

# Spirit's Self-Knowledge, History, and the Absolute\*

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper offers an answer to John McDowell's question of why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* has a history. Spirit's content is revelation (Enc. § 383), and spirit realizes itself as what it is – revelation – by unfolding into two dimensions: a finite and an infinite subject. The infinite subject successively gives new forms of thinking to the finite subject, and this succession is history. This is shown more concretely with regard to the historical development of (philosophical) conceptions of self-consciousness from Descartes via Kant to Hegel. From this an overall picture of Hegel's philosophy of spirit emerges through which its culmination in absolute spirit and, in particular, religion becomes conceivable and according to which there is a leap between Hegel's philosophy and the pagan world. Thus, the paper is directed against two widespread tendencies in current readings of Hegel: the tendency to cut off or downplay absolute spirit in favor of subjective and objective spirit, and the tendency to assimilate Hegel's philosophy of spirit to Aristotle's philosophy of soul and life.

**KEYWORDS:** Spirit's Self Knowledge, History, Absolute, Religion, Hegel, Aristotle

*For Franziska*

In a recent paper, John McDowell asks the question of why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* has a history.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I shall develop an answer to this – pretty substantial – question. It will go into a quite different direction than McDowell's. I shall primarily refer to the so-called Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which actually is the preface to Hegel's system as a whole and, thus, also the place where Hegel sharply outlines his conception of the relation of spirit's self-knowledge to history.

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<sup>2</sup> MCDOWELL, J. Why Does It Matter to Hegel That *Geist* Has a History?. In: Zuckert, R.; Kreines, J. (Eds.). **Hegel on Philosophy in History**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

There are three focal, related claims,<sup>3</sup> I argue, which we have to understand in order to see how spirit's self-knowledge and history are related to one another, and why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* (spirit) has a history:

(1) Spirit can gain its full 'self-knowledge' only through history (rather than by timeless and circular mere pure thinking, as in the *Science of Logic*).<sup>4</sup>

(2) Spirit can demonstrate its 'power' only through history (by overcoming its own negativity, that is, misconceptions of itself).<sup>5</sup>

(3) Spirit can reveal itself as 'revolutionary' only through history (by bringing about new forms of thinking that were not available yet in prior stages of history).<sup>6</sup>

In the course of this paper, I will discuss these claims, explore what they mean, and integrate them into a coherent conception of the relation of spirit's self-knowledge to history. In this conception, all of the focal concepts McDowell deals with in his paper will show up too. But they will turn out to be arranged quite differently, so that an equally different picture of Hegel's *Geist* will emerge.

### 1. Some Preliminary Remarks: Spirit's Self-Knowledge and (Pure) Self-Consciousness

John McDowell thinks that spirit's self-knowledge, as Hegel conceives of it, is the self-conscious self-knowledge of finite, self-conscious beings; 'spirit' is supposed not to signify or point to any entity distinct from the finite, self-conscious being; it rather means one "formally

<sup>3</sup> As will emerge, there is a way in which the second and the third claim can be understood as aspects (or implications) of the first claim, once it is properly understood. Still, it makes sense to distinguish these three claims from one another in order to highlight the three distinctive points they each make.

<sup>4</sup> In § 7 of the Preface, Hegel talks about "the stage which self-conscious Spirit has presently reached" and that it "now demands from philosophy [...] knowledge of what it is." In § 25 he states: "[T]he representation of the Absolute as *Spirit* [is] the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion." In § 28 he further unfolds this thought under the heading of "*Weltgeist*" [HEGEL, G.W.F. **Phenomenology of Spirit**. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977/1981].

<sup>5</sup> In § 32 of the Preface, Hegel claims: "It [sc. Spirit] wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being." [HEGEL. **Phenomenology of Spirit**, § 32].

<sup>6</sup> In § 11 of the Preface, Hegel states: "[I]t is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation." [HEGEL. **Phenomenology of Spirit**, § 11].

distinctive way of being a living thing”, namely the one that applies to human beings.<sup>7</sup> Right at the beginning of his paper, McDowell states:

Hegel introduces knowledge of *Geist* as knowledge of the human: not knowledge of individual human peculiarities, but “knowledge of the universal, of the human being [des Menschen] and therewith essentially of Geist.” The philosophy of *Geist* is the philosophy of the human being.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to me that the short passage from § 377 McDowell quotes does not warrant what he wants it to warrant. If Hegel wanted to say, as McDowell puts it, that “[t]he philosophy of *Geist* is the philosophy of the human being”, he would have to explain (knowledge of) *Geist* in terms of (knowledge of) the human being. But he does it the other way round: he explains (knowledge of) the human being in terms of (knowledge of) *Geist* – which then just raises the question McDowell wanted to get answered by his reading of this passage: what does “*Geist*” mean here, how does it relate to the human being, and what does it tell us about the human being?

Moreover, McDowell seems to presuppose that “and therewith (*und damit*)” signifies a relation of equivalence: the word “Geist”, at least in this context, can be replaced by the word “human being” *salva veritate*. But the German “*und damit*” does not necessarily have this meaning. It can also mean “and also.” If it means “and also”, the passage would indicate that philosophy of *Geist* goes beyond what can sensibly be called philosophy of the human being. That this reading – “*und damit*” in the sense of “and also” – is the adequate one is strongly suggested by a preceding sentence in the same paragraph which obviously echoes in the one just quoted: “... knowledge of the true about the human being and of the true in and for itself, – of the essence itself as *Geist*.”<sup>9</sup> In the German original it reads: “... Erkenntnis des Wahrhaften des Menschen wie des Wahrhaften an und für sich, – des *Wesens* selbst als Geistes.” I think this passage directly conflicts with the view McDowell ascribes to Hegel – that the philosophy of *Geist* is the philosophy of the human being –, regarding the two points already mentioned: first, the German “*wie*” here clearly must be rendered as “and (also)”, indicating that “knowledge of the true about the human being” implies some necessary transition to “(knowledge) of the true in and for itself.” Second, Hegel does not explain *Geist*

<sup>7</sup> This claim is based on the assumption that Hegel largely shares Aristotle’s views about the soul of living beings. I am skeptic about this supposed closeness of Hegel and Aristotle, and will discuss this issue in section 7 of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> This is my own translation, and I follow McDowell in leaving “*Geist*” untranslated here.

in terms of the human being, but the other way round, saying that philosophy of spirit is knowledge of “the true about the human being” as (knowledge of) “the true in and for itself” – (knowledge) of the “essence itself as spirit” – which just poses the question that Hegel indeed intends to raise in these opening paragraphs of the philosophy of *Geist*: what is *Geist*?

This brief discussion of § 377 already provides some exegetical warrant that, according to Hegel, philosophy of spirit is not just philosophy of the human being, let alone the human soul. Rather, I will argue that it is philosophy of spirit also as far as it ‘transcends’ the human being. Philosophy of spirit, as I think Hegel conceives it, is a philosophy of the human being that, in being the philosophy of the human being, necessarily leads up to dimensions of spirit ‘beyond’ the human being. I will take this point seriously in this paper, and try to explicate why Hegel thinks this must be so, and what spirit as ‘transcending’ or ‘being beyond’ the human being is supposed to mean.

It will emerge that, in its striving for self-knowledge, the finite subject gains the insight that there is a finite subject and an infinite, absolute subject, and that this insight is a self-revelation by this absolute subject. That is, in the course of such self-knowledge, I get to know myself as being related to an absolute subject, and the absolute subject gets to know itself – reveals itself – through finite subjects. McDowell does not discuss the absolute (subject) or absolute spirit in his paper, although this, I think, is essential to answering his question of why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* has a history.

Despite that, I agree with McDowell in one important respect. Being at one with Sebastian Rödl,<sup>10</sup> McDowell emphasizes that understanding self-consciousness is pivotal for Hegel, just like for all German Idealists. Indeed, understanding self-consciousness is the point to start with if one intends to engage in what Hegel calls “philosophy of spirit.”<sup>11</sup> However, in some crucial passages of the *Preface* which my three claims above are based on Hegel does not refer to self-consciousness without any qualification, but to what he also calls “*pure self-consciousness*”, the mere “I”, or the “I = I.” This is self-consciousness ‘as such’, yet in abstraction from whatever it may permeate or be the form of; it is mere “self-certainty”, as he also puts it later in the *Phenomenology*. By that he means the subject’s pure self-reference qua

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 17-18, referring to RÖDL, S. **Self-Consciousness**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> McDowell also seems right to me in resisting Robert Pippin’s tendency to enter the social dimension of self-consciousness – what Hegel calls “objective spirit” – too early, before taking the idea of self-consciousness as such under scrutiny. Cf. MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 17, on this.

thinking, the subject's thinking about itself as the thinker of this very thought, more precisely: the insight that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking.

## 2. *Pure Self-Consciousness and Its Two Misconceptions*

Pure self-consciousness – the insight that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking – historically was first addressed by Descartes and, then, by Kant. Hegel claims that both Descartes and Kant drew wrong conclusions from it. Cartesian and Kantian philosophy thus are two significant misconceptions of pure self-consciousness in the history of philosophy, having far-reaching implications: they preclude Descartes and Kant from having a proper philosophy of spirit, of spirit in its two dimensions – finite and infinite subject –, and of spirit as essentially bound up with freedom.

