

The Shadow of God

Michael Rosen

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God

KANT, HEGEL, *and*
the PASSAGE *from*
HEAVEN *to* HISTORY

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For my students

I am not a religious man but I
cannot help seeing every problem
from a religious point of view.

—LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

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References and Abbreviations

References to Kant are made in the following way. The abbreviation “Ak.” (standing for “*Akademie Edition*”) is followed by two numbers separated by a colon, the first of which stands for the volume number, the second the page. In first references and in the bibliography, I will give the title both in English and in German, but subsequent references will be from the English title alone. The exception is *The Critique of Pure Reason*, to which reference is standardly made by the pagination of the first two editions (A and B).

References to Hegel’s works are, in almost all cases, to the German of the Suhrkamp edition of *Hegels Werke in 20 Bänden*. Again, first references and the bibliography will contain the title in both English and German but later references will use the English title as an abbreviation.

The works of Marx and Engels are referred to by the GDR edition of the Marx-Engels-Werke (*MEW*), which has the advantage of being both complete and available online. Again, English titles will be used as an abbreviation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A Not So Secular Age?

The last thing one settles in writing a book is what one should put in first.

—PASCAL

A Spy Story

Here is how a spy story starts.

A man in a cheap suit hurries through an industrial wasteland. He is nervous and runs his fingers through his hair, which looks as if he has cut it himself with nail scissors. At length, he comes to a wall and reaches over to pull out a loose brick. He takes a small packet out of his pocket (a notebook? a roll of film?) stuffs it into the cavity and puts the brick back. Then he walks away, all the while glancing around to see if he is being observed. Suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, a large black car appears and two men leap out. He is bundled inside and driven off, not to be seen again.

The scene now shifts. Two sleek-looking middle-aged men in bowler hats are walking through St James's Park, deep in conversation while pretending to feed the ducks. "So there you have it, George", one says to the other. "There's probably nothing in it, but the Minister would like you to take a look—discreetly, of course."

And with that we're off. We know that, if le Carré or whoever it is is on form, by the end of the next few hundred pages, after some unexpected

but plausible twists and turns, the events described in St James's Park and the poor chap with the bad haircut will have been tied together into a satisfying whole. That, to put it briefly, is the separation (and final coincidence) between plot and story, and it's what you pay your money for when you buy a thriller or a crime novel.

Jonathan Wolff (to whom I owe this insight into the contrast between plot and story) remarks: "A detective novel written by a good philosophy student would begin: 'In this novel I shall show that the butler did it.' The rest will be just filling in the details."¹ Would it really, though? I suspect that a philosopher's detective novel is more likely to start: "In this novel, I shall challenge the widely held view that the butler did it. I shall call into question received assumptions about what it is to be a butler and what would count as evidence for showing that the butler (if indeed he is one) had 'done' it." Or something like that.

Even if philosophy is not a whodunnit, it is still a kind of mystery tour: the aim is to change the understanding of what is otherwise taken for granted, so how can we describe our destination adequately until we have reached it? Worse, what makes us confident we are really *advancing towards* that destination? As Hume worries, "by what criterion shall I distinguish [truth], even if fortune should at last guide me on her foot-steps?"²

Most Anglo-American philosophers deal with such vexing considerations by ignoring them. One philosopher who certainly did not, however, was Hegel, and they led him to some disparaging remarks about the very idea of preceding works of philosophy with prefaces or introductions. The sort of considerations presented in prefaces are, he says at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, inappropriate and contrary to philosophy's purpose:

For whatever one might properly say about philosophy in a preface and in whatever way one might say it—for example, a historical statement of its tendency and standpoint, its general content and results, a network of randomly pointing assertions and assurances about truth—none of this can be accepted as the way in which to present philosophical truth.³

The reader can be forgiven, surely, if she does not find this encouraging. Hegel, whatever his other merits, hardly stands as a model of reader-friendliness. What is more, he himself then goes on to give the *Phenome-*

nology a preface—fifty of the densest and most demanding pages of philosophical prose ever written.

