

The Young Hegel and the Search for a Language

El joven Hegel y la búsqueda de un lenguaje

ABSTRACT. The search for a language pervades Hegel's early writings and characterizes his self-understanding as an intellectual. At first, in Tübingen and Berne, the language that Hegel is in search of must be such as to bring intellectuals and the people closer together and, at the same time, it must act as a glue for the people, that is, it must encourage individuals to identify with the community they belong to. Later, in Frankfurt, Hegel will turn to the search for a language appropriate to science and, at the same time, will criticize forms of language regarded as inadequate; this will lead to his first attempts to develop a system.

KEYWORDS: CHRISTIANITY; HEGEL; LANGUAGE; MYTHOLOGY; RELIGION

RESUMEN. La búsqueda de un lenguaje impregna los primeros escritos de Hegel y caracteriza su autocomprensión como intelectual. Al principio, en Tübinga y Berna, el lenguaje que Hegel busca debe ser tal que acerque a los intelectuales y al pueblo y, al mismo tiempo, debe actuar como aglutinante del pueblo, es decir, debe animar a los individuos a identificarse con la comunidad a la que pertenecen. Más tarde, en Fráncfort, Hegel se volcará en la búsqueda de un lenguaje apropiado para la ciencia y, al mismo tiempo, criticará las formas de lenguaje consideradas inadecuadas; esto le llevará a sus primeros intentos de desarrollar un sistema.

PALABRAS CLAVE: CRISTIANISMO; HEGEL; LENGUAJE; MITOLOGÍA; RELIGIÓN

I.

In his younger years,¹ Hegel does what anyone devoting themselves to philosophy as *Lebensberuf* should do but often does not allow themselves the time to do: the critical examination of the education they have received. His friends Hölderlin and Schelling had already opened up to the public; Hegel waits but does not remain idle. The time of waiting is a fruitful time, during which he produces a bulk of manuscripts: his early writings.

With the sole exception of the *Leben Jesu* and the annotated translation of the letters of the lawyer Jean-Jacques Cart, Hegel's early writings are in a fragmentary state. Although groupable by complexes, they were probably present in Hegel's mind in a different form from the one in which we read them. Scholars have often identified some main themes in Hegel's early writings. One of these, which pervades them and characterizes Hegel's understanding of himself as an intellectual, is the *search for a language*. Why search for a language? Because the question that drives Hegel is: how can intellectual work affect real life? To this end, it is necessary for the intellectual to find a common language with the people.

In this search for a language, the theological and the political element are combined. They are reflected both in Hegel's biography and in his thought. It is well known — think of Alexandra Birkert's book *Hegels Schwester* and Klaus

[1] The following abbreviations have been used:

GW = G.W.F. HEGEL, *Gesammelte Werke*. Im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft hrsg. von der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg: Meiner, 1968 ff.

OC = G.W.F. HEGEL, *On Christianity. Early Theological Writings*, transl. by T.M. Knox, with an Introduction, and Fragments transl. by R. Kroner, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948; New York: Harper, 1961.

OSP = "The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism", in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. by F.C. Beiser, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 1-5.

SW = J.G. HERDER, *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. von B. Suphan, 33 Bde., Berlin: Weidemann, 1877-1913.

SWB = F. HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, hrsg. von M. Knaupp, 3 Bde., München: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992.

TE = G.W.F. HEGEL, "The Tübingen Essay of 1793: *Religion ist eine*", in H.S. HARRIS, *Hegel's Development. Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 481-507.

TWA = G.W.F. HEGEL, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*. Auf der Grundlage der 'Werke' von 1832-1845 neu edierte Ausgabe, hrsg. von E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, 20 Bde., Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970 (Theorie-Werkausgabe).

References to English translations of Hegel's writings are in square brackets.

Vieweg's recent Hegel biography² — that since his Stuttgart years Hegel — together with his sister Christiane and the circle of friends who sometimes met in his house — nurtured strong political interests. Moreover, Hegel himself recalls that he was destined to study at the theological seminary in Tübingen as early as the age of twelve.³ This biographical element parallels Hegel's theoretical interest in religion, in particular Christianity and the influence it has had on the history of the West.