This is how Hegel describes the period beginning with Descartes and leading to Kant, which, as a whole, prepared the ground for his own philosophy:

[A]t the stage which self-conscious Spirit has presently reached, it is clear that Spirit has now got beyond the substantial life it formerly led in the element of thought [= a period ending with Descartes, i.e. to which Descartes still belongs, as its end, T.O.], that it is beyond the immediacy of faith, beyond the satisfaction and security of the certainty that consciousness then had, of its reconciliation with the essential being, and of that being's universal presence both within and without. [= The period of Christian belief before the Enlightenment, T.O.] It has not only gone beyond all this into the other extreme of an insubstantial reflection of itself into itself [= the standpoint of Kantian philosophy, "*Reflexionsphilosophie*", T.O.], but beyond that too. Spirit has not only lost its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss, and of the finitude that is its own content. Turning away from the empty husks, and confessing that it lies in wickedness, it reviles itself for so doing, and now demands from philosophy, not so much *knowledge* of what it *is* [which is what philosophy, according to Hegel, can and ought to do, T.O.], as the recovery through its agency of that lost sense of solid and substantial being. Philosophy is to meet this need, not by opening up the fast-locked nature of substance, and raising this to self-consciousness [which, again, is what philosophy, according to Hegel, can and ought to do, T.O.], not by bringing consciousness out of its chaos back to an order based on thought [which, again, is what philosophy, according to Hegel, can and ought to do, T.O.], nor to the simplicity of the Notion [which, again, is what philosophy, according to Hegel, can and ought to do, T.O.], but rather by running together what thought has put asunder, by suppressing the differentiations of the Notion and restoring the *feeling* of essential being [= what "*Unmittelbarkeitsphilosophie*" (e.g. in Schleiermacher and other Romantics) does, which Hegel is strictly averse to, T.O.].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 7.

Hegel himself enters the stage at the culmination of this – revolutionary – period of the history of philosophy, where the ‘need’ of spirit, its being unsatisfied with the available (mis)conceptions of spirit, becomes manifest. It is his task to overcome both (kinds of) misconceptions, the Cartesian and the Kantian one, without thereby lapsing into *Unmittelbarkeitsphilosophie*, which many of his contemporaries are prone to do. In order to see how this is meant to work, what the philosophical progress from Descartes via Kant to Hegel consists in, we first have to take Descartes’ and Kant’s (mis)conceptions of ‘pure self-consciousness’ under closer scrutiny.

To begin with, Descartes and Kant share the basic assumption that the fact that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking, which is known through the Cartesian meditation, is to be explained by reference to the I think<sup>13</sup>: it is ‘because’ I think that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking. Descartes specifies this assumption ‘ontologically’, by conceiving of the I think (the *cogito*) as the way I exist (“*sum res cogitans*”): as long as I exist, I am thinking, as thinking is the mode of my existence. Hence, modally, Descartes conceives of my thinking as necessary.<sup>14</sup> Kant rejects both specifications, the ontological one by conceiving of the I think as something non-substantial instead (as ‘pure self-reflection’), the modal one by introducing the idea of ‘spontaneity’ (the I think as ‘the’ act of spontaneity). Now let us look at the sequence of these two (mis)conceptions in closer detail:

*Descartes.* In his *Meditations*, Descartes applies what can be called the methodical principle of doubt. That is, I put into doubt any content of my thinking that can be put into doubt without ending up in an immediate contradiction. Doing so, I realize that I can indeed put into doubt any content of my thinking, with only one exception: I think. I cannot think of myself as not-thinking, for doing so would be doubting what I am doing in this very act of doubting: thinking.

Descartes aims to explain why this is so. His explanation draws on a certain unquestioned principle of ‘ontological’ thinking that, from a (post-)Kantian point of view, will turn out to be pre-critical. This principle says: the impossibility of thinking something as thus-and-so is to be explained by reference to this something’s being necessarily not-thus-and-so. To give an example: it is possible to think that this brown book in front of me could

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<sup>13</sup> Which is mirrored by the fact that they first introduce the very phrase “I think” (or “*cogito*”) into philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> He of course does not claim that, necessarily, a finite thinking thing exists, but that, if and as long as I exist, I necessarily think, as this is what my existence consists in.

be blue, because it is not necessarily brown. Accordingly, as it is not possible to think of myself as not-thinking, this must be because I think necessarily.

The supposed necessity of my thinking is the flipside of Descartes' ontological form of thinking: as far and as long as I exist, I am thinking necessarily, for my existence consists in my thinking. That is, I cannot think of myself as not-thinking, for this would amount to thinking of myself as not existing – the immediate (performative) contradiction.

*Kant.* Kant shares Descartes' view that it is by reference to the *cogito* – the *Ich denke* (the 'I think') – that we have to explain why I cannot think of myself as not-thinking. This is an implication of his general claim that the I think is the "highest point" of philosophy<sup>15</sup>: a priori truths can be explained (or justified) by reference to the I think, but the I think itself is unexplained, or explains itself. However, Kant criticizes the ontological form of Descartes' thinking in the Paralogism chapter of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. His pivotal insight is that philosophizing about the I think – properly understood, as 'pure self-reflection' – does not warrant a conception of myself as something existing in the sense of a substance, as Descartes thought it would. Kant conceives of the I think as the very act of thinking which qua thinking is internally self-reflective; this is opposed to a conception of the I think as consisting in or making up a thing, or a kind of thing – a *res*, a substance.

However, this Kantian move is obscure, in even two respects:

(i) First, it is unclear what a 'pure act' is supposed to be: conceiving of a pure act as an act that has no subject of which it is to be predicated seems nonsense<sup>16</sup>; but conceiving of this act as being exhibited by a subject signified by the indexical 'I' raises the second problem.

(ii) Second, if there is a subject of this act, this subject cannot be the individual signified by the indexical 'I', for then the I think would be my, N.N.'s, thinking. But my, N.N.'s, thinking cannot be the "highest point of philosophy"; if it were, philosophy would collapse into solipsism.<sup>17</sup> Kant notices the problem and, thus, glosses "the I" in terms of "this I or He

<sup>15</sup> KANT, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 133 [Footnote].

<sup>16</sup> There has been an instructive discussion between ROSEFELDT, T. Kants Ich als Gegenstand. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, n. 54, 2006, and HORSTMANN, R.-P. Kants Paralogismen. *Kant-Studien*, n. 84, 1993, on this point: Rosefeldt thinks that Kant must conceive of the I as a thing in a minimal sense (as a "logical thing (*logischer Gegenstand*)", as Rosefeldt puts it) in order to avoid the absurdity just mentioned. It should be noted, however, that Fichte's philosophy is built on this very absurdity. As we will come to see later, all these problems are inevitable consequences of a deeper misconception Hegel is drawing our attention to.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel seems to conceive of the Romantics as having taken this route, with the merit of being consequent at least. Thus, it seems to be Hegel's view that the Romantics straightforwardly (re)present the (or one) absurdity of the doctrine of the I think thus conceived.

or It (The thing) which thinks.”<sup>18</sup> There are two ways of understanding this: either, there is a second I additional to me who ordinarily is signified by the indexical ‘I’ – an ‘alter ego’, so to speak –; then, we have lost track of the insights from the Cartesian meditation, in which I reflect on myself, as a real thinker about whom we can ask whether her thinking is necessary or free. Or, the Kantian quote just reflects the insight that we can talk about thought as ‘it’ is in itself. That is surely true: when I think (and know) that p, ‘it’ is the case that p, and ‘the thought’ that p is true. However, this does not accommodate the upshots of the Cartesian meditation, either: the insight that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking. In this proposition, I obviously cannot replace ‘I’ by ‘it’. This is because, as far as we consider the ‘I think’ as such, in pure self-consciousness, and not as far as it may ‘accompany’ any objective thought, it does not make any sense – it is impossible – to paraphrase it without employing the indexical ‘I’.

Kant seems clear about this problem too. This is why he strictly keeps to the phrase ‘I think’, both in the *Transcendental Analytic* and in the *Paralogism* chapter from the *Transcendental Dialectic*. Kant is also clear about the contradictory difference between necessity and spontaneity; he is aware that non-necessity is a necessary, though maybe not a sufficient, condition for spontaneity. Now, I think is meant to be an act of spontaneity – ‘the’ act of spontaneity. This does not mean that it is something I choose to do, or do voluntarily, and could thus decide to refrain from doing; it does not even mean that it is an action done at will. However, it means that it is an act whose defining operation – synthesis – cannot be understood in terms of necessity. Even where I find myself ‘forced’ to draw the conclusion C from the premises P1, P2, P3, I am doing this not necessarily, but spontaneously: I ‘see’ that it ‘must’ be so, but this does not happen to me by necessity, as in the case of a mechanistic causal event. Kant’s resistance to the idea that the I think, and (its) synthesis, is something necessarily going on matters far beyond this case of drawing a logical inference. Thinking is one single capacity. That is, if I affirm that I think necessarily, this would be predicating necessity of all my individual acts of thinking, of all my particular thoughts, a priori. There is no way out of the problem by conceding that I think necessarily, but insisting that this does not mean that I necessarily think that p. This point can be made especially clear in Kant’s own terms: if the I think – the act of spontaneity, synthesis as such – were something necessarily going on, all thoughts which are thoughts due to their form – synthesis – would be necessary

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<sup>18</sup> KANT, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 346 / B 404.

due to this very form, that is, as far as they are thoughts. And the problem extends even further: actions, as far as they result from thoughts about what to do, would be necessary and, thus, not free, if these thoughts were necessary. Thus, the question of whether the I think is necessary or not, is of fundamental importance. This makes clear why Kant cannot accept the Cartesian conclusion drawn from the insight that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking: I think necessarily. But, as we have seen, he cannot make sense of the I think as a spontaneous act, either.<sup>19</sup> This why it is right to characterize Kant's view as a dogmatism of spontaneity, mere insistence on spontaneity (as opposed to necessity); not without any plausibility or warrant if considered against the Cartesian background, but without sufficient rational penetration, with ending up in confusion indeed that has been puzzling readers of Kant right from 1781 onwards.

