

The Time of Love and Anguish

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When one falls in love, their world fundamentally transforms. Colors seem brighter, sounds more melodic and passions more vibrant; the world gleams with possibility. The passing of time is no longer measured by the clock, but instead, by reuniting with one's lover. Song lyrics, daydreams, and the otherwise banal occurrences of everyday life all serve as reminders of love, so that in short, all thought narrows to one thought—that of the beloved. Yet, such rapture has the inverse possibility for love's passion can fade away with the sands of time, can be cut short by death or an unforeseeable circumstance, or it can be given to another.

Love and its vicissitudes reside at the core of human subjectivity, and manifest in a vast range of relations. That love, pain, death, and the transience of time are fundamental to human finitude makes them of central importance to Hegel. However, these affects and experiences are not only part of relations between humans, between lovers, but between human and the divine. Hegel's treatment of love in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. III* is interwoven with the thematic threads of of (eternal) love, (eternal) anguish (*Schmerz*) and temporality. The task in this paper is to untangle these threads. In doing such, the paper will show the parallels between finite and religious experiences of love and anguish, and the implications these have for temporality.

Hegel's overarching objective in his the three volumes of lectures on religion is to show how "the kingdom of God—or spirit—is to move from the universal to determinacy, to pass over into actuality."¹ In this movement, he identifies three elements that are important for the development of spirit in the context of the most developed expression of religion, consummate religion: first the eternity god as the father; second the incarnation and death of Christ; and third the present as the time of the spirit.² Hegel's project is to take biblical narratives and see them as accounts of reconciliation, specifically, reconciliation

1 *LPR vol. III*, 123, Lecture Manuscript.

2 In the 1824 Lectures of *LPR vol. III*, Hegel develops this account in relation to time: "We can then define these three elements differently in regards to *time*..." (187)

of human and divine. While the divine is always there *in* and indeed *as* finite subjectivity, finite subjectivity is not immediately aware of this.³ Hegel, thus begins here, within the finite realm and the correlative sensuous affective experiences of finite subjectivity, in particular the experiences of love and anguish. The experience of love and anguish recur in the realm of spirit in religion, which is always present but unactualized. Both religion and love overcome all opposition, and for Hegel, the two seem to coalesce. This is because love is *always already* infinite, but the immediate experience of it is based in finite subjectivity.

Intuiting oneself in loving an other offers a rich model for self-recognition in absolute otherness. Yet, Hegel's model based on love only comes about insofar as one is working in the realm of spirit; to this extent, love cannot merely be between two finite beings, but also must also be with the divine. Accordingly, Hegel states that

“expressed in the mode of sensibility... the Holy Spirit is eternal love... [f]or love is distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of this identity of the two—to be outside of myself and in the other—this is love.”⁴

When Hegel claims that God is love then, he dismisses diminished, impoverished notions of God as one, or something *beyond*, and instead avails God to all. One's relation with God is to be outside of oneself and in the other—this, in short, is love.

Love transforms a world, not only the lover and the beloved. In the finite world, love is the source of anguish, for to fall in love is to become attached to another being, and to be attached to another is to be vulnerable to the loss of love, to the loss of that which is loved, or to the loss of oneself in the experience of loving. Thus, the pain of love is often associated with separation and subjectivity. Indeed, this pain manifests as the anguish that comes from the separation of two subjectivities when love takes place in a context that is inadequate to its fulfillment. When one's love with another is broken, when it changes, when it dies, or when it is met with unequal intensity, one faces agony by virtue of the loss or devaluation of love. What is more, when one loves another, she gives part of herself to her beloved, but in doing such, she also runs the risk of losing herself. This possibility for love is present even in the most banal, everyday language: She has lost herself in her love for another.