This is due not only to his theological interests and the need to come to terms with the education he received first at the *Gymnasium Illustre* in Stuttgart and later at the *Stift* in Tübingen, but also to his desire to remain close to the concrete lives of peoples and individuals. Hegel is convinced that religion has played and still plays a decisive role in the lives of human beings and states.⁴ This interest is reflected in his search for a language. In Hegel's time, the language of religion is common to all, believers and atheists, intellectuals and the uneducated. The diversity between the language of the learned and that of the people is a perennial problem, on which Hegel's research is grafted together with a reflection on the role of the intellectual and his own role as an intellectual. In his view, the history of the German people is marked by Christianity, and so are its culture, traditions and customs. This is why the language of tradition, primarily that of religion, suitably reworked, allows the intellectual to enter into communication with the people and to be 'organic' with respect to them.

At first, in Tübingen and Berne, the language that Hegel is in search of must be such as to bring intellectuals and the people closer together and, at the same time, it must act as a glue for the people, that is, it must encourage individuals to identify with the community they belong to. Later, in Frankfurt, Hegel will turn to the search for a language appropriate to science and, at the same time, will criticize forms of language regarded as inadequate; this will lead to his first attempts to develop a system.

[2] See A. BIRKERT, *Hegels Schwester. Auf den Spuren einer ungewöhnlichen Frau um 1800*, Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2008; K. VIEWEG, *Hegel. Der Philosoph der Freiheit. Biographie*, München: C.H. Beck, 2020³ (2019¹).

[3] See G.W.F. HEGEL, *Über den Unterricht in der Philosophie auf Gymnasien* [1822], in *TWA* 11, p. 38.

[4] In the so-called 'Tübingen Fragment' Hegel writes that "religion is one of the most important concerns of our life" and that it is mixed in with the main moments of individuals' lives (births, marriages, funerals) (cf. *GW* 1, p. 83 [*TE*, p. 481]). Cf. J. HYPOLITE, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel*, Paris: Rivière, 1948, pp. 12-13. Cf. also S. ZHANG, *Hegels Übergang zum System. Untersuchungen zum sogenannten "Systemfragment von 1800"*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1990, p. 44: "Anders als heute hatte die Religion im 18. Jahrhundert, im älteren Territorialstaat Deutschland, starken Einfluß auf das politisch-gesellschaftliche Leben. Das politische Problem stellte sich zunächst in religiös-theologischen Begriffen".

II.

It is possible to reconstruct the progressive formation of Hegel's philosophical vocabulary through his readings and, from the combined reading of his sources and early writings, to derive a general conception of language. However, in this paper I do not intend to examine what Hegel writes about language, but rather the role that the search for a language plays in shaping his philosophy. And yet we must ask ourselves: what do we mean by language? It is not only a system of signs or the form in which contents are expressed.⁵ It contains the culture of the community that uses it, i.e. primarily tradition, which is necessary for mutual understanding. The members of a people share a common history, traditions, customs, culture — and they share a language. Language is the bearer of the spiritual history of a people.

Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and August Wilhelm Schlegel explained the origin of language starting with an analysis of living languages and argued in various ways that it is an instrument of storage, memory, which arises from the need for communication and through communication.⁶ For Herder, language is fundamentally reason, so a history of it mirrors the development of reason in human history.⁷ In language, insofar as it makes possible the rise and development of a community, the living conditions of

[5] One of Hegel's earliest sources on the subject is Christian GARVE's "Versuch über die Prüfung der Fähigkeiten" (in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, Bd. VIII, Leipzig 1769, pp. 1-44), filed and archived by the then young gymnasium student in 1787 (cf. *GW* 3, pp. 126 ff.). Cf. D.J. COOK, *Language in the philosophy of Hegel*, The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1973, pp. 22 ff. See also Th. BODAMMER, *Hegels Deutung der Sprache. Interpretationen zu Hegels Äußerungen über die Sprache*, Meiner: Hamburg, 1969, pp. 23 ff.

[6] Cf. L. FORMIGARI, *La logica del pensiero vivente. Il linguaggio nella filosofia della Romantik*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1977.

[7] Herder defends this idea in *Über die neuere Deutsche Litteratur. Fragmente* (Erste Sammlung, zweite völlig umgearbeitete Ausgabe, Riga: Hartknoch 1768² (1766-1767¹); in *SW* II, pp. 1-108), in which he states that language is to be explained "as a development of reason and a production of human soul powers" (*SW* II, p. 68), and reiterates it in the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (welche den von der Königl. Academie der Wissenschaften für das Jahr 1770 gesetzten Preis erhalten hat, Berlin: Voss, 1772; in *SW* V, pp. 1-154), in which it is claimed that language is "the child of reason and society" (*SW* V, p. 9), and "derives quite naturally from the first act of reason" (*SW* V, p. 39; cf. more generally pp. 26 ff.). Cf. N. MERKER, "Società e linguaggio in J.G. Herder", in HERDER - MONBODDO, *Linguaggio e società*, a cura di N. Merker e L. Formigari, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1973, pp. 1-28; D. GOLDONI, *Filosofia e paradosso. Il pensiero di Hölderlin e il problema del linguaggio da Herder a Hegel*, Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1990, pp. 32 ff.

a people are historicized; it is the 'reservoir' of the history of a people, whose thoughts it makes visible.⁸ Without language, there is no thought.