As we shall see in a moment, all that is because Kant – despite the differences from Descartes – shares with Descartes a fundamental and freedom-threatening misunderstanding of the logical form of the Cartesian insight that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking. That is, we can trace back the obscurities surrounding the Kantian I think to their 'logical root', from the viewpoint of which they do not (and cannot) appear as accidental mistakes anymore, let alone as problems resulting from a certain (mis)reading of the Kantian texts, but are revealed as unavoidable implications of this misunderstanding.

So, though Kant is on the right track in overcoming the ontological misconception of the I think that shapes Descartes' philosophy, overcoming only the ontological, but not the logical, misconception remains insufficient. As long as the logical form of the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' is not understood properly, the very idea of self-consciousness is not yet fully grasped. So Kant is the 'great contradiction'<sup>20</sup>: he calls for freedom, but cannot account for it rationally, theoretically. As we will see more clearly in a moment, this is because he holds on to a logic that is ontologically shaped, although he has already moved beyond ontology. He underpins the realist conviction that the fact that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking must be explained by reference to something being the case 'anyway': I think. This is mistaken, from a Hegelian point of view – which is ours, as it belongs to the stage of history we still belong to.

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<sup>19</sup> This is why Fichte, on his own premises, is right in ending up with the following exclusive disjunction: either (Spinozist) necessitarianism or a philosophy of freedom that is the freedom of self-positing, of the absolute I.

<sup>20</sup> To apply Hegel's (logical) category of 'becoming (*Werden*)': in Kant, the final realization of spirit's self-knowledge is in the becoming. But becoming is a contradictory state, in between of 'being' and 'nothing'.

How precisely history comes into play will be the topic of the next sections. However, I want to remark right here that my reading allows, even implies, identifying Descartes' and Kant's conceptions of self-consciousness as necessary misconceptions, that is without imputing a mistake to them they 'could' have avoided. This is an important advantage of my reading, as it allows for criticizing great philosophers without taking up the arrogant attitude of discovering 'their' mistakes and assuming that they result from their defectiveness.

In Descartes and Kant, the time for the final conception of self-consciousness had not yet come. Later in the paper, it will emerge why spirit needs time.

### 3. *Hegel on the True Conception of Pure Self-Consciousness and Its Logical Ground*

Descartes and Kant, I said, basically share the same misunderstanding of the logical form of the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking'. They think that the proposition – and its validity – is to be explained by the fact that I think. They conceive of '(not) thinking' as 'being the case or not', and they differ in what 'being the case' means: being something or consisting in an act – whatever this means. Moreover, Kant differs from Descartes in calling for freedom (first in the minimal sense of spontaneity, as non-necessity) explicitly.

The misunderstanding of the logical form of the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' is an understanding according to which it is legitimate to apply what Sebastian Rödl, building on Héctor-Neri Castañeda<sup>21</sup>, calls "*the rule of detachment*":

He [sc. Castañeda] noted that the rule of detachment, which licenses the inference from *S knows p* to *p*, does not apply when what is known is specified by the special pronoun he honoured with a star, *S knows that she\* is F*. *She\** is a first-person pronoun; it is that pronoun in indirect speech. When someone knows *she\* is F*, then there is no detaching what she knows from her knowing it [...].<sup>22</sup>

It is the logical form of self-consciousness that is responsible for this non-applicability of the rule of detachment. In this non-applicability of the rule of detachment, the logical form of self-consciousness is manifested, and accounting for this non-applicability is accounting for the logical form of self-consciousness.

<sup>21</sup> CASTANEDA, H.-N. "He": A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness. *Ratio*, n. 8, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> RÖDL, S. Self-Consciousness, Negation, and Disagreement. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n. 117, 2017, p. 217.

Note that the non-applicability of the rule of detachment, as it is presented by Castañeda and Rödl, only applies to sentences of the form “S knows that she\* is F.” In the following, I will extend the scope of the rule of detachment (and its non-applicability) to the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’;<sup>23</sup> for it too is the logical form of self-consciousness that makes the inference from ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’ to ‘I think (necessarily)’ illegitimate. Just as accounting for the non-applicability of the rule of detachment to sentences of the form “S knows that she\* is F” is part of understanding what (the logical form of) self-consciousness is, accounting for the non-applicability of the rule of detachment to the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’ is, I think, an essential part of the philosophy of self-consciousness, and thus also crucial for understanding the role that pure self-consciousness plays in Hegel’s philosophy of *Geist*.

It is not legitimate, I said, to apply the rule of detachment (in its extended sense) to the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’. The ‘myself’ essentially contains a self-reference back to the preceding ‘I’, and the ‘(not-)thinking’ signifies the same as the preceding ‘think’. This is why it is illegitimate to apply the rule of detachment to it, which is what Descartes and Kant do, each of them then dealing differently with the result though. Why is it not legitimate to apply this rule? Well, it lies in the very nature of self-consciousness that ‘I (cannot) think of myself ...’ is categorially different from ‘I (cannot) think of an object o ...’. Seeing this is or presupposes having grasped the very point of self-consciousness, as being categorially different from consciousness of an object, already. This reflects the fact, which Rödl emphasizes all along, that there is no way towards an understanding of what self-consciousness is without having it understood already, at least implicitly. However, it makes a difference whether this claim, as in Rödl, only applies to the timeless finite subject or (also) to the history of philosophy. Rödl thinks that every individual subject has an (implicit) understanding of self-consciousness, but he does not say much about how to explain that many philosophers have failed (and still fail) to make it explicit in their philosophies. Hegel thinks that, before a certain turn in history (of philosophy), no sufficient understanding of self-consciousness was available to finite subjects, including philosophers. At the stage in history (of philosophy) discussed here – the period between Kant and Descartes on the one side and Hegel on the other side –, the very idea of self-consciousness

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<sup>23</sup> How precisely this extension works and what it amounts to will be unfolded in the following.

had not been grasped yet. Rather, this period is (part of) the ongoing (not yet accomplished) struggle for understanding what self-consciousness is.

This implies that the first subject to whom this understanding was available could not have taken it from the (form of) thinking she inherited from her predecessors; nor could the predecessors have arrived at it by their own (form of) thinking: they necessarily had been certain that one defining feature of thinking precisely is the universal, unrestricted applicability of the rule of detachment. Thus, the thought that this applicability is restricted is no thought, at least no thought about thinking, for them. This is why Hegel thinks that his philosophy, which is the first one that is built around a proper and full understanding of (pure) self-consciousness, is not in continuity with the philosophy of his predecessors, Descartes and Kant. Rather, he thinks that there is a 'leap' in between. This insight has far-reaching implications, which will be the topic of the following section.

Before that, we have to understand what, according to Hegel, is the proper and full understanding of (pure) self-consciousness, of the logical form of the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking'. How can we 'explain' it – and its validity – if not by applying the rule of detachment and, then, referring to the I think as something going on, as Descartes and Kant did? (Or is there no such thing as 'explaining' it?) Well, if the rule of detachment does not apply, the proposition cannot and must not be cracked into supposedly self-standing constituents. That is, one has to conceive of the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' as a non-separable, original unity; a unity that is an a priori impossibility – that is: a logical proposition, a proposition of "speculative logic", as Hegel puts it.

Speculative logic shares with pure formal logic that it contains a priori necessities (or impossibilities), but differs from it in one decisive respect: whereas the propositions of pure formal logic are about nothing, are "senseless (*sinnlos*)", as Wittgenstein notably puts it, the propositions of speculative logic have content: they are, ultimately, about myself, as far as I am a self-conscious subject.<sup>24</sup> The proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' tells me something about myself, as far as I am a self-conscious subject.

Due to what propositions of speculative logic share with propositions of pure formal logic, they also share with them the form of an inseparable, original unity that is prior to its

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<sup>24</sup> That this proposition is not about myself, as far as I am a particular individual, is implied by the fact that this proposition is an a priori impossibility: there cannot be a priori impossibilities about me, as far as I am a particular individual. Note that this corresponds to what Hegel says in § 383 of the *Encyclopedia*.

constituents. In 'A = A', the meaning of the sign '=' is defined; there is no separate item signified by the '=' nor a separate item called 'A' which, due to their nature, can or have to combine the way 'A = A' expresses it.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' too cannot be explained by reference to separate items, but rather itself 'explains', or better: defines, what its constituents are, what is meant by 'I' and 'thinking'. So the proposition explains what (pure) self-consciousness is<sup>26</sup>, and there is nothing called '(pure) self-consciousness' (or the 'I think') which in turn would or could explain the proposition.