Nevertheless, the difficulties that Hegel points to are real ones. We—author and reader—need to start from a shared understanding of how philosophical argument is to take place. But that is something that anyone with the slightest acquaintance with the history of philosophy will see cannot be taken for granted. It is true that philosophy has had brief periods when it has looked somewhat like Thomas Kuhn’s “normal science” (these are usually called “the end of metaphysics”) but, despite the best efforts of professional establishments to impose uniformity, such orthodoxies have not proved durable.

In that connection, a dismissive (if funny) remark attributed to the Harvard philosopher W. V. Quine needs to be reckoned with. Quine is reported to have said that two sorts of people are drawn to the study of philosophy: those interested in the history of philosophy and those interested in philosophy.⁴ This book proceeds, however, from exactly the contrary conviction. Its objectives are both philosophical and historical: not only is the history of philosophy itself philosophical, but philosophical history, I believe, represents the most fruitful way of understanding some of the deepest and most perplexing issues that face us—as philosophers and as citizens. And this means that the way it is written and the kind of arguments it advances will be very different from those given by more conventional English-speaking philosophers.⁵

So an Introduction there shall be. As a first step, I shall present and discuss briefly a series of quotations that the reader will encounter again later in the book. The idea is to give a sense of purpose to a journey that will carry us through what will be, at times, very dense and tangled terrain.

Secularization

Let us start with a quotation that gives this book its title, *The Shadow of God*. It comes from section 108 of Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*:

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which

his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow.⁶

Nietzsche's aphorism is enough to establish that this is a book about *secularization*. Yet what do we mean by "secularization"? On one understanding—most common in the English-speaking world, although not confined to it—secularization is simply the retreat of traditional religious practice. It can be measured in the decline of public worship, church membership and the existence of confessional political parties, for example.⁷

Among those who agree that such a change has taken place with the coming of the modern world, there is, however, the broadest possible spectrum of views as to how it is to be evaluated. At one end stand those self-professed "Enlightenment" thinkers who see the retreat of religion as part of a movement by which reason and science gradually clear away the cobwebs of superstition and advance human well-being.⁸ At the other are those for whom secularization is part of a process in which technological capacity is paid for by the loss of what really matters: a stable sense of what really matters. A remark attributed to the Chicago Straussian Allan Bloom captures the idea very succinctly. Modern Americans, Bloom is reputed to have said, are promised life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, while the ancients had war, slavery . . . and happiness.⁹ Between the two extremes, one finds countless narratives of mingled gain and loss—Schiller's *entgötterte Welt*, Max Weber's *Entzauberung* or the "long withdrawing roar" of the tide in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", for example.¹⁰ This is "secularization" as the move from one social world to another—whether that transition is counted as good, bad or a mixture.

Yet those who read German may know that there is another, almost exactly opposite, sense of "secularization". The third chapter of Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* starts: "All significant concepts of modern political thought are secularized theological concepts."¹¹ In other words, on this interpretation, religion, so far from disappearing, still carries on, although translated. This view is less common in the English-speaking world, but one famous example is worth noting. Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*¹² is, as its title makes plain, a treatment of Enlightenment political thought whose aim is to show that the historians and political theorists of the eighteenth century, their own professed hostility to religion notwithstanding, were repeating an older, theo-

logical tradition of looking at political processes from the perspective of redemption and salvation.

Nietzsche's image does not correspond exactly to either of these two senses, however: its message is one of continuity and discontinuity. Yes, things have changed ("God is dead") but, at the same time, a vestige of religion remains (God's "shadow") and that is not innocent. We "have to vanquish" that shadow too. Still, of course, for Nietzsche, God himself was always a kind of shadow—a fiction or illusion. How, then, does the "shadow of God" differ from "God"?

The shadow of God may refer to ideas and practices that, in important ways, resemble traditional religion. Yet they are not recognized as religious, most likely because they do not contain some of religion's most familiar features—miracle stories, claims to revelation or practices of shared worship, for example. Nevertheless, they continue the role of religion in consoling us for the brevity of our lives and the suffering that those lives contain. This book is particularly focused on one feature of traditional religion: the belief in personal immortality and the way in which new conceptions of human self-transcendence through historical community emerged that, at first (in Kant and Fichte) existed alongside belief in personal immortality, but later came to act as a substitute for it.