A people has no idea for which it has no word; the most vivid intuition remains a dark feeling until the soul finds a character and incorporates it through the word into the memory, the recollection, the understanding, and finally into the understanding of the human beings, the tradition.⁹

Language is the bearer of a thought and, as the language of a people, which is formed in and through history, it is also the bearer of the spiritual history of that people; in it the thought of the centuries is stored. A philosophical dictionary of languages, Herder claims, would constitute a history of the human spirit.¹⁰ Hegel knew Herder well. The language he is looking for, besides being an expression, must also be a repository of the memory and spirit of a people.

Hegel's reflection implies at the same time a *was* and a *wie*. Reflection on the object demands reflection on how the object is expressed. Conversely, when speaking of Hegel's search for a language (for the *wie*), we cannot neglect the object of the search (the *was*). Due to its complexity, the object requires adequate language to express it. This need manifests itself in Hegel's Frankfurt writings. I do not believe, as Daniel Cook argues, that Hegel started to feel the need for a philosophical language only in his Jena years,¹¹ and I doubt that, as Terry Pinkard claims, it was just Hölderlin who influenced Hegel's language in such a way as to persuade him "to abandon in his philosophical writings the more easygoing prose style of his earlier years and [...] to cast his philosophy in a form that demanded of his readers that they take him on his terms".¹²

I will first focus on the 'Tübingen Fragment' (text 16) and some Bernese writings, then on the so-called *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, and finally examine some fragments from the Frankfurt years.

III.

[8] Cf. J.G. HERDER, *Über die neuere Deutsche Litteratur*, in *SW* II, pp. 8, 12 ff.

[9] ID., *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Riga-Leipzig: Hartknoch, 1784-1791; in *SW* XIII, p. 357. See also ID., *Über die neuere Deutsche Litteratur*, *SW* II, p. 18: "Every nation therefore speaks in the way it thinks, and thinks in the way it speaks". Cf. M. FORSTER, "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles", in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 56 (2002), pp. 324 ff.

[10] Cf. J.G. HERDER, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, in *SW* V, pp. 53, 136.

[11] See D.J. COOK, *Language in the philosophy of Hegel*, pp. 66-72.

[12] T. PINKARD, *Hegel: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 82.

The thinking of the early Hegel is fully situated within the philosophical discussions of the time, which understood religion as morality or in relation to its capacity to produce morality and involved the distinction between natural and revealed religion. The starting point of the 'Tübingen Fragment' is the realization that there is a separation between reason and sensibility, intellect and feeling, and the consequent attempt to harmonize them. According to Hegel, human beings do not act solely out of respect for universal reason, as sensibility is "the principal factor in all the action and striving of men".¹³ "Grosser sensibility", if not enlightened by reason, is a source of prejudices and errors;¹⁴ but the intellect is not capable of producing morality on its own, since morality cannot be learnt from moral treatises, but through exercise and experience.¹⁵ Hence the criticism of the compendiums of morality,¹⁶ the need for a new language that will appeal to individuals, that will express the spiritual in a new way, the task of spreading the *Aufklärung*.¹⁷

How can we achieve an effective morality, i.e. not a pure morality but one that is soiled by the real life of human beings? Hegel examines religion, how it was and is lived by human beings, and proposes his ideal of a "popular religion [*Volksreligion*]".¹⁸

Some conceptual dichotomies are connected to popular religion.¹⁹ One is the opposition of "subjective religion" and "objective religion"; another is

[13] HEGEL, *GW* 1, p. 84 [*TE*, p. 482]. A few lines later Hegel claims: "Just as [on the one hand] pure morality must in the abstract be sharply distinguished from sensibility in a system of morals, since sensibility is placed far below it—even so [on the other hand] in dealing with human nature and human life in general we must take particular account of man's sensibility, his dependence on external and internal nature, upon his surroundings and the environment in which he lives, and upon sense impulses and blind instinct" (*GW* 1, pp. 84-85 [*TE*, p. 482]).