Hegel grounds these experiences in subjectivity, for subjectivity is the condition for the possibility of loss of self, or of the self that is in another within a

3 *LPR vol. III*, see 199-201 (1824 Lectures)

4 *LPR vol. III*, 276, 1827 lectures. Also see *LPR vol. III*, 78.

love relation. In one's attachment to self or ego, Hegel claims she is "burdened by subjective particularity."⁵ To remain attached to the natural world then, is to remain chained to particularity, and thus to suffering:

"This is the infinite anguish, the suffering of the world."⁶ Insofar as subjectivity remains wedded to the finite world, to identity, to other particular subjectivities, it will suffer. This is because "human beings are inwardly conscious that in their innermost being they are a contradiction, and have therefore an infinite *anguish* concerning themselves. Anguish is present only where there is opposition to what ought to be, to an affirmative."⁷

Perhaps the most extreme moment of anguish separating lovers is that of death. Loss is a precondition of love, for as transient beings, we all must die.⁸ Insofar as a beloved can die, death always haunts love. That each person must necessarily die their own death does nothing to alleviate the gravity of the anguish, for death shatters the illusion of stability, of permanence, and showcases the inevitability of change and impermanence. As the absolute annulment of finite subjectivity, death shows that "...the pinnacle of finitude is not actual life in its temporal course, but rather death, the anguish of death."⁹ Death reveals by implication that subjectivity, particularity, or finite individuality, *takes time*. More emphatically, subjectivity in the natural realm *is* time. A release accompanies the cessation of all time and temporality in death: for the deceased, natural life is liberated; those who remain living must come to terms with the loss of another's life. The release of a loved one leaves in its wake an emotional void, an emptiness in the one left behind, for what is lost is not only the loved one, but the sense of self one had in their shared love with the other. When a loved one dies, one must in turn ask herself— who am I without you?¹⁰ To this extent, death and the loss it implies leaves one anguishing over the other, and unrecognizable to her own self. In the finite realm, love and anguish then, are opposite ends of the same piece of string.

In the spiritual realm, love and anguish are inversely interwoven, for now, love presupposes and indeed springs forth from anguish. Infinite anguish is the source of infinite love because, "love as [originating] in infinite anguish

5 *LPR vol. III*, 139, Lecture Manuscript.

6 *LPR vol. III*, 210, 1824 lectures.

7 *LPR vol. III*, 305, 1827 lectures.

8 See *LPR vol. III*, 129, Lecture Manuscript: "Death is natural; all human beings must die."

9 *LPR vol. III*, 125, Lecture Manuscript.

10 See Butler, Judith, 2004, *Precarious Life, The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London and New York: Verso.

is precisely the concept of spirit itself.”¹¹ The loss is affected in the biblical narrative of the death of Christ:

“The speculative [mode] of love that arises from infinite anguish, this purity of subjectivity, occurs through the infinite mediation; and this infinite mediation has its objective shape in the life, suffering, and exaltation of Christ.”¹²

Although death is *the* negative, it nonetheless has a positive element, for in the spiritual realm, death *is* love, precisely because death reconciles.¹³ In the spiritual realm, love overcomes death by living in the community of spirit; here, love is raised to the eternal.

Just as lovers focus all of their energy on one another in the experience of love, such concentration also occurs in the realm of spirit, whereby all attention is directed to God. Hegel introduces this idea in the Prefaces to volume I, where he claims that the resolution of problems, the healing of grief, and thereby the finding of peace and satisfaction comes from the recognition that all human thoughts are but one: “the thought of God.”¹⁴ Finite subjectivity dissolves in the absolute thought of God, it “dies” insofar as it lets go of its individuality, its finitude. What it relinquishes is all personality and all identity: “Subjectivity has given up all external distinctions in this infinite value, distinctions of mastery, power, position even of sex (*Geschlecht*) and wealth.”¹⁵ It loses itself, but only insofar as it surrenders itself. Resigning all distinctiveness “in the unity of divine and human nature, everything that belongs to external particularization has disappeared—the finite [itself] has disappeared.”¹⁶ Ultimately then, what is lost is no loss at all.

11 *LPR vol. III*, 140, Lecture Manuscript.

12 *LPR vol. III*, 139, Lecture Manuscript.

13 “...death is what reconciles. Death is love itself; in it absolute love is envisaged.” *LPR vol. III*, 220, 1824 lectures; “But at the same time this death is to this extent the highest love. [It is] precisely love [that is] the consciousness [of] the identity of the divine and the human, and this finitization is carried on to its extreme, to death.” (*LPR vol. III*, 125, Lecture Manuscript.)

