority. Hegel gives examples: feelings, intuitions, images – as far as we are aware of them – are representations which, given their unmediated form that they bestow on the content, turn it into something finite. Hence Hegel’s critique of a philosophy of representation that takes the absolute as its object. Emphasizing the contradictions of such a philosophy can be actually equaled with the critique of traditional metaphysics in Hegel’s entire work. However thought is defined as the mediated form of thinking, as a result of reflexivity. As determination of the process of thinking, the concept is *infinite* since thinking does not relate to its exterior through reflexivity. The concept is thus the form of thinking whose object is not exterior to itself. At the same time, the concept is also *concrete*. “Since thinking seeks to create a concept about things, this concept (along with its most unmediated forms, the judgment and the syllogism) cannot consist of determinations or of relations that would be alien and exterior to things.” (Hegel 1970b, 81). A synonym of *concept* in its speculative meaning is, therefore, the term “objective thought.” From a speculative point of view, thinking is not limited to a mere faculty of knowledge. Consequently, it would relapse into the limitations of an opposition, namely that between the subject and the object. Ergo thinking has a double universal nature: that of the self and that of things, and only together can the two access their truth, according to Hegel’s speculative philosophy.

Hegel’s distinction between representation and concept is of essence for the definition of philosophy seen as a manner of considering objects through thinking. The task is subsequently specified: it is not directly about thought – concept – in philosophy, but rather about the transformation of representation into concept. The mediation of the concept makes philosophy the absolute form of speculative thinking. The issue raised at this point for philosophy is that of not being understood outside Hegel’s ultimate reference, which is the speculative. Therefore, emphasizing the essentially correlative side of the philosophical object is necessary: the object is not the concept in an abstract sense as much as the *transformation* of representation into concept. The relationship between representation and concept is not accidental: representation is not the subjective starting point of thinking, it is the unmediated reproducing of itself

through the mediation of concept. At the level of the forms of thinking, the concept, as an object and medium of speculative philosophy, is mainly a reflected representation, therefore transformed within philosophy. What is produced is thus informed as a restoration of the traditional content of philosophy: “only through the mediation of a change does the true nature of the object become conscious to us.” (Hegel 1970 b, 78). At this point, the question is *how can the mediated nature of the concept be made visible in the discourse?* The answer, in terms of Hegel’s logic, is that the truth of the concept is judgment and syllogism. As for the broader issue of philosophy, Hegel leaves traces which can be identified as the defining features of speculative philosophy.

Among these traces, the most important one is understanding philosophy as a system. The relationship between philosophy and the system is not a historic accident. That speculative philosophy is a systematic philosophy means for Hegel that the systematic character is a necessary determination of philosophy which is seen as necessary. “The science (of the Absolute, author’s notes) is mainly a system, since truth, being of a concrete nature, exists to the extent to which it grows in itself and is then reunited with itself, retaining this unity; in other words, this is to the extent to which it becomes a totality; only through the differentiation and determination of these differences can the necessity of these differences be comprehended, as well as the freedom of totality.” (Hegel 1970 b, 59). With Hegel, the system is opposed to a rhapsodic enumeration of items of knowledge. To the same extent, it is also different from the axiomatic way of thinking, characterized through the arbitrariness – therefore the subjective and hence limited nature – of the principle. For Hegel, the system can be defined as the logic of the determinations that the content itself poses, as the self-explanatory presentation of the contents of philosophical knowledge. Therefore, for Hegel the system is not defined extensively, as a sum of items of knowledge, but dynamically. The moments of the system cross each other, as they are not joined according to an external principle. “Each circle (part of the philosophical system author’s note), as it is not totality itself, goes beyond the limits of the element that

defines it and lays the foundations of a broader sphere.” (Hegel 1970b, 60). As Hegel points out, the idea or thought that is thinking of itself, appears as integral both at each point of its determination within the system and in the system itself. This cannot be well comprehended if the system is given an interpretation in terms of classical logic. However the problem is solved when the system becomes a form of dialectics, a passage from the unmediated nature of a point to the mediation that totality gives: “the particular science is both knowledge of its content as existing object and acknowledgement – in this content – of the passage to its higher circle.” (Hegel 1970 b, 64). In other words, what the system accomplishes is a passage from the unmediated nature of thinking to its mediation, or, using the terms previously defined, from representation to concept. The *concept* of representations is actually their philosophic system, i.e. the process of placing them in coherence, freeing them from the singularity and exteriority that sets them to be unmediated forms of thinking.