[14] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 95, 100 [*TE*, pp. 490-491, 495-496].

[15] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 97-98 [*TE*, pp. 492-493] and the following note.

[16] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, p. 94 [*TE*, p. 490]: "No printed manual can bring it about that evil impulses should never arise at all, or that they should not develop to any great extent—no enlightenment of the understanding can achieve this—this negative effect<—>Campe's *Theophron*".

[17] This opinion is shared by L. PAULIZZI, *Linguaggio e Lumières. Un'indagine su ragione e intelletto nel pensiero di Hegel*, Roma: Castelvechi, 2024, pp. 122-123.

[18] On the appropriateness of translating '*Volksreligion*' as 'popular religion' rather than 'folks-religion' as Harris does, see M. FLOHR, "'The Tübingen Fragment': From Moral Philosophy to Normative Social Theory", in *The Young Hegel and Religion*, ed. by E. Sembou, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017, p. 37, fn. 1.

[19] The term '*Volksreligion*' first appears in the Gymnasium paper *Über die Religion der Griechen und Römer*, in which Hegel already speaks of a purified, non-anthropomorphic ideal religion that does not contradict the principles of reason (cf. *GW* 1, p. 44), and the concept of *Volksreligion* stands at a fair distance between the two extremes into which religion can fall:

that between “pure rational religion” and “fetishist faith [*Fetischglauben*]”.²⁰ The former worships God in spirit and truth, is based on a few fundamental principles (see the postulates of practical reason) and the exercise of virtue is its only object of worship; the latter has to do with dogmas and statutory commandments.²¹ In Hegel’s view, only a popular religion can weave all human feelings into a noble bond in accordance with morality, lead people to rational religion without penalizing their sensibility, and remove superstitious faith.

In order for it to be a subjective, rational religion, which leaves room for sensibility, is not superstitious, but stimulates and strengthens morality, so as to be a living and useful religion,²² popular religion must profess doctrines based on universal reason, it must involve the imagination, the heart and sensibility, it must not separate life and doctrine, but include all the needs of life and public actions.²³

As Jean Hyppolite has observed, Hegel “already tries to understand a religion as one of the primordial manifestations of the genius of a particular people”.²⁴ As a result, the question of language, of the form-content relationship, becomes apparent. How to express concepts in a way that avoids the separation of high and popular culture? Hegel makes use of historical figures and situations. He considers both individuals (Jesus, Socrates) and peoples (the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the first Christian communities) as expressions of concepts. In certain cases, he proposes a simplified interpretation of the significance of a people or an individual in history. This is the case, for example, with the Jews, reduced to a ‘people of diremption’.²⁵

In some fragments from the Berne period, Hegel argues again for his ideal of a *Volksreligion*, but in opposite terms to the ‘Tübingen Fragment’: public worship must be organized in such a way as to occupy the heart and the imagination by resorting to national representations, myths and institutions,

superstition and mere doctrinaire speculation (cf. C. LACORTE, *Il primo Hegel*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1959, p. 92).

[20] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 99-102 [*TE*, pp. 494-497].

[21] I dealt with this topic in V. RASPA, “Unità, libertà e autonomia del soggetto etico. Un primo confronto di Hegel con Kant” (in *Studi di storia del pensiero moderno (Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Meinong)*, a cura di I. Cubeddu e V. Raspa, Urbino: Montefeltro: 2002, pp. 128-133), in which I discuss Hegel’s relationship to Kant.

[22] That of utility seems to be the main characteristic that Hegel demands of religion. He leaves no room for transcendence, but regards religion as a human fact, which he views as founded not on divine events but demands of practical reason.

[23] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 103 ff. [*TE*, pp. 499 ff.].

[24] J. HYPPOLITE, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l’Histoire de Hegel*, p. 19.

[25] On this see V. RASPA, “Unità, libertà e autonomia del soggetto etico. Un primo confronto di Hegel con Kant”, p. 135 and *passim*.

but “reason should not be sent empty away”.²⁶ The theme is the same, but the criticism is no longer directed at the intellect, which must leave room for sensibility, but at sensibility, which must be exercised in a way that does not contradict reason. This line of thought is clarified in the *Leben Jesu*.