Nietzsche, we have noted, sees the shadow of God as something that we moderns still have to "vanquish". Yet why should that be so? And how should we do it? A simple answer would be that human beings should live by the standards of reason and truth, and that such post-religious ideas and practices, once identified and tested according to those standards, should be rejected for failing to meet them. But Nietzsche, as we shall see, has a much more radical and troubling suggestion to make. What if the idea of "living according to reason" and believing only what can be given a solid foundation is itself a myth? If so, those who believe that they have emancipated themselves from religion in embracing the "modern, scientific world-view" are themselves the perfect illustrations of the power of "the shadow of God". As Nietzsche puts it in another aphorism:

An idealist is incorrigible: throw him out of his Heaven and he will make himself an ideal out of his Hell.¹³

In that case, the consequences of connecting a belief back to its religious origins or motivations become much less straightforward. Of course, it may be that the force of a belief depends on it being thought *not* to have

such sources and that it will lose its authority as soon as the connection is uncovered. But that does not have to be so.

Consider, for example, the belief that human beings have “certain inalienable rights” just by being human. It is undeniable that modern ideas about human rights have their origins in Western religion—whether directly (human beings were “endowed” with those rights “by their creator”) or in virtue of a “human dignity” that comes from mankind being formed “in the image of God”.¹⁴ But what happens to the idea of rights once those religious sources are revealed? Certainly, if rights are made independent of religion, a number of questions suddenly become problematic—most obviously, who (or what) the bearers of rights are. How can one conduct rational disputes about the rights of fetuses, of animals—or AI bots—when there is no shared religious foundation to settle the issue?¹⁵ But that does not mean that the idea of rights stands or falls with belief in religion. It is quite possible—if complicated—for secular thinkers to sustain belief in human rights and at the same time to be perfectly well aware of the religious context in which such beliefs about rights originated.¹⁶

Another important point is that, instead of treating secularization as the effect of external developments (the emergence of the “scientific worldview”, changing social structures requiring new ideologies, or whatever) this book frames its narrative from a perspective internal to ideas themselves. The monotheistic religions face a standing problem. They present the world to believers as the product of an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent deity. If that is to be more than blind faith that God is good, although it is not open to human beings to comprehend how, the believer must have the world and her place in it justified to her, and this effort to justify—to combine faith with reason—causes monotheism enormous difficulties.

Faith and Reason

This brings me to my next quotation. In an essay in the *Wall Street Journal*, the conservative British philosopher Roger Scruton invoked Kant to claim, against Stephen Hawking, that “There is still room for God.” Scruton concludes:

Kant, who destroyed all the systems of metaphysics and dug a grave for theology, was also a believer who, as he put it, “attacked the claims

of reason in order to make room for those of faith.” It seems to me that he was right.¹⁷

Scruton was misquoting Kant. The famous quotation he had in mind in fact reads: “I have therefore found it necessary to *deny knowledge* to make room for faith.”¹⁸ And this apparently small slip represents, in fact, an extremely significant change of meaning. To make sense of our place in the world and to justify it by connecting it with a benevolent creator requires understanding and explanation as well as emotional commitment, which means that, for Kant, religion is *not* beyond reason.

The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, which killed tens of thousands (including many of the faithful, who were worshipping in Lisbon’s churches when the earthquake struck) produced an intellectual crisis in the eighteenth century that deeply affected many of its leading thinkers, Kant not least among them. It led to a search for new ways to defend the claim that the world is the product of a benevolent creator. For Kant (“*sur Lisbonne fumante Kant froidement penché*”, as Samuel Beckett pictures him in his poem “ainsi a-t-on beau”) the solution was that the goodness of the world lies in human freedom—freedom that makes human beings justifiably open to reward and (more especially) deserving of punishment in an afterlife.¹⁹ This in turn entails a conception of the relationship between God and mankind that requires divine justice to be intelligible to human beings. Tying divine goodness so closely to morality—something which it is open to human beings to know by their own reason—threatens, however, to make God himself superfluous. In this way rationalistic religion, when pressed to its limits, as Kant does, turns out to be self-undermining.