The proposition in itself 'explains', or better: defines, what (pure) self-consciousness is; it can only do so if it (or its content) is not (pure) self-consciousness, but something essentially belonging to the answer to the question of what (pure) self-consciousness is. Indeed, I earlier said that pure self-consciousness is knowing that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking. Thus, (that) I cannot think of myself as not-thinking is not pure self-consciousness, but its 'logical form'.<sup>27</sup> Hegel refers to this logical form as "the concept in general (*Begriff im Allgemeinen*)"; he even introduces this concept of "the concept in general" by reference to pure self-consciousness:

The Concept, as far as it has achieved an existence which is itself free, is nothing other than the I or pure self-consciousness. (*Der Begriff, insofern er zu einer solchen Existenz gediehen ist, welche selbst frei ist, ist nichts anderes als Ich oder das reine Selbstbewußtsein.*)<sup>28</sup>

That is, there is a logical form – Hegel calls it "pure relation to itself (*reine Beziehung auf sich selbst*)" –, which is realized by "the I." "The I", a self-conscious (finite) being, is this logical form, as far as it is realized, as far as it "exists." Conversely, within the conceptual framework of Hegel's *Logic*, the logical form is its "ground." In pure self-consciousness – i.e. in knowing that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking – the self-conscious (finite) being

<sup>25</sup> This is a point made explicit by the later Wittgenstein. Cf. BAKER, G.P.; HACKER, P.M.S. **Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning, Volume 1 of an Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, Part 1 – the Essays, 2nd edition, extensively revised by P.M.S. Hacker.** Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, on this.

<sup>26</sup> Maybe together with other propositions.

<sup>27</sup> On the difference between 'the concept', as the logical form of self-consciousness, and (really existing) self-consciousness, cf. MARTIN, C. **Ontologie der Selbstbestimmung. Eine operationale Rekonstruktion von Hegels "Wissenschaft der Logik"**. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012. Martin also argues to conceive of 'the concept' as 'self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*)', which already implies a conception of freedom beyond mere non-necessity.

<sup>28</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. **Wissenschaft der Logik**. TWA, vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979, p. 252 [Miller's English translation modified].

reflects on its ground, its logical form; it makes it explicit by a proposition signifying this logical form: a proposition of speculative logic.

Notably, Hegel also characterizes this logical form, “the concept” in general, as “self-referential negativity (*sich auf sich selbst beziehende Negativität*).” This is something which, especially on a highly abstract level, is hard to grasp. However, with regard to the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’, one can literally ‘see’ what it means: the proposition is not ‘I think (of myself as thinking)’, but ‘I *cannot* think of myself as *not*-thinking’. It contains a double negation.

Notably, Hegel further claims that this double negation is not futile. That is, it does not just restore what was originally negated, as is the case in pure formal logic. We can now make sense of this claim. We know that the rule of detachment is not legitimately applicable to the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’. Given that, it is impossible to infer ‘I think (necessarily)’ from it – which one could do if the rule of detachment were applicable. Its application would take this form (symbolizing ‘x think(s)’ by the predicate ‘Tx’, and ‘I’ by the individual ‘i’):

$$\sim\Diamond(Ti \text{ that } \sim Ti) \rightarrow \Box(Ti \text{ that } Ti)^{29} \rightarrow \Box Ti$$

The conclusion then would be: ‘I think necessarily’, just as it was in Descartes.

Whereas, realizing that the rule of detachment is not legitimately applicable to ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’, the only thing formal logic is entitled to do with this proposition is converting it to a necessity (instead of an impossibility):

$$\sim\Diamond(Ti \text{ that } \sim Ti) \rightarrow \Box\sim(Ti \text{ that } \sim Ti)$$

The conclusion is: ‘Necessarily, I do not think of myself as not-thinking’. But this is completely different from ‘I think (necessarily)’, the Cartesian conclusion, and does not imply or even warrant it. So given a proper understanding of the logical form of the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’, one is not entitled to infer ‘I think necessarily’ from it, not even ‘I think’ – no propositions signifying real acts whatsoever.

That is, only if one realizes that pure self-consciousness is not grounded in itself (as Kant thought it is), but in its logical form, one can account for the spontaneity (and freedom) of my thinking – at least for its minimal condition being fulfilled: that my thinking is not something necessarily going on. Note that in what follows, we will have to distinguish between two senses of freedom: in its first, and minimal, sense it means the non-necessity of

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<sup>29</sup> This is an inference that can also be drawn, figuring as an illustrating ‘intermediate’ step here.

my thinking. This is not a sufficient characterization of thinking and its spontaneity or freedom in a positive sense yet, to be sure; but it is the reason why Hegel, in the quote, predicates “freedom” of the existing self-conscious being.<sup>30</sup> Non-necessity is a necessary condition of spontaneity and freedom, in defense against the necessitarianism targeted by Hegel, as well as by all other philosophers of German Idealism: the ‘Spinozist threat’. In its second sense – which will come up in the following section – “freedom” means the ‘process of being freed from being committed to the view that I think necessarily’, by means of the argument just sketched. This is not only freedom because it frees me from some misconception, but primarily because it frees me from a particular misconception, namely the one according to which there can be no freedom in (my) thinking.

We need to take one final step in this section: in the quote above, Hegel says that the logical form of pure self-consciousness is its “ground”, and that pure self-consciousness “exists”, i.e. it is the ground as far as it has gained existence. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explicates the dialectical relation between ‘ground’ and ‘existence’; and we can make sense of this with regard to pure self-consciousness: as I said, pure self-consciousness is grounded in its logical form which is signified by the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’.<sup>31</sup> ‘Grounded’ here has a normative sense: it is only because what the proposition says is the case that pure self-consciousness is what it is. However, this normative sense does not imply an ontological independence of the ‘ground’ from what ‘exists’ on the basis of it<sup>32</sup>: ‘because it is the case’ does not point to a ‘being the case’ ontologically independent of the existing pure self-consciousness, i.e. in the sense required by the realist conviction (and in the sense underpinned by crude Platonists). This point is also captured by the notion of ‘(logical) form’: like any form, also this form, qua form, does not exist but for and in existing pure self-consciousness. This is why Hegel says that not only what exists depends on its ground, but also the other way round.

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<sup>30</sup> Hegel even characterizes the transition to the Logic of the Concept (*Begriffslogik*) as entering “the realm of freedom.”

<sup>31</sup> It could seem as if there were an ambiguity within the concept of ‘pure self-consciousness’: on the one hand, it means the insight (or knowledge) that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking; on the other hand, it means a self-conscious (finite) being. In fact, both meanings are identical, because, as far as we are concerned with self-conscious (finite) beings here, they consist in – potentially or actually, implicitly or explicitly – having the insight (or knowing) that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking.

<sup>32</sup> Though there is an ontological dependence on pure self-consciousness from its ground, ‘the concept’, to be sure: pure self-consciousness – knowing that I cannot think of myself as not-thinking – would and could not ‘be’ without the proposition it knows (and its being true).

So far, the logical grounding of self-consciousness is nothing that would lead us beyond (pure) self-consciousness or beyond the self-conscious finite subject in ontological (or metaphysical) respect, but only in a logical one. Speculative logic so far does not contain or imply any distinctive metaphysical commitments. But as soon as we take it together with the idea of a leap in history mentioned before, this changes. Then it turns out that we have to account for an absolute subject, as something existing and being distinct from finite subjects (from ourselves) – and from which finite subjects (we) metaphysically depend. This is what I shall now turn to.

#### 4. *The Absolute – Freedom and History*

There is a leap in history, I said; in the first place, it separates Descartes and Kant on the one hand and Hegel on the other. Descartes is the ‘beginner’ of a philosophy of (pure) self-consciousness, in two senses of the word ‘beginner’<sup>33</sup>: he is the first who does philosophy of (pure) self-consciousness, and he still is an amateur in philosophy of (pure) self-consciousness. He clearly sees that thinking about myself, the one who is thinking, is a crucial and focal philosophical issue; but he cannot see that its logical form conflicts with the form of ontological thinking that he leaves unquestioned, let alone that he would be (explicitly) bothered by the necessitarianist implications of his thinking. Kant sees the conflict between the (logical) form of pure self-reflection and ontological thinking, as well as the incompatibility between necessity and spontaneity (or freedom). But he does not see that what he does – applying the rule of detachment, though without ontological and necessitarianist implications (– and thus incoherent) – conflicts with the logical form of (pure) self-consciousness, which he cannot fully grasp, either. That is why his conception of (pure) self-consciousness is beyond pre-critical ontology, but this side of the new metaphysics of the absolute that, as we will now come to see, emerges from the Hegelian conception of (pure) self-consciousness and its location in the history of philosophy and, thus, of spirit.