In this work, the rewritings of the facts but especially the sayings of Jesus, who does not perform miracles, are expressions of a new language. Hegel rewrites the Golden Rule in terms of the categorical imperative,²⁷ he rewrites the Our Father²⁸ and the sayings of Jesus in Kantian terms. In the *Leben Jesu*, Hegel continues to use plastic figures and historical situations to express his thought: he expresses his theses by means of the historical opposition between Jesus, a champion of Kant’s *Selbstgesetzgebung* (giving laws to oneself),²⁹ and the Jewish clergy, an expression of ethical heteronomy. Hegel intends to promote Kant’s message of a rational religion of morality. But if Jesus personifies the young Hegel’s ideal, if he was the teacher of a purely moral religion, how did it Christianity become a positive religion?³⁰

The answer provided by Hegel (in the text 32) is very articulate and also involves language.³¹ In his view, due to a number of circumstances the positive was implicit in Jesus’ own teaching, or rather, in his language. He attempted to speak a language that was comprehensible to the Jewish people, and in doing so, he spoke a great deal about himself, he gave himself authority, otherwise his words would not have been effective, and he required others to have faith in his own person. Hegel’s argument continues by noting that Jesus spoke of himself as the Messiah, that especially the belief in miracles contributed to the positivity of his religion, that a significant role in this process was played by the disciples, through whose mediation the positive passed into the faith of the early Christians, who formed a sect in opposition to the official faith; finally, he examines the consequences of the expansion of the community and its extension to society and the state. An analogy here should be pointed out: Jesus used, as Hegel also tries to do, a language that the people could understand. Yet the language used by Jesus resulted in the positive character of Christianity; Hegel then attempts to weaken positivity, modifying the language of religion from within with the help of critical philosophy. This is evident when one considers that in the *Leben Jesu* Jesus does not require others to have faith in his own

[26] HEGEL, *GW* 1, p. 126.

[27] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, p. 221.

[28] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 218-219.

[29] Cf. I. KANT, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Riga: Hartknoch, 1785¹, 1786², AB 87-88, cf. also AB 74, 79; ID., *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Riga: Hartknoch, 1788, A 59.

[30] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 284-285 [*OC*, p. 71].

[31] Cf. *GW* 1, pp. 289 ff. [*OC*, pp. 75 ff.].

person, whereas in the writings on positivity he demands it.³² The reason for this apparent contradiction lies in this: in the *Leben Jesu* Hegel offers an interpretation, not a historical reconstruction, whereas in the writings on positivity he expresses a historical judgement. The historical Jesus demands others to have faith in his own person, not the ideal Kantian Jesus.

IV.

The so-called *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*³³ fits right into this search for a language. The text speaks of the idea of beauty and claims that the highest act of reason that unites truth and goodness, the theoretical and the practical, is an aesthetic act, i.e. the work of beauty. “The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic power as the poet”.³⁴ These thoughts are clearly of Hölderlinian origin, referring to the conception of intellectual intuition as the highest knowledge, the only one capable of grasping totality.³⁵ People “who cannot understand ideas, and who frankly enough confess that everything is obscure to them as soon as it goes beyond charts and indices”³⁶ lack aesthetic sense. Poetry once again becomes — according to a leading idea of the *Hyperion* (1797-1799) — what it was in the beginning, teacher of mankind. It can do this if it is united with religion:

we are so often told that the great multitude should have a *religion of the sense*. But not only the great multitude needs one, the philosopher does so too. Monotheism of reason and of heart, polytheism of imagination and art — this is what we need!³⁷

Here the role of mythology, or rather a “new mythology”, a “mythology of reason”, begins to emerge. The religion of the sense corresponds to popular

[32] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 1, pp. 289-290 [*OC*, pp. 75-76].

[33] I will not discuss the question of the authorship of the manuscript here. I will simply point out that the editors of the 1984 critical edition (Ch. Jamme and H. Schneider) attribute it to Hegel, as do other interpreters such as O. Pöggeler, H.S. Harris, K. Düsing and M. Franz. In any case, this interpretation is the most economical: everyone, starting with Rosenzweig, recognizes that the text was written by Hegel; the suppositions to justify an authorship by Schelling (F. Rosenzweig, L. Strauß, B. Dinkel, X. Tilliette) or Hölderlin (W. Böhm, F. Strack), as well as the thesis that it is a text sent by letter or that Hegel copied it for himself, are more complicated and conjectural than the thesis that attributes authorship to its writer. For a discussion of the question concerning the authorship of this text, see F.-P. HANSEN, “*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*”. *Rezeptionsgeschichte und Interpretation*, Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1989.

[34] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 616 [*OSP*, p. 4].

[35] Cf. F. HÖLDERLIN, *SWB*, I, p. 558.

