

Surplus Immediacy and the Defect(ion) of Hegel's Concept

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1.

This reflection is written with respect and gratitude for the work of Donald Verene, who helped open my eyes to Vico's inspiring work and the importance of the imaginative universal. I well remember, while doing doctoral work, being a member of a small group of Vico's admirers who would meet, almost as a secret sect, and with Donald Verene as our guide, to study and enjoy the *Scienza nuova*. Vico, one found, was the kind of thinker, perhaps like Plato, who becomes a companion and inspirer, even while not necessarily being for one an "object" of scholarly research. Donald Verene has also awakened us to the philosophical importance of images in Hegel, and especially his *Phenomenology*.¹ Verene offers us a more winged Hegel than the usual commentary. This is a "Hegel" to whom, I think, Hegel himself came to *play false*. Vico not only gives our imagination wings, as Joyce said, but also had more wings than Hegel, whose version of speculative reason betrays what I would call the intimate strangeness of being. A properly winged philosophical imagination knows this intimacy and this strangeness.² Reading Vico one always feels that something beyond the circle of thought thinking itself is always breaking, whether from sources more deeply immanent in the human soul itself, or from powers or happenings that exceed the power of any determinate or determining concept.

My reflection to come will have a more Vichian than Hegel stamp, though it bears on whether Hegel's concept, hence his whole practice

of philosophical thinking, shows a defection from what the happening of immediacy shows or communicates. My question will be: Is there a fullness to the givenness of immediacy which asks more of philosophy than Hegel's concept can give, something more intimated in its own way, for instance, in Vico's imaginative universal?

First, I will offer a brief interpretation and criticism of the Hegelian approach to immediacy. Hegel has a rather negative view of immediacy as in itself a mere indeterminacy. Conceptual thought mediates this indeterminacy of immediacy, and only when this mediation has been effected can claims be made to categorial intelligibility. In itself, and taken for itself, immediacy seems to be equated with a defective condition. I would put it otherwise, and this will be my second concern. There is no adequate sense of what I will call "surplus immediacy" in Hegel—a sense of rich givenness that precedes the determinations of conceptual thought, and that also exceeds claims to completely subject what is given to the categorial determinations of philosophy. Surplus immediacy is overdetermined.

These points are general, but I will develop them with some more definite reference, both at an elemental level, and at a more ultimate level. With respect to the first, the elemental level, I will say something about sense immediacy: aesthetic happening, as I would prefer to call it. Thus I will discuss some of the implications for sense immediacy, again with reference to the general orientation revealed by Hegel's conceptual approach in the *Phenomenology*. If there is a significant sense of surplus immediacy, with relation to what I will call the *passio essendi*, the passion of being, we will not be able to endorse the strategy of Hegel. While not defective in asking for determinate thought, this strategy does defect from the fullness of the ontological situation and the full requirement of thinking, in light of the surplus of immediacy.

With respect to the second, the more ultimate level, I will remark on art and religion. *Relative to art*: The immediacy of art evidences something of this surplus immediacy, indeed otherness that still cannot be determined in terms of a thinking that would be absolutely self-determining. *Relative to being religious*: While there are many relevant points here, such as this otherness and transcendence, I will offer a few words about what might be communicated in terms of a crucial instance of religious surplus immediacy—the happening of prayer.

2.

One might say that immediacy has been taken to present something like the following general problem for philosophy: when we are, we seem simply to exist or experience; when we think, a “distance” or difference is introduced which moves us away from existing or experiencing, simply as being or undergone. That distancing or difference can be taken as expressing the difficulty. We seem forced into an “either/or” that is insurmountable. We exist, and we participate in a happening of being that is prior to and other to thought. We think, and we have immediately lost touch with this happening *qua* happening, immediately deserted immediacy by resort to mediating thought. It seems we must chose one or the other: either the happening of being and its immediacy, or the truth of thought and its mediation.

It would be simpleminded to grant that this “either/or” is, or can be, the last word. It cannot be from the standpoint of the happening, since it is this itself, and our perplexity about it, that moves us “away” from it into thought. It cannot be the last word from the side of thinking, since thinking may well be the desire for the articulated truth of the happening of immediacy. Either immediacy or thought: Plump for immediacy, do we have to sacrifice mindfulness? Chose thought, has mind destined itself to abstraction and emptiness? It is fair to say, I think, that most philosophers have refused that choice, though again most have refused it in the name of thought, and the best in the name of a thinking that is not simpleminded, but that in a variety of registers tries to seek the truth of the happening of immediacy, seek even the truth in the immediacy itself.

I agree that it is simpleminded to insist on an “either/or” here. Yet, there is not any *one* simple relation between the happening of immediacy and the truth of thought. There are a number of possible relations. Indeed, depending on the kind of immediacy that is happening, the form of that relation will be different, as well as the kind of being truthful that is called forth by the happening. I say this because we are tempted to think of some *one big problem* of immediacy and thought. In fact, there are important and indispensable plurivocities to both the happening and the thinking, and the relations between the two, some of which are subtle and need discerning discriminations.