To Hegel, philosophy is the modality *par excellence* of the “depositivization” of representation through concept, in other words it means “presenting” it to the testimony of the spirit. The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* takes this issue even further in the sense of relating it to the horizon of the mystery mentioned above. At this point, the specification of the absolute religion (Christianity) as a revealed religion can be achieved starting from a clarification. The term *Offenbarung* has a double use (Hegel 1993, 179-180): at the same time Christianity is a religion of revelation (*offenbarte*), as well as a religion that is revealed (*offenbare*). In the first case, revelation is a historical fact which is characteristic of the mode of the Christian truth: this is a truth of faith and not of the intellect, related to a specific historical moment and which thus a positivity that will be, as I will try to prove, the object of “speculative interpretation.” In the second case, the Christian religion is revealed in the sense that it is the full development of the essence of religion as such, the plenary religion, identical to its concept. Plenary, substantiated religion is, in this sense, a revealed religion. The two meanings combine when revelation – in its former meaning – becomes the spirit’s testimony through the philosophical exer-

cise of the concept; the positivity, the historical character of Christianity becomes a point in the process of the spirit of relating to itself. The Marheineke edition of *The Lectures* contains a synthesis of the versions of the lectures of 1824 and 1827. In an initial stage, revelation is seen as a manifestation of the spirit. "Being revealed is this primary division of the infinite form and it means to be determined, to exist for another; this manifestation of the self belongs to the very nature of the spirit." (Hegel 1970 a, 193). However, the content of revelation is a totally different issue: on the one hand, it is manifold. Creation and dogma are instances of divine revelation. Therefore, revelation takes the form of positivity, as something that "comes" from elsewhere and is, through its very origin, of a nature other than human. On the other hand, as Hegel points out, revelation is its own object: seen as a manifestation of the spirit, it is, in fact, the form of the testimony of the spirit and not the origin of a truth which is different from this testimony: "What does God reveal if not that He Himself is this revelation of His being? What He reveals is infinite form." (Hegel 1970 a, 194). The importance of the philosophy of religion lies in this very identification between the two meanings of revelation; in other words, the disclosure of the fact that the entire dogmatic content of Christianity, initially a positive content *par excellence*, is in fact the moment of founding the truth about God as spirit, whose essence is self manifestation. What I will try to demonstrate in the end of this section is precisely the manner in which Hegel manages to proceed to this identification, so that "the revealed content is that what is revealed (God as Spirit) is exactly what is for the Other and always for itself, at the same time" (Hegel 1993, 106). From this standpoint, for Hegel, revelation is complete. Therefore, Christianity, as a religion of the spirit, is neither a religion of truth, nor one of mystery: the revelation of the spirit does not allow any remainders, it is complete, while the truth reaches its full "expression" within this religion. Although it is questionable from a dogmatic point of view, the consequence drawn by Hegel is completely justifiable from the standpoint of the philosophy of spirit, which reveals itself to be identical to itself even when existing in The Other, having a fundamental determination to

show itself. Therefore, in Hegel's view as presented in the lectures held in Berlin, philosophy as depositivation of representation ultimately leads to the theological "outcome" of a God who has nothing to hide.