[36] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 616 [*OSP*, p. 4].

[37] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 616 [*OSP*, p. 5].

religion. It engages imagination, heart and sensibility by making use of myths. According to Hegel, myths must be 'national'. "Every nation which has its own religion and polity", Hegel writes at the end of the Berne period, "has had its own national imagery of this kind".³⁸ The Germans, by contrast, after Valhalla were desolated by Christianity, found themselves with no homegrown religious or political myths.

Why is a new mythology necessary? And why is mythology necessary in general? Because myths unify the world of representations of the individual components of a people. In this sense — as Otto Pöggeler has shown³⁹ — the myth discussed in the *Ältestes Systemprogramm* is not reduced to the expression of a certain way of thinking and narrating history. To the first question the *Ältestes Systemprogramm* answers that a new mythology is necessary to overcome the split between intellectuals and the people, between the enlightened and the unenlightened. Only if we give ideas an aesthetic, i.e. mythological, form will they be of interest to the people, and only if mythology is rational will the philosopher not feel ashamed of it.

Hence finally the enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands: mythology must become philosophical to make people rational, and philosophy must become mythological to make philosophers sensuous.⁴⁰

In this chiasm, philosophers are equated with reason and people with sensibility. Using a different language and different concepts, Hegel refers to the Kantian view that thoughts need intuitions in order not to be empty and intuitions need concepts in order not to be blind.⁴¹ At the same time, that ideas must become sensible means that reason is a very complex faculty, which involves the imaginative sphere. Only when this program is implemented "will eternal unity reign among us". The people then will no longer have any fear of its wise men and priests, and the latter will no longer turn their contemptuous glances towards the people; only then will there be a harmonious development

[38] HEGEL, *GW* 1, p. 359 [OC, p. 146].

[39] Cf. O. PÖGgeler, "Hegel, der Verfasser des ältesten Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus", in *Hegel-Tage Urbino 1965*, hrsg. von H.-G. Gadamer, Bonn: Bouvier, 1969, pp. 17-32; in Ch. JAMME & H. SCHNEIDER, *Mythologie der Vernunft. Hegels "Älteste Systemprogramm" des deutschen Idealismus*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1984, pp. 136-137; O. PÖGgeler, *Die Frage nach der Kunst: von Hegel zu Heidegger*, Freiburg (Breisgau)-München: Alber, 1984, pp. 51 ff.

[40] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 616 [OSP, p. 5].

[41] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Riga: Hartknoch, 1781¹, 1787², A 51 = B 75 [*Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 193-194].

of all powers, of each individual as well as of all individuals — when no power is repressed. For this to happen, a “new religion” must be founded.⁴²

It is therefore extremely important to have a language that facilitates communication between intellectuals and the people. Such a language can act as a glue only insofar as it is memory, a receptacle in which the history and spirit of a people are stored. The *Ältestes Systemprogramm* fits right into the Hegelian philosophical path I have tried to trace.

V.

In the Frankfurt writings, some topics of the *Ältestes Systemprogramm* reappear and are further developed, others are abandoned. The idea of *Vereinigungsphilosophie* remains; as for language, Hegel begins to seek a non-reflective language appropriate to philosophical science. The change is not abrupt. Hegel retains the idea of a close relationship between language and the people, which he will further analyze in his Jena years. Indeed, in the philosophy of spirit of the Jena period we read:

*speech [Sprache] only is as the speech of a people, and understanding and Reason likewise. Only as the work of a people is speech the ideal existence of the spirit, in which it expresses what it is in its essence and its being.*⁴³

Why does Hegel’s line of research change? First, because Kant’s proposal proves inadequate. Not least because Hegel decides to become a philosopher and becomes aware of the fact that the language of philosophy has never been popular. This does not mean — as he states in another writing from the Jena period, *Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik* — that the people cannot rise to it. It only means that philosophy must not be popular at all costs.⁴⁴

We know that two important concepts of the Frankfurt years are love and life. We also know that love, which Hegel initially views as the solution to the problem of diremption, on closer examination proves an incomplete unifying principle. I will not go into the quite fascinating theme of love in the Frankfurt writings.⁴⁵ Hegel attempts to satisfy the need for unification through religion,

[42] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 617 [OSP, p. 5].

[43] HEGEL, *GW* 6, p. 318 [*System of Ethical Life* (1802/3) and *First Philosophy of Spirit* (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4), ed. and transl. by H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979, p. 244]. On this issue see D.J. COOK, *Language in the philosophy of Hegel*, pp. 66 ff.; F. LI VIGNI, *La comunanza della ragione. Hegel e il linguaggio*, Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1997, pp. 59 ff.