14 *LPR vol. I*, 114, 1824 Lecture. He develops this idea in vol. III: “The divine idea occurs in the Christian religion as a present, immediate individual. For single individuals all worldliness has been concentrated in this individual; this is the one and only sensible presence that has value, the infinite abstraction of the present. Being in love [is] like this too; but in the present case [we live] at the same time in an infinite abstraction from all worldliness. Subjective happiness [my] being in love with any particular individual I chance to be attracted to, [is here] sublated.” Lecture Manuscript, 136.

15 *LPR vol. III*, 138, Lecture Manuscript. Hegel continues, “Before God all human beings are equal. This comes to consciousness for the first time here and now, in the speculative and negative [elements] of the infinite anguish of love; herein lies the possibility and the root of truly universal justice and of the actualization of freedom.”

16 *LPR vol. III*, 212, 1824 lecture.

The affective path of this transition is that of infinite love, “for love [consists] in giving up one’s personality, all that is one’s own. It is a self-conscious activity, the supreme surrender [of oneself] in the other.”^{17 18} This transition is revolutionary for “it gives the world another shape,”¹⁹ one that has an affective content of eternal love. Religion, Hegel contends, is the region of “eternal truth and eternal virtue, the region where all the riddles of thought, all contradictions, and all sorrows of the heart should show themselves to be resolved...”²⁰ All questions and concerns, problems and paradoxes, whether ethical, epistemological, or psychological, lose their gravity, for they are seen as derivative. That is, while they emerge, they nonetheless point back to one ultimate thought.²¹

Surrendering all subjective ties also revolutionizes one’s relation to temporality. In religion, “spirit frees itself of all finitude;”²² the freedom that *is* religion releases one from the bonds of finitude, and thus, the experience of time can now be rethought as the overcoming of finite time in recognition of eternity. For this reason, Hegel can claim that “...[Christ] leads us out of the temporal sphere.”²³ More concretely, when the problems of particular finite life are broken down and surmounted by the one thought that is God, one forgets the angst of finite temporality and lets it pass away into eternal harmony. Hegel characterizes this as a dissolution or evaporation of “finite aims, limited interests, toil, sorrow, unpleasantness, earthly and finite cares”²⁴ “All of it,” he states, “wafts away into a kind of past.”²⁵

17 *LPR vol. III*, 125, Lecture Manuscript.

18 “Natural will is surrendered. All distinctiveness, all traits of personality, all interests and purposes towards which the natural will might direct itself [are] as nothing.” (*LPR vol. III*, 128, Lecture Manuscript)

19 *LPR vol. III*, 128, Lecture Manuscript.

20 *LPR vol. I*, 149, 1827 Lecture. Also: “This is the region in which all the riddles of the world, all contradictions of thought, are resolved, all griefs are healed, the region of eternal truth and eternal peace, of absolute satisfaction, of truth itself” (*LPR vol. I*, 83, Manuscript); “The philosophy of religion has as its goal, as its content, the region in which all the riddles of the world, all the contradictions uncovered by profound thought, are resolved, and in which every pain of feeling is dissolved and healed, the region of eternal rest, of truth” (*LPR vol. I*, 113, 1824 Lecture).

21 “...find their final ultimate center in the *one* thought of God” (*LPR vol. I*, 84, Lecture Manuscript).

22 *LPR vol. I*, 150, 1827 Lecture.

23 *LPR vol. III*, 117, Lecture Manuscript.

24 *LPR vol. I*, 114, 1824 Lecture. Also: “We may and must, therefore, contemplate a life in and with the eternal, and to the extent that we sense this life and feel it [this sensation] is the dissolution of everything imperfect and finite.” (*LPR vol. I*, 84-85, Lecture Manuscript).

25 *LPR vol. I*, 114, 1824 Lecture. As Hegel states in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “The wounds of Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind” (para 699).