Posterity

Kant’s picture of an afterlife in which punishment is meted out to the wicked that they had escaped here on earth might not encourage belief in personal immortality for those who do not share his uncompromising retributivism, but we also find in Kant a new conception of human self-transcendence, centred on individuals’ membership in historical communities—a conception that increasingly came to take belief in personal immortality’s place. My next quotation foreshadows this. It comes

from a letter written by Diderot and contains an impassioned appeal to posterity:

Oh holy and sacred Posterity! Support of the unhappy who are oppressed, you who are just and who is not corrupted, who avenges the virtuous, unmasks the hypocrite, and tames the tyrant; sure and consoling idea, never abandon me! Posterity for the philosopher is the other world of the religious man.²⁰

It is a puzzling idea. Why should an avowed non-believer look to an allegorical personification for consolation in a godless universe? How could “Posterity” ever “do” anything? Nevertheless, it is the argument of this book, it is an idea that we should take very seriously.

One of the great themes of the monotheistic religions is that human lives are lived under observation. In countless sermons, priests, rabbis and mullahs have warned their congregations that their misdeeds, while they may escape human detection, will not go unnoticed by God.

Yet, observation is in itself a kind of relation—a one-sided one, to be sure—between observer and observed. For Coleridge, writing at the heart of the period that most concerns us, it is a promise as well as a threat:

What comfort in the silent eye upraised to God! “Thou knowest.”
O! what a thought! Never to be friendless, never to be unintelligible!
The omnipresence has generally been represented as a spy, a sort of Bentham’s Panopticon. O to feel what the pain is to be utterly unintelligible and then—“O God, thou understands!”²¹

Simply to be observed—observed *and* understood—can be a kind of consolation.

The idea that human beings “live on” in the memories of their successors is by no means a new one—it was very important to the Romans. Its modern revival is somewhat different, however. Where the Roman hoped to be remembered by his countrymen for his glorious deeds, modern versions, inheriting, as they do, the Christian religion, are more universal and celebrate a less martial conception of virtue: in living under the eye of posterity, we are united as part of mankind as a whole. And it is not just that posterity will judge us justly and give us the public honour we deserve. Even if we do nothing outstanding and are not remembered, we take part in the great unfolding drama of human history—our actions connect us with one another in a never-ending human chain.

The Church Invisible

My next quotation comes at the end of a letter written by the young and radical Hegel to the equally radical and even younger Schelling:

Let reason and freedom be our watchword and our rallying point the Church invisible.²²

Hegel and Schelling had become friends as fellow-students at the Tübinger Stift—the Protestant theological seminary in Tübingen that produced lawyers and administrators for the Dukedom of Württemberg, as well as pastors. They were, then, more than familiar with the history of theology. On its most traditional interpretation, the “Church invisible” corresponds to a division between the living and the dead—those who form part of the Church in this world and those members of the Church who have achieved salvation and now enjoy the presence of God in the next. Closely related is the idea that the Church is a “*corpus mysticum*”—the mystical body of Christ. These notions regarding the nature of the Christian community took on a new significance with the Reformation.

The Reformation, at first a struggle to reform the Church, soon became a dispute about the theological significance of the Church itself. The original reformers were, in most respects, orthodox Augustinians who believed in the doctrine of Original Sin and the need for divine grace. Where they came to differ from Augustine is how that grace might be conferred on human beings: exclusively through the sacraments of the Church or more directly.

It is often assumed from this simple story that the Augustinian idea of the Church as a community disappeared from Protestantism and all that was left was the bare relationship between the individual believer and God. But that is not so. For the majority of Protestants, the old idea of the Church—the community of believers who had become its members by validly receiving its sacraments—needed to be replaced by a new, more complex conception. Thus, for Calvin, there is both a “church visible”—those who are outwardly Christians by the standards of practices and conventions—and a “church invisible”—the true Christians sanctified by divine grace. Needless to say, this conception is deeply problematic: who is truly a member of the Church and who is merely outwardly a member? Is there any way of telling—even in one’s own case? By the time that the phrase “Church invisible” was being used by Hegel and Schelling, however, the

issue was not about who really was “in communion” by divine grace and who only seemed to be so, but about a much broader conception of the human community.