Of course, one of the classical places for discussion of the issue bears on *sense experience*, as if that were paradigmatic for the happening of immediacy. Thus, for instance, the empiricist doctrine of impressions strike us with vivacity and power, and lie outside the power of our complete voluntary deliberations. This “being beyond us,” in striking us with an intrusive, even overwhelming impressiveness, is often taken as close to what is paradigmatic for the happening of immediacy. Notice too how “ideas” are described by empiricists like Locke and Hume: mere pale images or copies of impressions, as if they were the defective versions of the immediacy. I am not endorsing that form of empiricism, though it does give voice to an important sense of contrast. I think this form of empiricism may well turn out to focus one of the more crude forms of the happenings of immediacy, which is not to discount immense subtlety in aesthetic immediacy, as I will suggest. But there may be other happenings of immediacy that are simply not attended to, if we focus all our attentions, or our primary ones, on the sensuous, and in the terms that certain kinds of empiricism dictate.

The most important point, I think, is to negotiate the “either/or” without softening the demands made by the terms in contrast, and not by either an abdication of thought to the happening of immediacy, or an infidelity to that immediacy by abstract or dictatorial thought. This applies both to aesthetic being and mediating reflection. And it may turn out that it is a question of something that is prior to, that takes precedent to this “either/or”—something more original and preceding, something more ultimate and exceeding.

3.

You might rightly ask: Does not Hegel already provide us with the successful negotiation of philosophy beyond this “either/or”? Does not his version of speculative dialectic not only reject the “either/or,” but offer the affirmative resolution in a sublating “both/and”? We need not choose because thought attains the truth of immediacy; thought is the mediated truth of the happening of immediacy, without which the happening itself is just happening and not truth at all: a mere lacking “that it is,” or empty being.

I grant something like the *desideratum* of Hegel to do justice to both, but deny that his understanding of immediacy, and also his

articulation of the character of thought, do the justice that is asked of us. Let us now look a little more closely at the Hegelian approach to immediacy. As I said, Hegel has a rather negative view of immediacy. We find this, for instance, in his discussion of what he calls sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or in his general approach to “feeling,” say, in relation to either his philosophy of right or his philosophy of religion. On the whole, immediacy refers to something that in itself is indeterminate, in the negative sense of being indefinite, and lacking in proper determination. By contrast, it is by reference to his view of the concept that this putatively empty indefiniteness is to be made intelligible through the determinations of thought. Conceptual thought mediates this indeterminacy of immediacy, and only when this mediation has been effected can claims be made to categorial intelligibility. In itself, and taken for itself, immediacy seems to be equated with a defective condition—defective of intelligibility, hence poverty-stricken for philosophy, till properly conceptual thought determines its mediated intelligibility.

Consider what he says about the “this-here-now” in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel presents the self-understanding of self-certainty as claiming to be the richest *Gestalt* of consciousness. Hegel claims to show it is the most indigent. Among his ways of indicating the point concerns the need to *bespeak the richness*, to articulate the plenitude. To speak of the richness is already always to mediate the immediacy, and in terms beyond the immediacy, that is in terms of mediating universals. The richness of articulation is elsewhere than sense-certainty itself understands. And, of course, Hegel does grant there is *more* in sense-certainty; there is more than pure being (*PS*, 59). But what is this “more”? It turns out to be the mediating universal, something more than can be accommodated on the terms of sense-certainty themselves. It is not the surplus immediacy that I will mean.

Take Hegel's example, an example far more full of rich ambiguity than Hegel realizes: “Now is night.” Then (Hegel says) I write this down. But by tomorrow noon, it is no longer night, and now the truth written down is stale. The truth of night has wilted in the noonday light. Hegel's point is that the “now” as *this* “now” cannot be fixed; its truth escapes that kind of fixation; and surely this is true. I would say you cannot univocalize the “now” precisely as process always ever ongoing as othering beyond “itself.” Immediacy is this always ever ongoingness as othering beyond self. It reveals the universal

impermanence, as we might call it. There is something here excessive to fixed determination. You cannot univocalize and hence reduce it to a determinate identity. But the meaning of this excess, and this elusiveness to univocal fixation, is what is at stake.

Clearly by naming it as such, I do get some fix on it. Hence the issue is not the fixed against what is not fixed at all. It is rather what it is about the process as process that allows a certain determinability, and yet exceeds all determination. The question of immediacy, *vis-à-vis* Hegel, concerns where we situate the nub of the issue, and hence the kind of analysis or thinking that is consequently forthcoming. It is very clear what Hegel wants to communicate by telling us that the truth of night becomes stale in the noon. It is that “this-here-now” cannot be named as such, just insofar as it is a “mere” immediacy (how many questions are hidden or avoided by that little word “mere”?). We need mediation to say anything at all about what is given in the immediate. Hence the drift of Hegel’s account that, as it turns out, is also in search of what remains the same in the ongoingness. Not this “now,” or that “now,” but the “now” as such, the universal “now.”