3. Spirit and Truth

Paragraph no. 381 in the *Philosophy of Spirit* defines the spirit starting from the relation it has with nature. The strategy is the same as that of the Jena papers, where the spirit is defined by the relation with its opposite concept, that is nature. In an initial phase, The Encyclopedia deals with clarifying the systemic relations between the two: "To us, the spirit implies *nature*, since it is *truth* and, therefore, an *absolute principle*. Nature has disappeared from this truth and spirit has revealed itself as the Idea that reached the point of existing for itself, whose object and consequently subject is the *concept*." (Hegel 1970 c, 17). The identity between Spirit and Idea, created through the mediation of suppressed nature is the most important element of this paragraph. Hegel defines the spirit in terms of the process, not of the substance, as a mediation of the Idea, a return of the Idea from its alterity, which is nature: in other words, the fundamental determination of the spirit is *ideality*, the process of reducing exteriority to interiority; the term is a translation of what is acknowledged in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely *Erinnerung*. Seen from the standpoint of the relationship with nature, this ideality is seen as a negation, as a difference; however, from the point of view of the entire system, ideality is a manner of the affirmative, since it represents a return of the logical Idea to itself, the self-comprehension in relation to nature. Therefore, the philosophy of nature is not only a subjective attempt of reconstructing natural phenomena from the perspective of the spirit within the system, but also a description of the manner in which the Idea itself, while present in nature, suppresses "dispersion" as a form of the existence of nature. The philosophy of nature is a phenomenology of the Idea in nature, not a "re-definition", a reconstruction of nature from the standpoint of the philosophy of spirit. Thus, the relationship

between the three terms (idea, nature, spirit) becomes intelligible: it is a circular relation in which the last term, i.e. spirit, actually defines the circle itself, that is the “idealization” that allows the speculative relationship between the first two elements. The relationship that the spirit establishes with another form of its “exteriority”, namely history, radicalizes this result: “the spiritual activity is directed towards a subject that is active in itself – towards an object that has made efforts to rise up to what has to be accomplished through this activity.” (Hegel 1970 c, 23-4). The age is the one that creates the people who define and inform it, who give the specific goal to it, Hegel says. A consequence of these clarifications regarding the definition of the spirit is the fact that it is conceived in relation with the other instances of the philosophical system, as a form of circularity; in other words this is neither as a transformation of nature into something other than nature itself, nor as a transformation of logic, but as a “truth” of nature and logic, as a way of establishing a dialectic relation between them. Once the spirit becomes a mode of relation and not a resulting substance from the natural process, and the spirit thus designates the development of logical subjectivity so that it can recognize itself to be a form of concrete subjectivity, the question that rises is: *how can the development of the spirit as such be understood, which is the most important element of Hegel’s pneumatological project?* Hegel himself makes the request clear in the addition to paragraph no. 379: “Only when we consider the spirit in the self-realization of its concept can we genuinely know it and its truth; (for this is, in fact, the conformity between the concept and reality).” (Hegel 1970 c, 15).

Paragraphs 382-384 refer to the inference of the determinations of the spirit starting from its definition outlined in paragraph no. 381. The first determination is freedom: “Formally speaking, the essence of the spirit is, therefore, freedom, the absolute negativity of the concept as identity with itself.” (Hegel 1970 c, 25). As Hegel warns us, freedom cannot be conceived as a withdrawal from the relationship and as singularity, but on the contrary as the process of assuming the relationship, considered as a necessary point in the development of the spirit. *Reference to oneself*, which is the

speculative name given to freedom, can be achieved only *within the other*, not outside him. It is a result of the growth of the spirit, not its premise. And, consequently, freedom identifies itself with the truth of the spirit. Hegel repeats Christ's words: "The Truth shall make you free!" which he re-writes as follows: "freedom makes it (the spirit, author's note) true." (Hegel 1970 c, 26). The spiritual definition of truth will be discussed further on; for the moment, the result is that truth is identified as freedom of the spirit or, in other words, with the dialectic assumption of the relationship with the other. The crucial element of Hegel's aforementioned pneumatological project thus becomes clear: it is about a demonstration of the necessity of the "path" of the spirit in relation with the various modes of exteriority, in other words, of its freedom. The "idealization" as a definition of spirit is identical with its *freedom* as a determination of the existence of the spirit in relation with its various alterities.