For Kant, the ideal form of moral community consists in a world composed of human beings who exceptionlessly follow the moral law, what he would famously call in the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* the “kingdom of ends”. He gives an earlier presentation of this ideal towards the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. At that point, however, very significantly, Kant refers to it as the “kingdom of grace”—a phrase taken from Leibniz (A812, B840). In the Mongrovius transcription of Kant’s *Lectures on Ethics* of 1785—lectures that were given between the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork*—Kant explains that the two formulations are equivalent: “Leibniz also calls the kingdom of ends moral principles of the kingdom of grace” (Ak. 29:610). The kingdom of grace is, he writes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “a *corpus mysticum* of the rational beings in it, so far as the free will of each being is, under moral laws, in complete systematic unity with itself and with the freedom of every other” (A808, B836). The *corpus mysticum* of the Church is thus transformed, on Kant’s metaphor, into a transcendental moral community.

Whether it be called the “kingdom of grace” or the “kingdom of ends”, it is important that this is not just a hypothetical test for evaluating action in the world as we have it. It also gives Kant (as he explains in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*) a standpoint by which we can see mankind moving through history towards the realization of a “republic of virtue”. Hegel and Schelling’s embrace of the idea of an “invisible church” is an expression of their shared commitment to a progressive ethical-political ideal that would embody what was best and most valuable in Kantian philosophy and French politics.

Freedom

Hegel’s farewell salutation to Schelling also invokes the ideas of reason and freedom, and a central purpose of this book is to present the distinctive conception of freedom that was first articulated by Kant and continued in its essentials by his successors, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. An anticipa-

tion of that conception can be found in a famous, if also puzzling, quotation from Rousseau:

the impulse of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to a law that one has prescribed to oneself is freedom.²³

How can one “obey” one’s own law? Of course, you can commit yourself to following a principle that you yourself have decided upon, but, if you are the *source* of a law—if you have “prescribed” it to yourself—can’t you also choose to unbind yourself from it? And, in that case, is your following that law “obedience”? Does it really have authority over you? This, we can say, is the *paradox of autonomy*. How did the Idealists deal with it?

Here is a passage from Hegel, written thirty years after his letter to Schelling:

. . . nature is not free but is only necessary and contingent. For necessity is the inseparability of different terms which yet appear as indifferent towards each other; but because this abstract state of externality also receives its due, there is contingency in nature—external necessity, not the internal necessity of the notion [*Begriff*].²⁴

An apparently bewildering quotation! We commonly assume two things: that freedom is opposed to necessity, and that necessity is opposed to contingency. Yet Hegel is here rejecting both ideas. On the one hand, nature is said to be unfree because it is “only necessary *and* contingent”. On the other hand, the *Begriff* is said to be free, yet at the same time “necessary”. Plainly, for Hegel, necessity must come in more than one form: a “bad” necessity that binds from outside (“external necessity”) and a “good” necessity that is internal. “Bad necessity” is also, at the same time, “contingent”.

Such a contrast between internal and external necessity can be traced back to Spinoza. As he wrote in a letter to his correspondent Dr Schuller:

I say that that thing is free which exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature; but that that thing is under compulsion which is determined by something else to exist, and to act in a definite and determined manner. For example, God, although He exists necessarily, nevertheless exists freely, since He exists solely from the necessity of His own nature. So also God freely understands Himself

and absolutely all things, since it follows solely from the necessity of His own nature that He should understand everything. You see, therefore, that I do not place freedom in free decision, but in free necessity.²⁵

For Spinoza, internal necessity is something reserved to God alone. It was the distinctive contribution of the German Idealists to claim that human beings themselves have both a kind of “free necessity” as well as “free decision”. In this way the “paradox of autonomy” can be resolved: the law which we “give to ourselves” is binding on us, not because we have willed or chosen it, but because it is expressive of our true, rational nature. The resulting conception of freedom makes “reason” and “freedom” practically synonymous.