As the necessity of the experience of finite time evaporates, an alternative way of experiencing time comes to the fore, one that is divorced from “finite purposes, [disgust at] petty interests, the pain of this life, [even if in isolated moments that are themselves unhappy] the troubles, burdens, and cares.”²⁶ This alternate way experiencing time is the,

Sabbath of life—in which all the unpleasantness and misery of the everyday world—waft away into devotion’s present feeling or in devotion’s hope...Psyche drinks from this river of forgetfulness, and in its doing so earthly cares and worries waft away and the whole realm of temporality passes away into eternal harmony.²⁷

However, that the finite drifts away into the past, loses its hold, and can be forgotten, does not annul its occurrence. Rather, the experience has been surpassed by one with more sophistication, and thus, the past is no longer essential to spirit, for it has entered into a new realm. Underscoring this point, Hegel describes the realm of eternity in everyday temporal terms—“as the Sunday of their lives”²⁸ or “the Sabbath of life.”²⁹ This description points to Hegel’s attempt to frustrate a classical structure of opposition—in this instance, of finite and infinite, of temporal and eternal. Finite time is not simply replaced with eternity, but rather, Hegel seems to be gesturing towards an experience of eternity temporalizing itself. Yet, the co-existence of the two experiences requires a different way of thinking, being, and experiencing—this for Hegel is the role of the speculative that accompanies the richest experience of God.

With the recognition that all thought is *one* thought of God, one need not be burdened with the ties of finite temporal concerns and anxieties, and an experiential space of love opens and “radiates into the temporal present.”³⁰ This is the sensuous experience of eternity temporalizing itself. Hegel characterizes the state as an “intuition and feeling” in which “we are not concerned with ourselves, our vanity, our pride of knowledge or conduct...”³¹ Seen from

26 *LPR vol. I*, 85 Manuscript. Also: “Finite purposes, [disgust at] petty interests, the pain of this life, [even if in isolated moments that are themselves unhappy] the troubles, burdens, and cares of “this bank and shoal of time,” pity and compassion—all this, like a dream image, seems to float away [into the past like a soul that drinks from the water of forgetfulness, its other, mortal, nature fading into a mere semblance, which no longer causes it anxiety and on which it is no longer dependent]” (*LPR vol. I*, 85, Manuscript).

27 *LPR vol. I*, 114, 1824 Lecture. “Truly in this region of the spirit flow waters of forgetfulness from which the soul drinks.” (*LPR vol. I*, 150, 1827 Lecture); “Everything [else] drops into the past, finite life seems like a desert” (*LPR vol. I*, 150, 1827 Lecture).

28 *LPR vol. I*, 85, Lecture Manuscript.

29 *LPR vol. I* 114, 1824 Lecture.

30 *LPR vol. I*, 115, 1824 Lecture.

31 *LPR vol. I*, 85, Lecture Manuscript.

an affective stance then, what overrides the vanity and pride that constitute the temporal spirit is that of bliss or blessedness.³² Since spirit is emancipated from self-concern, past grief and anxiety about the future also vanish and leave open an affective space which is filled by the experience of God as bliss. The movement is one in which “everything earthly dissolves into light and love, not a remote but an actually present liveliness, certainty, and enjoyment.”³³

If Hegel’s incessant claim throughout his corpus is that philosophy must address the needs of its time, the pressing question for us then becomes, to what extent does Hegel’s thought accomplish this for us, here and now? Given that some versions of Christianity have bolstered an exclusionary and often barbaric political platform, is it a viable model of love in the contemporary world? Might we embrace this structural scaffolding of this thought and dismiss it in its particularity? In this ‘instant’ society—one of constant and immediate contact, provided by things like the internet, iphones, facebook, texting, and twitter, has our relation to time forsaken the possibility of its suspension and thus Hegelian blessedness? That is, are we so embedded in time that our love of it inescapably binds us to it? If so, what implication might this have for our happiness, our loves, our anguish?

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32 “If our concern is with a feeling, then it is bliss” (*LPR vol. I*, 150, 1827 Lecture); “This occupation is the consciousness of absolute truth; as a mode of sensibility, it is the absolute enjoyment we call blessedness, while as activity, it does nothing but manifest the glory of God and revel in the divine majesty” (*LPR vol. I*, 114, 1824 Lecture).

33 *LPR vol. I*, 150, 1827 Lecture.