It is interesting to note how the problem of truth is brought about. Paragraph no. 379 defines it as in "conformity with the concept to reality". Paragraph no. 381 further clarifies the matter by designating the actual modality of this conformity: it is not established immediately, but it rather a dialectical reduction of alterity, a form of assuming the relation as a point of dynamic identity with itself. Paragraph no. 383 raises the problem in a new way: "The determination that is distinct from the spirit is *manifestation*." (Hegel 1970 c, 27). Reality that is consonant with the concept of spirit, acquired by going through its factual hypostases, represents – in this new determination – the universal nature of the spirit which, existing for itself, is the process of making itself particular in relation with the various positivities. It is not a content whose form is the spiritual one that is revealed in the spirit, but the spirit itself, identical with itself in its particular manifestations. In other words, the spirit does not reveal something, it shows itself, "its determination and its content are the revelation itself" (Hegel 1970 c, 27). The process of idealization becomes understandable from the perspective of paragraph no. 383, as the self-recognition of the spirit within the environment of its alterity; the process is neither mechanical, nor logical, but essentially phe-

nomenological. “The particularization” of the spirit in its factual manifestations is, in fact, the process of revealing itself, as an essence or fundamental determination. The consequence is the re-delineation of the relation between form and content, which has been referred to in the present chapter. The central element of this re-delineation is the idea of the unity between form and content, the fact that, from the standpoint of speculative philosophy, the absolute content is, in fact, its own manifestation as form. “Therefore, true content includes form in itself, while true form is its own content.” (Hegel 1970 c, 28).

Consequently, truth is defined as the full manifestation of spirit, as the unity between form and content, a unity that is seen as manifestation, in other words, a unity in which form is not external to content, but is its actual manifestation. From the standpoint of the philosophy of spirit, Hegel’s theory of truth becomes a theory of revelation or manifestation of the self. The theological example provided by Hegel is clear: the Son does not represent the organ of divine revelation, but the very content of this revelation, namely that the Father is differentiating Himself in the Son, and from this process of differentiation He returns to Itself as Spirit. The same context clarifies Hegel’s assertion that the Spirit represents the truth of nature and logic. When nature and logic are seen as forms of the spirit – i.e. as its manifestations, substantiations – they are conceived in truth, from the point of view of their real content. Similarly, defining absolute spirit as the unity between the concept of spirit and its reality – therefore as truth of the spirit or as its complete manifestation as a spirit, gives an interesting meaning to the term “absolute”; from the point of view of the hermeneutic framework that I have tried to present, this term has an important meaning: in this view, “absolute” corresponds to the mode of a complete manifestation of the spiritual content, the identity of spiritual form with spiritual content, its total transparency. Consequently, it is in fact identical with the meaning of the term “true” as a unity between reality and concept.

4. Interpretation and the Reduction of Mystery

If a Hegelian concept of “interpretation” is accepted, it can be seen as being oriented towards the *clarification* of the content of representation and, therefore, towards the reduction of mystery, not towards its assumption and accretion. At this point, the paradigm still draws on the Enlightenment, as mentioned before. Hegel’s “interpretation” is not a subjective enterprise that can be summarized in a set of rules, it is a transformation of the object and it means bringing it into the position of being intelligible, comprehensible. Moreover, interpretation thus justifies (*rechtfertigt*) the object, finds a place in the horizon of the truth. It is difficult to define this concept of interpretation by referring to the acknowledged traditions of hermeneutics, as they make Hegel reject his fundamental beliefs. This concept can be clarified through an analogy, for instance that of the mirrors reflecting themselves (R. Gasché), an indication of perfect transparency or of the mystical birth unto God as a sign of return to truth through the very tensed relation with its own boundaries. The locus of these phenomena, the process of clarification as a result of self-confrontation describes somehow intuitively what Hegel suggests by his concept of *interpretation*. Unsuspicious through its very nature, Hegel’s interpretation starts from the presupposition of the initial clarity of the object and is defined as an approach through which this clarity is acquired again and assumed in the horizon of the finiteness of the world.

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