[44] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 4, pp. 124-125.

[45] I have dealt with this topic in V. RASPA, *Sulle origini del concetto di contraddizione negli scritti giovanili di Hegel*, in *Studi Urbinati. B: Scienze umane e sociali*, LXVIII (1997/1998),

and in this regard asks how to adequately express the divine as the removal of oppositions.

In *Reines Selbstbewußtseyn – Reines Leben...* (text 57), Hegel writes that the divine, pure life, is conceivable only if one tries to abstract from every deed and determination. The simplicity thus achieved is not produced by abstraction, for this would be an act of reflection, i.e. the activity of the intellect that produces separations and fixes finite determinations in consciousness; but in this case pure life would come to be nothing more than a determinate abstracted from everything determinate, or, conversely, the simple abstraction from every determinate, the negative indeterminate. “This pure life is the source of all separate lives, impulses, and deeds”.⁴⁶ To be conscious of pure life is to recognize that “plurality is nothing absolute”, but is relative to its source, its unity. When the divine comes to consciousness, it is indeed alive in the human being, but it does not allow itself to be determined, delimited, grasped by reflection. Religion is consciousness of the dependence of every single human being and action on such a source, on pure life. Unification is achieved not by assuming plurality within unity, but by leading it back to unity as its source. A language that leaves room for dominance relations like Kant’s morality is not adequate to express the divine. One cannot speak of the divine using expressions of reflection that evoke opposition.⁴⁷

To make himself understood by the Jews, Jesus uses a “realistic language that often sounds harsher than when feelings are supposed to be expressed in the parallelistic style”.⁴⁸ Hegel describes Jesus’ preaching as a struggle between his attempt to make himself understood and to express in pure form the divine that was the content of his message.

In *Man kan den Zustand...* (text 58), Hegel focuses on John’s Prologue. This “contains a series of propositional sentences which speak of God and the divine in more appropriate language”,⁴⁹ which is “the simplest form of reflective language”. The sentences ‘In the beginning *was* the Logos; the Logos *was with* God, and God *was* the Logos; in him *was* life’ “have only the deceptive semblance of judgments, for the predicates are not concepts, not universals like those necessarily contained in judgments expressing reflection. On the contrary,

pp. 125 ff.; Id., “The Notion of Contradiction in Hegel’s Early Writings”, in *The Young Hegel and Religion*, pp. 186 ff.

[46] HEGEL, *GW* 2, pp. 248-249 [*OC*, p. 254].

[47] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 2, pp. 248 ff. [*OC*, pp. 254 ff.]. For a commentary on the passage, cf. K. DÜSING, *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1976, pp. 66-67; M. BAUM, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1986, pp. 61-62.

[48] HEGEL, *GW* 2, pp. 251-252 [*OC*, pp. 255-256].

[49] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 254 [*OC*, 256].

the predicates are themselves once more something being and living”.⁵⁰ Yet, Hegel claims, “even this simple form of reflection is not adapted to the spiritual expression of spirit. [...] This always objective language hence attains sense and weight only in the spirit of the reader”.⁵¹

In *Urteil und Sein* (1795), Hölderlin had argued that judgement acts in the opposite way with respect to intellectual intuition: whereas the latter keeps subject and object unified, judgement is “original partition”, *Ur-Theilung*. Judgement requires subject and object to be opposed, and at the same time presupposes a totality of which they are parts.⁵² Hegel takes up Hölderlin’s idea and argues that because the language of reflection separates subject and predicate, it is not suitable for expressing the divine, which excludes any opposition:

everything expressed about the divine in the language of reflection is *eo ipso* a non-sense [*widersinnig*]; and the passive spiritless assimilation of such an expression not only leaves the deeper spirit empty but also distracts the intellect which assimilates it and for which it is a contradiction.⁵³

What is contradictory to reflection, to the intellect, is not contradictory to pure life, to the divine.

It is true only of objects, of things lifeless, that the whole is other than the parts; in the living thing, on the other hand, the part of the whole is one and the same as the whole. [...] What is a contradiction in the realm of the dead is not one in the realm of life [*Was im Reich des Totes Widerspruch ist, ist es nicht im Reich des Lebens*].⁵⁴

The principle of contradiction holds only in the sphere of the intellect, whose object is the dead [*das Tote*]; hence, the principle of contradiction has no universal validity from an ontological point of view.⁵⁵ This idea is conceived in the context of a relational monist ontology that Hegel began to develop with the concept of life.