Understanding the logical form of the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’ properly and, thus, understanding this proposition as a (speculative) logical one at all, was not at hand before Hegel. This is what we learn from history when we ‘read’ it

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<sup>33</sup> In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel explicitly calls Descartes the “beginner of modern philosophy (*Anfänger der modernen Philosophie*)” – in both of the following senses of the word, I take it.

philosophically, the way I am just trying to perform it. Doing that is essential to philosophy, if philosophy wants to be philosophy of spirit and not just mere logic. It seems to be an aspiration of Hegel's *Logic* that we – now – have a priori knowledge of the logical succession of different forms of thinking; that is, we know a priori that, if there is reason in history and, thus, history is a philosophical topic, these forms have to develop according to this succession. But the *Science of Logic* cannot tell us that there are (and, as I will argue, must be) actually held misconceptions of pure self-consciousness in history (of philosophy).<sup>34</sup> This is what Hegel means by saying that the 'negativity' that is essential to spirit is not yet fully at work in the *Logic*. These misconceptions – and the overcoming of them – will, however, turn out to be necessary for the realization of spirit's self-knowledge and -revelation, as I will argue. This explains why Hegel is such an attentive 'reader' of history (of philosophy). It is quite patent from his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that there he is not just repeating transitions from one form of thinking to the next, which we may already have gone through in the *Science of Logic*; rather, he points to the actually held misconceptions which spirit is about to overcome.

In order to understand the role of these misconceptions – and the overcoming of them – in the realization of spirit's self-knowledge, we have to consider more closely what I was referring to as 'the leap' in history. The leap means that something new, a new form thinking, enters the stage of history (of philosophy). If we radically think through the idea of something new entering the stage of history, we must conceive of the new as something that is impossible to emerge just out of what is already there. This allows us to make sense of Hegel's definition of 'spirit' in the *Encyclopedia*: it is "revelation (*Offenbaren*)"<sup>35</sup>. Interestingly enough, this very concept stems from religion. I will dwell on that later. What is meant by "revelation" basically corresponds to what I was referring to as 'the leap' in history (of philosophy). It is to be specified as follows: something new is shown to finite subjects; it is given as something valid, and they acknowledge it as valid although this would not have been possible on basis of their old form of thinking, as – in our case – this old form of

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<sup>34</sup> I leave open the hotly debated question of whether the transition from *Logic* to *Realphilosophie* is as compelling as Hegel suggests it to be. This was notably disputed already by his early critics, such as Schelling. At any rate, it should be clear that even if this transition was compelling, doing philosophy of history (of philosophy) does not and cannot just consist in repeating the *Logic*, but contains reference to reality and all implications this reference has. With regard to my concerns, this means that, in any case, we cannot know within the *Logic* that, in history, actually held misconceptions occur.

<sup>35</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830). Hamburg: Meiner, 1991, § 383 [my translation].

thinking implies the universal (unrestricted) applicability of the rule of detachment, to all propositions of the form 'I cannot think (that) x', 'It is impossible to think (that) x', whatever the x might be. It is a new form of thinking established as a successor to the old one: the applicability of the rule of detachment now is restricted. Seeing that is conceiving of self-consciousness as self-consciousness, as categorially different in (logical) form from consciousness of an object, that is, fully grasping the very idea of self-consciousness and its logical form.

Interestingly enough, Hegel says "that it [sc. spirit] does not reveal something; rather, its determination and content is this revealing itself (*daß er [sc. der Geist] nicht etwas offenbart, sondern seine Bestimmtheit und Inhalt ist dieses Offenbaren selbst*)"<sup>36</sup>. That is, spirit's revelation is not exhausted by providing a new form of thinking to finite subjects; it is not exhausted by spirit's giving 'something' – something other than itself – to subjects. Rather, it culminates in thereby revealing revealing to them. What does that mean? Well, we have just thought through this very thought: by exploring the history of (pure) self-consciousness in Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, we realized that there is a leap between the first two and Hegel, and understood that leap in great detail; that is, we realized that there is something given at the stage of Hegel's philosophy which was not given before and which cannot follow just from the forms of thinking available before. That is, by giving the new form of thinking, spirit also gives everything at hand to know it as the giving – in short, it reveals (its) revealing, and it reveals itself as being this revealing. The revelation of revelation is spirit's self-revelation.

Spirit is revelation of revelation; and it reveals itself as this revealing which it is. This very thought implies a difference between spirit, as far as it reveals, and spirit, as far as it receives what spirit reveals; between the one who gives the new form of thinking, and the one to whom it is given. Hegel contrasts the two dimensions of spirit as 'the absolute' (or the 'infinite subject') and the 'finite subject'. Finite subjects are subjects which are essentially bound to history in the sense that they can only think in the form of thinking that is established in the period of history they belong to. The infinite subject is the subject that governs history by successively giving what it gives. Spirit is only the whole it is through essentially unfolding into these two dimensions. This insight is the result of a line of argument we just went through. Retrospectively, we can (and have to) characterize this line of thought

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<sup>36</sup> HEGEL. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), § 383 [my translation].

both as our gaining knowledge of the absolute subject, and the absolute subject's revealing itself as revealing. 'Spirit', as a whole, knows itself once it knows all this.<sup>37</sup>

So if we look back to all this from the result we have reached – the insight into the realization of spirit's self-knowledge –, we can answer John McDowell's question of why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* has a history as follows: without spirit's self-knowledge in its two dimensions, revelation – what spirit is, its "content" – could not be realized; revelation again could not take place if everything were already given all along; if there were nothing that is not yet given. The successive realization of different stages of forms of thinking – of what is given and not yet given – is what we call 'history (of philosophy)', at least from a philosophical viewpoint. This is why history is necessary for the realization of spirit's self-knowledge.

Looking back to our line of argument, we also see that it would be a misunderstanding to think that the leap is something like a mere break in history, something that brings discontinuity into history that makes it somewhat unintelligible. On the contrary, the development from Descartes over Kant to Hegel does have a continuity which is to be understood as the development towards what is finally going to be given through the leap. In other words, the misconceptions of Descartes and Kant are sensible and intelligible misconceptions: they can (and must) be 'read' the way we just read them,<sup>38</sup> as misconceptions resulting from the contradictory attempt to spell out the new form of thinking, which is in the coming, and its implications through the old form of thinking.

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<sup>37</sup> Now we can understand what Hegel means when he writes: "The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself." [HEGEL. **Phenomenology of Spirit**, § 20.] And: "[T]he real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about." [HEGEL. **Phenomenology of Spirit**, § 3.]

That is, first, spirit can only gain its self-knowledge just described by actually going through the process of history; and, second, an individual who stands at the stage where this process is accomplished can only reconstruct or acquire all this by referring to this process through which spirit has actually gone – as we just did it. In § 28 of the Preface, Hegel explicitly points to the fact that an individual can (only) engage in the form of thinking that spirit has already provided and, thus, only reconstruct or acquire spirit's self-knowledge as far as this is possible on the corresponding stage of spirit's self-revelation.

<sup>38</sup> Generally speaking, Hegel embraces a conception of history that can be illuminated by reference to the inner logic of a story. This is pointed out and presented by HUTTER, A. *Wahre Endlichkeit. Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist*. In: Drilo, K.; Hutter, A. (Eds.). **Spekulation und Vorstellung in Hegels enzyklopädischem System**. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. Hutter coins the concept of "true finitude (*wahre Endlichkeit*)" that is meant to reflect Hegel's concept of "true infinity (*wahre Unendlichkeit*)". The analogy to the inner logic of a story helps us to see why my detailed exposition and discussion of the philosophical period from Descartes via Kant to Hegel is not ornamental: just like a good novel does not and cannot consist in mere results, spirit's self-revelation needs to be spelt out stepwise.

Thus, it is even mistaken to think that the revelatory step only consists in the leap between Descartes and Kant on the one side and Hegel on the other. Rather, this is the conclusive step of a revelatory process starting from Descartes and, via Kant, leading to Hegel. This is why Hegel, on the one hand, emphasizes the leap, but also the continuity – and unity – of this philosophical period starting with Descartes:<sup>39</sup>

Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined [...]. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth – there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born – so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole [= Descartes' and Kant's anticipations of the leap, T.O.] is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash [= the leap, T.O.], illuminates the features of the new world.<sup>40</sup>

This metaphoric description contains something very important to Hegel: that in the transition that corresponds to the leap nothing is added by finite subjectivity. Rather, finite subjectivity just keeps 'looking at' what is under scrutiny – here: the proposition 'I cannot think of myself as not-thinking' –, and by spirit's revealing the new form of thinking according to which this is a proposition of speculative logic, the emptiness of Kant's conception of self-consciousness is overcome.<sup>41</sup>

As a final step of this section, I will dwell on the relation of the absolute to freedom.

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<sup>39</sup> There are other unities in the history of philosophy, to be sure, and there is one encompassing unity that makes it be the history of one project called 'philosophy'. But that does not conflict with the claim that there are periods in the history of philosophy in which decisive steps – leaps – occur to which certain unities (of periods) correspond.

<sup>40</sup> HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 11.

<sup>41</sup> In the Preface, § 32, Hegel says: "[T]hat an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure 'I' [= in its Kantian misconception, T.O.]. Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject, which by giving determinateness an existence in its own element supersedes abstract immediacy, i.e. the immediacy which barely is, and thus is authentic substance: that being or immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but which is this mediation itself." [HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 32.]

Let us recall: as long as the I think is meant to be the explanation of the proposition ‘I cannot think of myself as not-thinking’ – by applying the rule of detachment to it –, this either makes it impossible to account for the non-necessity of my thinking (Descartes), or it makes it impossible to account for it in a coherent way (Kant). After the leap, it is possible to account for the non-necessity of my thinking in a coherent way. But accounting for that, if one thinks things through, also means to acknowledge the leap as the leap and, thus, spirit as what it is: revelation; revelation of itself as revealing (Hegel).