Hegel and Religion

In the notebooks that Hegel kept between 1803 and 1806, at the time when he was teaching in Jena and working on what was to become the *Phenomenology*, there is an observation that reminds one strongly of Nietzsche’s aphorism about the shadow of God:

The public are concerned in philosophy with religion—lost religion; not science—that only comes afterwards. Human beings want to experience what their situation is, they want satisfaction for themselves; that is the interest of humanity in this time.²⁶

Of course, there is an important difference—Hegel is looking to philosophy for the restoration of what has been lost with the decline of religious consciousness, while Nietzsche is calling on us to complete the work of demolition—yet what unites the two is the idea that there has been a basic change in the religious landscape and that this has fundamental consequences. So what is the relationship between Hegelian philosophy and the Christian religion?

In the years following his death in 1831, Hegel’s pupils and followers split into two groups, known as “Left” and “Right” Hegelians or “Young” and “Old” Hegelians. Initially, the division was political—what attitude should Hegelians take towards the existing Prussian state?—but behind that, it swiftly emerged, was the question of religion.

It can be argued that Hegelianism and Christianity are in agreement. Hegelian philosophy is not in competition with the received doctrines of religion but is a way of articulating their content. This does, indeed, seem to be Hegel's own official view.

Nothing can be further removed from philosophy than to overturn religion or to maintain that the content of religion cannot be truth in itself. Rather, religion *is* the true content, although in the form of *Vorstellung* [representation]. Philosophy is not the first to give substantial truth; nor did mankind have to wait for philosophy in order to get consciousness of the truth.²⁷

The question, however, is what this difference between religious *Vorstellung* and philosophical *Denken* [Thought], as Hegel calls it, involves. When religion is transformed in the act of “translation” into the more fundamental discourse of speculative philosophy, what happens to its content? Is it being vindicated or is it being deciphered and, implicitly, criticized?

Hegel was a public professor at the University of Berlin—indeed, he was chosen by the Rector of Berlin University to deliver a public address in praise of Protestantism on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession—and he was undoubtedly far too conscious of that role to risk anything that the Prussian authorities would have considered contrary to public order and good morals. Yet there are places where it seems that the mask of Protestant orthodoxy slips. Here, for example, is a famous passage from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

God is this movement in itself, and, only through that, living God. But this persistence of finitude must not be held fixed, but sublated [*aufgehoben*]: God is the movement to the finite and thus, as its sublation [*Aufhebung*], to himself. In the I, as that which sublates itself as finite, God returns to himself and only exists as God in this return. Without the world, God is not God.²⁸

Hegel's language is elusive. Although “*Aufhebung*” is a familiar word in everyday German (unlike “sublation” in English) it is ambiguous—it can mean to remove (to lift a prohibition, for example) to preserve (to save up for later) or to elevate (literally “lift up”), all of which seem to be ingredients in the way in which Hegel uses the term. Still, it is hard not to read this and similar passages as moving religious doctrine away from traditional

ideas of divine transcendence towards something more immanent and pantheistic—God is in the world, and the world is necessary for the self-realization of God.

This picture of Hegel as making God a part of the world is reinforced when one adds in what he has to say about the way in which the divine must be knowable by human reason.

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel writes:

But in mentioning knowledge of the plan of divine Providence I have recalled one of the most important questions of our day: that of the possibility of knowing God—or rather, since it has ceased to be a matter of question, to the doctrine that has become a prejudice that knowledge of God is impossible. In direct contravention of what is commanded in Holy Scripture as the highest duty—namely, not just to love God but to *know* Him—the opposite of what is said there—that *Geist* leads to truth, that it knows everything and that it permeates even the depths of the divine nature—now dominates.²⁹

So there is strong textual support for the Left Hegelians' belief that, for Hegel, religious faith must be held to the standards of reason.