Hegel seeks an appropriate language to express the divine, which he currently believes is the solution to the problem of diremption. To express the divine is to express the absolute. Hegel’s search, no longer for a language common to intellectuals and the people, but for an appropriate language to express the

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] HEGEL, *GW* 2, pp. 254-255 [*OC*, 256].

[52] Cf. HÖLDERLIN, *SWB*, II, p. 50 [H.S. HARRIS, *Hegel’s Development*, p. 516].

[53] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 254 [*OC*, 256].

[54] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 258 [*OC*, p. 260].

[55] Cf. K. DÜSING, *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, pp. 55-56.

absolute, now proceeds from the concrete to the abstract. Language becomes less representational and more conceptual. This does not mean that Hegel turns away from political discourse, as shown by *Der immer sich vergrößernde Widerspruch*, in which there is a technical and conscious use of the concept of contradiction,⁵⁶ and the fragments concerning a critique of the Constitution of Germany.⁵⁷

Evidence of the new direction is offered above all by the so-called *System-fragment* (which consists of two fragments, texts 63 and 64 in the *Gesammelte Werke*), which has a logical slant and shows how reflection understands the absolute only in terms of an antinomy. Reflection is again criticized as being inadequate to express the absolute, and to say this is to search, *ex parte oppositi*, for a language capable of expressing it. The formula “union of union and non-union [*Verbindung der Verbindung und der Nichtverbindung*]”⁵⁸ implies the totality of the existent: for a contradiction includes the union of a term and its complement, whereas reflection’s way of understanding things by isolating and fixing them in a given form can by no means express life and totality adequately. Contradiction is used to express complexity, as in the case of the whole.⁵⁹

In text 63, Hegel states that religion is elevation of man from finite life to infinite life and still speaks of philosophy stopping short of religion,⁶⁰ since the former, understood as subjective reflection, is unable to reconcile the subsisting diremptions. However, towards the end of his stay in Frankfurt, he becomes aware of the occurrence of diremption even in the unity achieved by religion, of religion’s difficulty in reconciling spirit and body, God and life.⁶¹ In the *Differenzschrift*, philosophy takes over the role previously played by religion. In it, in continuity with his later Frankfurt writings, the use of non-descriptive and non-representational language becomes evident, and Hegel attempts to fulfil a

[56] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 5, 16-18. For a commentary on the fragment cf. H.S. HARRIS, *Hegel’s Development*, pp. 440-445; R. BODEI, *Scomposizioni. Forme dell’individuo moderno*, Torino: Einaudi, 1987, pp. 15-58; H. KIMMERLE, “Anfänge der Dialektik”, in *Der Weg zum System. Materialien zum jungen Hegel*, hrsg. von Ch. Jamme und H. Schneider, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990, pp. 277 ff.; V. RASPA, “Sulle origini del concetto di contraddizione negli scritti giovanili di Hegel”, pp. 140-144; ID., “The Notion of Contradiction in Hegel’s Early Writings”, pp. 195-198.

[57] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 5, 1-220.

[58] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 344 [OC, p. 312].

[59] As F. CHIEREGHIN (*Dialettica dell’assoluto e ontologia della soggettività in Hegel. Dall’ideale giovanile alla Fenomenologia dello spirito*, Trento: Verifiche, 1980, p. 43) points out, “The phrase ‘union of union and non-union’ constitutes the first purest but also most abstract expression of the formal structure of the whole”.

[60] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 344 [OC, p. 313].

[61] Cf. HEGEL, *GW* 2, pp. 320-321, 325-326, 345-348 [OC, pp. 297-298, 300-301, 315-319].

need that emerged at the end of his Frankfurt period: to provide a metaphysical foundation for his research.

It is obvious that an examination of this question cannot be thoughtfully and thoroughly pursued without becoming in the end a metaphysical treatment of the relation between the finite and the infinite.⁶²

Compared to the Tübingen and Berne years, the paradigm shift is evident. In Frankfurt Hegel tried to develop a language that expresses the whole, the negative, oppositions and contradictions. He begins to use the figure of contradiction to express reality as fully as possible, in the sense of describing its complexity, without simplifying it or adapting it to the thought that interprets it. In doing so, Hegel's discourse does not contradict or annihilate itself. It works with contradictions.⁶³

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[62] HEGEL, *GW* 2, p. 361 [OC, p. 176].

[63] I am grateful to Valerio Marconi for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article.

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