If we take these insights together, it follows that there is no conception of freedom without a conception of the absolute; but also, that there is no conception of the absolute without a conception of freedom internal to it, as making my freedom conceivable is what the absolute does, and it does so through history. Thus, the absolute is not a mere – dead, powerless – principle; rather, it governs history (of philosophy) in the way just described. It is a real actor that shapes history through its revelatory work. This is why Hegel talks about it as the successor of Spinoza’s substance, liberating it from its blind necessity and conceiving of it as an infinite subject which, by making our freedom accessible through revealing new forms of thinking, reveals itself as what it is through history; it is an essentially active, not an inert, ahistorical entity. This is the deeper sense of Hegel’s famous programmatic claim that it is the task of (his) philosophy to “grasp[.] and express[.] the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*”<sup>42</sup>. Note that Hegel says that the substance needs to be expressed ‘also’ as subject, but not ‘only’ as subject, not as subject instead of a substance. This is why McDowell’s assumption that by “spirit” Hegel does not mean anything substantial seems mistaken to me.<sup>43</sup>

In the quote, Hegel refers to the “substance” that is also “subject” as “the True.” And indeed, it makes sense to characterize infinite spirit as ‘the’ true – and not only ‘something’ true – that reveals itself, that is, as the new and adequate form of thinking that suspends the old forms; it is thinking as far as it is beyond the defective thinking of finite subjectivity that can do nothing else than holding on to the old forms of thinking. Again, this amendment of the defective thinking of finite subjectivity is an amendment of actual, real thought. It is not a

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<sup>42</sup> HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 17.

<sup>43</sup> “So Geist in particular is not a substance, material or immaterial. The idea of Geist is the idea of a distinctive way of living a life; often it is better to speak of Geistigkeit, as the defining characteristic of that distinctive form of life and thereby of the living beings that live it.” (MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 16.) This, I think, is in tension with McDowell’s praiseworthy anti-Pippinian attempt to pursue a metaphysical reading of Hegel instead of one that cuts down everything to mere normativity.

self-development of pure thought (as in the *Science of Logic*), but a transformation within real thinking, of acts of real-existing finite subjects. This is the domain of *Geistphilosophie*, as belonging to *Realphilosophie* from which Hegel explicitly excludes the *Science of Logic*.

We have just gone through this transformation, experienced it in this paper – as it can happen to every individual at the present stage of history. Hegel explicitly says that, once spirit has done its revelatory work through history, every individual is capable of acquiring this work by understanding it. That is, every individual can understand Descartes' and Kant's forms of thinking (as far as they are intelligible)<sup>44</sup>, but then also sees the progress from Kant to Hegel. This implies that she finds herself forced to dismiss a form of thinking she has held so far. But she does not do so by 'jumping' to another (random) form of thinking which one is free to accept or not to accept (or chooses for pragmatic reasons, gets used to through cultural influence, or something like that). Rather, she finds herself forced to acknowledge the new form of thinking as valid and true, as rightly replacing the old form of thinking.

It should be clear now why I, as a finite subject, metaphysically depend on the absolute: as far as I am spirit, a finite subject, I am thinking and knowing, the highest form of which is knowing myself as what I really am. But gaining this self-knowledge – and, thus, being what I am, as far as I am spirit – is only possible through the revelatory work of the absolute by which I gain knowledge of both myself and the absolute. This knowledge of both myself and the absolute – in one coherent line of thought – is what Hegel calls "absolute spirit (*absoluter Geist*)."

##### *5. The Three Claims (1)-(3) and How They Are Related – Philosophy and Religion as Absolute Spirit*

We can now turn back to the three claims stated at the very beginning of this paper. I shall sum up their decisive points by a counterfactual commentary on each:

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<sup>44</sup> Given that she can really understand it, this means that she must herself be in a confusion, although she lives in a stage of history in which this confusion is already overcome by spirit. In other words, she must, within herself, have a tendency to misconceive of herself, more precisely: to set herself up as the absolute. This explains why Hegel thinks every individual, even in present and future days, is or will be what Christians call a "sinner." I will go into that in the next section.

It should be noted again that Hegel does not think that individual subjects can immediately grasp the stage on which spirit presently is, but that they can only acquire it by going through the way spirit has already gone through. (Cf. HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 28.)

(1) Spirit can gain its full 'self-knowledge' only through history (rather than by timeless and circular mere pure thinking, as in the *Science of Logic*).

Spirit could not know itself as what it is – revealing – without this revealing taking place in history, nor without being differentiated into its two dimensions: the infinite (or absolute) subject, the revealer, and the finite subject, to whom it reveals itself so that the finite subject gains knowledge both of itself and the absolute.

(2) Spirit can demonstrate its 'power' only through history (by overcoming its own negativity, that is, misconceptions of itself).

Spirit would not be a real actor if its work were restricted to pure thought (to the realm of *Logic*, in contrast to the realm of *Realphilosophie*), as there would be no misconception actually held by real subjects that is in need to be overcome; there would be no negativity for spirit to bear, nor could it demonstrate its power by really bearing and overcoming these misconceptions.

(3) Spirit can reveal itself as 'revolutionary' only through history (by bringing about new forms of thinking that were not available yet in prior stages of history).

Spirit would not be able to present something new in a merely circular development of thinking (as the successions of the *Logic*), but only in the linear structure of history. Only in a linear structure, the result is not identical with the beginning.

The latter point, revolution, points to "world-history (*Weltgeschichte*)" and, thus, also to what Hegel calls "objective spirit (*objektiver Geist*)."<sup>45</sup> I will say a few things about this in the next section, also in order to show that my reading of Hegel does not cut off this sphere of spirit.

However, spirit's self-knowledge in its two dimensions – the absolute or infinite subject, and finite subjectivity –, as a whole, is at best reflected in objective spirit, but not fully actualized. It is actualized only in absolute spirit – and especially in 'religion'. Hegel indicates this when he says that the sphere of absolute spirit as a whole can well be called "religion" – not only the second form of this sphere.<sup>45</sup> It is striking and irritating that the vast majority of present readers of Hegel either ignore or try to downplay Hegel's philosophical

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<sup>45</sup> This is what Hegel explicitly says in § 554 of the *Encyclopedia*.

praise of religion.<sup>46</sup> From the texts, there can be no serious doubt that he thinks that philosophy and religion share points of congruence.

In order to account for this congruence, it does not suffice to ascribe a view to Hegel according to which religion is a – partly telling, partly misleading – allegory of what philosophy accurately penetrates and describes as spirit's self-knowledge. Rather, Hegel claims that philosophy and religion share the same content: God, as the one who reveals himself through religion and philosophy; taken together with Hegel's claim that philosophy is a presuppositionless discipline, it follows that he is committed to the claim that philosophy, out of itself, has knowledge of God's reality.<sup>47</sup> And indeed, it has. The absolute, as we have accounted for it, is God. This is not a philosophical cheat-identification, but meant seriously: we have seen that the absolute is an infinite subject revealing itself as what it is, and proving its power throughout history, as a real actor. That is, to the extent to which being a real actor means being a person, the absolute is personal. It is true that the way religion, in itself, talks about God's revelation and power is categorially different from the way philosophy, in itself, does so; it is false, however, to think that what Christian believers mean by 'God' – a really existing, infinite, self-revealing subject, a real actor – is a different entity from what is signified by the philosophical concept of 'the absolute'. (Though it may well be true that some further, maybe even essential features of the Christian God cannot be justified philosophically.)

This raises the question of whether there is more than one non-allegorical point in which religion and philosophy congrue. And it seems that there is: '(radical) sin'. By '(radical) sin' Christianity means the human being's will to set himself or herself up as the absolute. (This is, by the way, exactly what happens in traditional left-wing readings of Hegel which recommend to understand 'the absolute' as 'the human(kind)'). Interestingly, this is what also happens in the historical period preceding Hegel's philosophy: instead of realizing that self-consciousness is grounded in 'the concept', 'the I' (or 'the I think') is itself meant to be the 'highest point' (Kant) or, even worse, the 'principle of philosophy' (Schelling) or, absolutely worst, 'the absolute I' (Fichte). There can be no doubt that Hegel, all over his texts, identifies "the I" as far as it is setting itself up as the absolute as the profoundest and deepest

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<sup>46</sup> I deal with this in closer detail in OEHL, T. *Selbstbewusstsein und absoluter Geist*. In: Oehl, T.; Kok, A. (Eds.). *Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel. Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Hegel claims this quite straightforwardly, in describing his philosophy as a new version of the (ontological) proof of God.

form of evil; that is, as what Christians refer to as '(radical) sin'.<sup>48</sup> And there is a second aspect to the Christian – especially Pauline and Lutheran – doctrine of radical sin to which Hegel's philosophy congrues: that finite subjects' tendency to set themselves up as the absolute has the necessary implication of becoming unfree. This is what we saw happening especially in the Cartesian form of philosophical thinking.