One religious doctrine concerns us particularly. Kant believed in the Last Judgement and that human beings faced the prospect of punishment in an afterlife. Did Hegel? When it comes to Hegel's views on the subject of personal immortality, we have a story from a not-absolutely-reliable source. Heinrich Heine had studied in Berlin and knew Hegel. Looking back in his *Geständnisse* (written in 1854) he paints a picture of Hegel as almost pathologically cautious about revealing his private views—hence, Heine speculates, his friendship with the somewhat simple-minded Heinrich Beer, the brother of the composer Jacobo Meyerbeer, with whom he could relax, knowing that he would not be called upon to discuss anything complicated or controversial. In that connection, Heine tells the following anecdote:

One beautiful starlit evening we stood together at the window, and I, a young man of two-and-twenty, [thus in 1820] having just had a good dinner and finished my coffee, spoke with enthusiasm of the stars, and called them the habitations of the departed. But the master

muttered to himself, “The stars! hum! hum! The stars are only a brilliant leprosy on the face of the heavens.” “For God’s sake,” I cried, “is there, then, no happy place above, where virtue is rewarded after death?” But he, staring at me with his pale eyes, said, cuttingly, “So you want a bonus for having taken care of your sick mother, and refrained from poisoning your worthy brother?” At these words he looked around anxiously, but appeared to be immediately set at rest when he saw that it was only Heinrich Beer, who had come to invite him to a game of whist.³⁰

It is from this perspective that I propose that we interpret Hegel’s famous reference in the *Philosophy of Right* to world history as “the Last Judgement” (a reference, in fact, to a line in a poem by Friedrich Schiller).³¹ In tacitly abandoning the traditional religious doctrine of the Last Judgement, Hegel’s thought represents a very significant break from Christian orthodoxy and a decisive move away from heaven to history.

Philosophies as Forms of Life

No great artist ever chose to live a more public, documented life than Goethe. Not only do we have his own extensive autobiographical writings and correspondence, but those who were granted audience with the great man carefully recorded their conversations. Johann Peter Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe* became an international best-seller in the middle of the nineteenth century, and industrious editors added to the corpus of reminiscences, culminating in a multi-volume supplement to the Weimar edition of Goethe’s works. Among those additions was Johann David Falk’s *Goethe aus näherm persönlichen Umgange dargestellt* (Goethe presented from close personal intercourse).³² It contains the following striking recollection:

Just as Goethe did not like what had been learned by rote or cramming, he likewise maintained that all philosophy must be loved and lived if it would gain meaning for life. “But does one still live at all in this age?” he added. “The Stoic, the Platonist, the Epicurean—each must deal with the world in his way [*mit der Welt fertig werden*]; that

is the task of life, from which no one, to whichever school he counts himself, is excused. The philosophers, for their part, can give us nothing but forms of life.” [*Die Philosophen können uns ihrerseits nichts, als Lebensformen darbieten.*]³³

This conversation soon became famous (Kierkegaard copied it *verbatim* into his *Notebooks*). But what does it mean to say that a philosophy is a “form of life”? The passage continues:

“How they suit us, whether we are able, by our nature and abilities, to give them the required content, that is up to us. We have to test ourselves and examine everything that we take in from outside most carefully, as if it were nourishment; otherwise we will perish from the philosophy, or the philosophy will perish from us.”

It sounds as though, for Goethe, a *Lebensform* is something personal, tailored to the individual. And he goes on to muse on the correspondence between Kantian philosophy and Kant’s own character of “rigorous moderation” (*strenge Mäßigkeit*). If philosophy is subjectivized in this way, must we abandon its claim to reason and justification? Not so, I think. It is possible to put the two dimensions together: the philosophical drive to explain the world and to subject authority to the requirement of justification is one of the ways in which human beings “deal with the world”.

In *The Republic*, Plato, famously, tells philosophers that they should allow themselves to be led by arguments “like the wind”.³⁴ Yes, but *where* do they lead? Philosophical problems characteristically emerge when a number of commitments that are individually felt to be compelling lead to apparent conflict when brought together. From the point of view of logic alone, it is an open question how to respond to such inconsistency. Is the fact that p leads to q an argument for q or an argument against p? As Hilary Putnam has put it, “one philosopher’s *modus ponens* is another philosopher’s *modus tollens*.”³⁵

The different strategies of response—to give up one or another belief; to claim that the beliefs are ambiguous and, when properly re-interpreted, may be seen to be consistent; that they are ill-formed and so to be discarded; to argue that the conflict is a product of further, unstated but questionable, premises; to claim, indeed, that we may just have to live with the conflict—are the central heart of philosophical debate.

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