However, we have seen that these profound misconceptions are necessary steps in the realization of spirit's self-knowledge through history. This is the point where Hegel's philosophy deviates from Christian doctrine, which was one of the reasons why Hegel got under theological attack: he sounds as if sin was necessary for God's being God. We do not have to care about this deviation here, as it is nothing philosophy needs to be bothered by. However, the deviation should not make us overlook the following: if we take the two points in which philosophy and (Christian) religion really congrue, it follows that they both share the same view about freedom. Both philosophy and religion (re)present the process in which we are freed from misconceptions according to which we cannot be free (Descartes) or cannot make sense of being free (Kant); we are freed from unfreedom, for the sake of freedom ("zur Freiheit befreit", as Luther puts it<sup>49</sup>) – by the absolute: that is, accounting for the absolute and coherently conceiving of myself as free turn out to be internally related to one another. Thereby, it also turns out that these insights are nothing I could achieve out of myself alone, but only through and by the revelatory work of the absolute.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the relation between philosophy and religion is far closer than most present readers are willing to accept, due to their 'dogmatic secularism'. In fact, every reading that cannot even make sense of Hegel's omnipresent praise of Christian religion (particularly in its Lutheran form) is at least exegetically defective.

## 6. *Objective Spirit and (Its) Revolution(s)*

The relation between the finite subject and the infinite subject, the absolute, is the focus of my reading of Hegel. In other words, absolute spirit, the knowledge of this relation, is the

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<sup>48</sup> In Hegel's 1829 *Göschel-Rezension*, the focal role the concept of "sin" plays in his thinking becomes especially explicit. I discuss this in closer detail in OEHL. *Selbstbewusstsein und absoluter Geist*. For a quite comprehensive study of Hegel's "sin" cf. also RINGLEBEN, J. **Hegels Theorie der Sünde. Die subjektivitätslogische Konstruktion eines theologischen Begriffs**. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976.

<sup>49</sup> This is Luther's excellent translation of *Galatians* 5,1.

<sup>50</sup> The existential dimension of this fact becomes especially clear if one assumes that finite subjects in all present and future stages of history remain sinners. Cf. also fn. 44 and fn. 37 on this point.

culmination of my reading, just as it is the culmination of Hegel's philosophical system. Thus, my reading stands in opposition to the majority of current readings of Hegel, who instead focus on the relation between the finite subject and the institutions which it is part of and which Hegel subsumes under the notion of objective spirit. My reading implies that all readings that try to cut off (the philosophy of) absolute spirit or integrate it into (the philosophy of) objective spirit are profoundly defective.<sup>51</sup>

However, it is also true that my reading would be defective if it had nothing to say about objective spirit. If the infinite subject is really infinite, then, as Hegel makes clear, nothing is outside of it or untouched by it. If there is an absolute, there must be some manifestation of it also in the realm of objective spirit; the work of the absolute must not be restricted to history of philosophy, but also extend to history in the sense of world-history.

In order to show that and how it does, I will draw on Hegel's remarks on the French Revolution and its terror. These, I think, make for the most telling example for how straightforwardly the work of the absolute – that it negates the finite subject's setting itself up as the absolute – extends to world-history. In the *Phenomenology* section on the French Revolution, Hegel interprets the guillotine as executing spirit's revelatory power by making visible the negation of the finite subject as the Revolution misconceives of it – namely as the absolute, and as absolutely free:

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self [= the misconception of the I (think) resulting from the old forms of thinking, T.O.]. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.<sup>52</sup>

Though it sounds too harsh, Hegel is not exaggerating or joking here. Rather, he thinks that this decisive step in world-history, the French Revolution, is nothing but a finite execution of spirit's revelatory power – and, thus, the execution of the I as far as it misconceives itself. It is

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<sup>51</sup> Proving this is one of the main aspirations of the collected volume *Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel* which I edited jointly with Arthur Kok (OEHL, T.; KOK, A. (Eds.). **Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel. Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte.** Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018). It is directed against the widespread tendency to reduce absolute spirit to objective spirit (as it happens in the work of Habermas and Honneth), as well as the tendency to ignore absolute spirit in favor of objective spirit (as it is the case with Pippin and Brandom).

<sup>52</sup> HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 590.

finite – as objective spirit in general is<sup>53</sup> –, as it is the execution of spirit's revelatory power showing up in a real, but particular historical event. It is not – as philosophy and religion are – universally grasping spirit's revelatory power as such, i.e. infinitely in the sense that, once spirit's self-knowledge is reached through history, it remains as the truth.

There is a second elucidatory example in objective spirit we should briefly turn to: Hegel emphasizes that the dimension of 'subjective freedom' is one of the defining features of modernity (of modern consciousness) – and was not in view, let alone realized, in antiquity. This fact is internally related to the historical dimension of the realization of spirit's self-knowledge, as pointed out by my reading of Hegel. The revelation of spirit from Descartes via Kant to Hegel is an increasing clarification of the nature of (pure) self-consciousness, containing a leap between Kant and Hegel regarding the adequate understanding of the logical form of self-consciousness. That is, the 'depth' of the very idea of self-consciousness, as being categorially different in logical form from any consciousness of a mere object, is not fully grasped before Hegel, let alone before the beginning of the historical period of philosophy discussed in this paper.

Hegel thinks the very idea of self-consciousness is anticipated by Christianity, especially in its Lutheran form. He does, at any rate, not think that it was grasped in antiquity. This is reflected in the fact that the dimension of 'subjective freedom' was not called for, let alone realized in the social and political systems of antiquity. The most obvious upshot of that is the widespread acceptance of slavery. Aristotle did not only allow for the thought, but even embraced the thought that some people are slaves by nature; he could not have the idea of the human being's being free simply qua being an I – as he could not yet properly grasp the idea of 'being an I'. Thus, his view about slavery is not an isolated mistake, but rather grounded in the fact that – whatever precisely he meant by "*noêsis noêseôs*" – this thought is not equivalent to the modern idea of (pure) self-consciousness, its logical form, and its implications – such as subjective freedom – at all.<sup>54</sup> Pointing this out is not blaming Aristotle, but an implication of Hegel's thought that spirit's self-knowledge was not yet accomplished in Aristotle's times.

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<sup>53</sup> In § 386 of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel explicitly distinguishes subjective and objective spirit, which together make up 'finite' spirit, from absolute spirit which is 'infinite' spirit.

<sup>54</sup> McDowell admits that self-consciousness is not thematic for Aristotle (MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 17-18), but I think plays down the significance of this fact and the implications it has.

As we have further seen, spirit's self-knowledge implies accounting for the reality of the infinite subject. The infinite subject thus conceived can well be addressed as God, as it really governs history and reveals itself through actually held misconceptions of finite subjects, thus freeing them from the unfreedom these misconceptions imply. The constitutive involvement of such misconceptions in the realization of spirit's self-knowledge is what Hegel calls the "negativity" that spirit not only overcomes, but actually needs for its self-revelation. Now, there is nothing like this in the Aristotelian 'God', which thus is only a 'God', but not God. Aristotle's 'God' is pure thinking, Hegel's God is spirit, i.e. pure thinking as it really manifests itself through history. Thus, it is far more than pure thinking. (It is a cheat to say that Aristotle's 'God' too is more than pure thinking, as this thinking as such is actuality. This still does not suffice for 'God's' being God.)

Unsurprisingly, these upshots of my paper make direct contact with the ones from McDowell's paper. McDowell does not deny that, according to Hegel, there is a linear progress through history. However, he restricts this to a "second sense" of freedom which he characterizes and distinguishes from a "first" one as follows<sup>55</sup>:

[Freedom in the first sense is] freedom that can be in place even if it is only as a result of, for instance, her upbringing that someone takes some consideration to have rational force. That does not threaten the subject's freedom in the sense that figures in "the fact of reason"; however she came to take the consideration to have rational force, her taking it to have rational force precludes her from regarding its role in determining what she thinks or does as an influence from outside her rationality. But she falls short of freedom in another sense, which would require acting or thinking not just in light of something she takes to be a reason but also in light of something she knows to have the rational force she attributes to it.<sup>56</sup>

McDowell thinks that there is historical change only to the second sense of freedom, to the more or less actualized potential to recognize reasons as reasons, which, he thinks, "[a]s a feature of a life, [...] comes in degrees"<sup>57</sup>. However, "[r]egarding as internal to one the force of considerations one takes to be reasons"<sup>58</sup>, McDowell thinks, does and cannot undergo change in history.

This, I think, cannot be Hegel's view. Admittedly, it is hard to imagine how it could be otherwise without ending up in the bizarre view that a Greek individual was unable to give

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<sup>55</sup> In what follows, I will not discuss this distinction on its own, but only what McDowell says about historical change in this context.

<sup>56</sup> MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 31.

reasons and know them as being related to her in a way that is categorially different from, let us say, her being related to external causal influences on her body. Such a view is surely false. However, as it is generally true for philosophy, a lot depends on how to understand a phrase like “regarding as internal to one the force of considerations one takes to be reasons.” According to my reading, we have to ascribe a different (and deficient) understanding of a phrase like ‘internal to one(self)’ to the Greek individual, compared to a modern individual. The difference is not a gradual one, but a difference in kind.<sup>59</sup> The self-understanding of the modern human being is an understanding of herself as being categorially different from any object, as well as being unconditionally free. Such an abstract way of putting it may be available only to modern philosophers. However, the self-understanding of every modern human being – not only of philosophers –, their (implicit) self-consciousness, essentially contains the possibility of calling for their own subjectivity each, to what Hegel calls ‘subjective freedom’, and this is accompanied by the certainty that there is such a thing as ‘subjective freedom’, as the flipside of the fact that I am a human being, an I, just like every other human being is an I. This cannot have been the (implicit) self-understanding of an ancient Greek human being; it was shaped differently.

According to Hegel, the appeal to subjective freedom is ambiguous. On the one hand, it expresses or reflects the adequate understanding of pure self-consciousness, on the other hand, it can also express or reflect the misconception of it, the misconception of myself as the absolute. Both were not possible in ancient times. The ancients could not be sinners in the way moderns are, and thus could not even consider God to be a self-revealing subject who, qua self-revelation, negates this sin, as Hegel presents it.<sup>60</sup>

All in all, antiquity both lacks the developed form of freedom that is constitutive of the modern world and a sufficient grasp of the logical form of (pure) self-consciousness. They could not fully understand themselves, nor God. Self-consciousness, freedom – as well as philosophy and religion – do have a history.

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<sup>59</sup> It is instructive to compare this point to the view – which McDowell, by the way, endorses – that perceiving, as we ascribe it to non-rational animals, is not identical with perceiving, as we ascribe it to ourselves. This is not to say that animals cannot perceive, but that their form of perception is categorially different from ours. Now my claim will of course not be that the moderns relate to the ancients like rational beings to non-rational animals, but rather that spirit’s history makes up a categorial difference ‘among’ rational beings, finite subjects: between the understanding of a phrase like ‘internal to one(self)’ on the stage of antiquity and the understanding of this phrase in the modern era.

<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that the Greek could not be sinners.

### 7. *Critical Notes on the Relation between Hegel and Aristotle*

The preceding remarks point to a general difference between my reading of Hegel and McDowell's one. McDowell assumes that Hegel and Aristotle are very close in their focal ideas, whereas it seems to me that they primarily differ from one another. I have already pointed to some of the differences, and I will now try to sum them up in four somewhat programmatic points. I cannot justify them in detail here, but it should be obvious that they simply reflect the upshots of my reading of Hegel:

(1. Linearity of history) Hegel thinks, as the vast majority of modern people do, that history is linear rather than circular. The idea of a linear form of history was not even considered by Aristotle, and if he had considered it, this would have meant for him that history cannot be rational, let alone be the place where spirit's self-knowledge takes place.

(2. Pure thinking) According to Hegel, pure thinking is defective. It is an abstraction from reality; and spirit, only spirit, is reality. Pure thinking does not contain negativity in the sense in which spirit's self-knowledge, through history, does: there is incompleteness and insufficiency of the singular categories, but nothing like a manifest misconception that needs to be overcome and then is overcome, let alone a manifest misconception actually held by real-existing subjects. (This does not conflict with the fact that, according to Hegel, the true and final form of thinking can and needs to be spelt out formally, which is the task of the *Science of Logic*. But the proof that it is the true and final form of thinking is achieved by the revelatory work of spirit through history, and only through it.)

(3. Inner Corruption of Spirit) Despite the differences pointed out, Hegel is straightforwardly Kantian in at least one important respect: he endorses the idea of an 'inner corruption' of reason (or spirit), which Kant first brought up with the concept of 'transcendental illusion' that reason is inevitably confronted with. Such an idea would have been an absurdity to Aristotle; he can only think of external factors as inhibiting or distorting the proper work of reason.

(4. Outside and inside of Spirit) McDowell and Rödl are also Aristotelians in the following sense: they think that self-consciousness is a timeless form that a living being whose form it is can all along access from within, and only from within. Accordingly, the idea of a 'transition' from not-knowing what self-consciousness is (not even implicitly!) to knowing it is incoherent. From a Hegelian point of view, it is different: with regard to spirit's

self-knowledge as it is realized through history, the idea of a transition from a form of thinking that does not yet know what self-consciousness is to a form of thinking that does know it is constitutive.<sup>61</sup>

These fundamental differences raise the question of why Hegel does praise Aristotle the way he does. Apart from Hegel's general admiration for all great philosophers contributing to history in its linear development, there are two agreements between Hegel and Aristotle that I think explain it:

(I. The Concept of the Concept) As McDowell himself quotes<sup>62</sup>, Hegel remarks that he is a follower of Aristotle in reintroducing the concept of 'the concept' to the philosophy of mind (or spirit), to the philosophy of spirit's self-knowledge. McDowell thinks this means that Hegel picks up on the Aristotelian idea of a 'form of a living being' as it applies to rational living beings, finite subjects. Assuming that 'life' plays this focal role in Hegel's philosophy of spirit seems mistaken to me. I have offered an alternative understanding of Hegel's remark. 'The concept' is the form of (pure) self-consciousness, and realizing that (pure) self-consciousness has this logical form (and is thus grounded) is the decisive step in spirit's leading us beyond the subjectivist misconceptions discussed. The process of spirit's self-knowledge essentially is an overcoming of misconceptions by finite subjects, that is: of necessary inner corruptions of spirit. Strikingly, Hegel characterizes the Kantian misconception – the "I think" or "I = I" – as "death (*Tod*)"<sup>63</sup>; and he also characterizes the perishing of these misconceptions as "death (*Tod*)"<sup>64</sup>. Taking these two together, this view amounts to the idea of a "death of the death (*Tod des Todes*)", which Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, points out as the speculative truth of the cross and the resurrection. Now, what matters with regard to Hegel's relation to Aristotle's doctrine of 'life' is this: Hegel conceives of the process of spirit's self-knowledge as, so to speak, 'self-referential death'<sup>65</sup>, and not as an ongoing – "deathless"<sup>66</sup> – process of life.

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<sup>61</sup> This even applies to the individuals philosophizing at (or after) the stage of history reached by Hegel: in overcoming their misconceptions (or confusions), they undergo this very transition too, thanks to the revelatory work of the absolute. Cf. also fn. 44 and fn. 37 on this.

<sup>62</sup> MCDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. the above quote from HEGEL. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 32.

<sup>64</sup> Most vividly expressed in the above quote from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 590.

<sup>65</sup> GOBSCH, W. *Philosophieren als Sterben. Selbsterkenntnis und Versöhnung bei Hegel (eine Annäherung)*. In: Oehl, T.; Kok, A. (Eds.). *Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel. Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018, makes a lot of this, and he characterizes philosophizing, according to Hegel, as dying (*Sterben*); and HUTTER, A. *Methodischer Negativismus. Das Programm einer "Revolution der Denkart" bei Kant, Hegel und Kierkegaard*. In: Hutter, A.; Rasmussen, A.M. (Eds.). *Kierkegaard im Kontext des deutschen Idealismus*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, points

(II. Separateness of Spirit) Notably, Aristotle claimed that *noûs* is somehow separate (*chôristos*) from all finite beings<sup>67</sup>, and, particularly, it is not the soul of a human being, nor reducible to the soul of a human being.<sup>68</sup> Hegel too thinks that spirit, in the dimension of the absolute subject, is somehow separate from the finite subject – namely in the following sense: there is an – one – infinite subject, the absolute, whose reality is not reducible to finite subjectivity, nor to the finitude of objective spirit, nor to any other finitude. This is why Hegel quotes Aristotle on *noûs* at the conclusion of his philosophy of absolute spirit, where Hegel's proof of all this is summed up.

### *Conclusion*

John McDowell's question – why does it matter to Hegel that *Geist* has a history – is one of the most interesting and most important questions one has to ask in attempting to understand 'the whole' of Hegelian philosophy. I argued for the following answer to this question: spirit, in order to be what it essentially is, namely self-revelation, needs history, as revelation can only be realized by overcoming certain forms of thinking, by giving new forms of thinking that replace the old ones and, retrospectively, reveal them as misconceptions. Spirit's self-knowledge is knowledge of spirit as being realized in two dimensions: the absolute, that reveals itself, and the finite subject, to whom it is revealed – through history.

McDowell answers the question of why it matters to Hegel that *Geist* has a history without reference to the absolute and thus without reference to Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit. If my reading is correct, such an answer must be impossible. In fact, McDowell's paper is the attempt to understand history, which Hegel thinks is essentially the place of revelation of spirit, without accounting for the revelation of spirit; it is the attempt to make sense of Hegel's metaphysics – under the heading of its focal concepts 'spirit (*Geist*)', 'self-knowledge (*Selbsterkenntnis*)', 'history (*Geschichte*)', and 'freedom (*Freiheit*)' – without going into the metaphysical culmination of Hegel's system.

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out the relevance of this, as he calls it, "negativist" method and nature of Hegel's philosophy which is also manifest in the (historical) process of the realization of spirit's self-knowledge.

<sup>66</sup> As Aristotle himself puts it in *De anima* III 5, 430a23.

<sup>67</sup> SHIELDS, C. The Active Mind of *De anima* iii 5. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, points out the puzzlement this remark from *De anima* III 5, 430a17-18 ought to cause.

<sup>68</sup> Strikingly MCDOWELL. Why Does It Matter, – despite of his Aristotelianism – does not seem to make anything of this crucial point in Aristotle. Moreover, this point stands in tension to McDowell's exclusive focus on the soul (*psychê*) instead of *noûs*.

In this paper, I tried to focus on this culmination, following Hegel's caveat that this cannot be achieved without pursuing the preceding course of spirit's development in close detail. Absolute spirit – the congruence of philosophy and religion – ramifies all over Hegel's thinking. McDowell's Hegel is a pagan, but Hegel's philosophy is not pagan. This is not an argument, but a trenchant summary of the difference between McDowell's Hegel and my Hegel.

They are very different – in spirit.

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