There is some overlap here between Hegel’s approach and Kant’s transcendental aesthetic: just as in the latter, we bring the a priori forms of space and time to the sensuous manifold, so in the former, the universal appears to be emergent in the flux of sensuousness; it is the universal “now,” for Hegel, that really appears with mediating thought, itself embodied in the language which talks about the “this-here-now.” There is a long way to go in Hegel, and he will want to say that this mediation is not merely subjective, since it concerns the mediation of the object as much as the subject. But in both instances of object and subject, it will be a process of determination that takes the shape of a more inclusive self-mediation, or self-determination. Determinability will reveal itself as *self*-determination; and here again we witness the complex continuation of the transcendental turn to a “higher subjectivity” that includes the more normal, determinate subject and object. This ultimate inclusive power will be, in the end, the self-determination of thought itself. This indeed is what the *concept* is for Hegel, and impossible to understand without some reference to the self-positing of the transcendental ego or self.

Hegel will justify the non-interference of this inclusive power by claiming that the “now” undergoes its own process: night passes into day. Not so clear, as some commentators have pointed out, is the

“this-here”; for we have to turn around, for the process to move further; the tree (Hegel’s example, *PS*, 60) does not quite so overtly turn itself around, though a generous sense of self-moving could be applied to this, too. But the “house” (again Hegel’s example, *PS*, 61) does not turn itself thus. Here we have space, but “space” also evidences the emergence as a more universal concept or categorial determination: the universal “space.” This reveals the thrust of Hegel’s way of dealing with the immediacy: it is nothing in and for itself until the process of mediation, ultimately a self-mediation, articulating the universal form of thought, articulates for us what is there. Immediacy *qua* immediacy must always be downgraded to a “mere” beginning, albeit necessary in its own way, but not sufficient, and in fact, absolutely insufficient. The absolute insufficiency of the immediate is its poverty. There is always, and primarily, a *teleological* thrust to Hegel’s interpretation. It is not *archeological* relative to the givenness of a rich beginning. The end is the fullness, the beginning the indigence. How you can get fullness in the end, if the beginning is thus indigent, is not explained.

4.

I would put it otherwise, and this is my second concern. There is no adequate sense of what I called “surplus immediacy” in Hegel—a sense of rich givenness that precedes the determinations of conceptual thought, and that also exceeds claims to completely subject what is given to the categorial determinations of philosophy. There are a number of ways the point might be put, but I would say that there is a *passio essendi*, a passion of being, that is prior to any *conatus essendi*, the endeavor to be (or to think), on our part. This *passio essendi*, this patience of being, or patience to being, has to do with surplus givenness that is presupposed by any efforts on our part to determine the intelligibility of immediate happening. Our efforts to determine conceptually the meaning of this surplus immediacy call for a fidelity to the fullness of what is communicated in this elemental givenness. If we put the dominant emphasis on the determining power of the concept, in the way Hegel does, we risk a conceptual defection from this surplus immediacy. In the name of categorially determining its intelligibility, we risk a contraction of intelligibility to the terms of our concepts, and hence risk impoverishing, not only

our conceptual terms but what is communicated in and through the surplus immediacy. My point is not to deny the necessity of concepts—it is to question whether Hegel’s concept as self-determining thought can be the last word, or indeed the first. It is the subordination and overriding of the otherness of the surplus immediacy that I question. Hegel speaks of thought as overreaching its other, so making it *its* other, and hence not other. This cannot be the appropriate way to put it, if there is a certain surplus to immediacy. A different thinking is also needed.

How to advance the point? Look at the whole happening of *night* otherwise. “Now is night.” Do not write down: now is night. Sleep in the night, dream in the night, look at the sky in the night. Write it down, like Hegel, and one senses something hurried and anxious about this writing it down, lest it pass, lest too the darkness overwhelm one. Let it overwhelm one. Hegel would bridle. He was not that kind of thinker. And yet we cannot let him move so quickly from the dark to the shadowless noon, when, to Hegel at least anyway, the truths of night appear false (“stale”—is this not Hegel’s beloved “put down,” namely, calling something he does not like “insipid”?). But what other can happen in the night? Love can happen in the night. Different loves, some erotic in a more normal sense, some perhaps philosophically erotic, or perhaps loves that communicate a longing for truth beyond diurnal demonstration, a longing might make the truths of day surely blanch. Woo in the night, and while waiting, call to mind Mnemosyne, mother of the muses.³ Now is night: sing it, do not write it down. Or if you must write it down, do not write it in words that die in being written. Write it, say, in the dark illuminating utterance of the poetic word.

Now is night. I think of Zarathustra’s *Nachtlied*. Not to glorify Nietzsche, or Zarathustra; but just such a phrase, or one close to it, is a refrain in this immensely poignant song. “Night is come.” It comes; meaning perhaps, night has closed around us, while we might not have noticed, but coming on and closing around us, saturating us, dark falling around us, on us, as we go about the day, night releases something in us. What does it release? And what kind of release? And what has the word of the poet to do with the release? What has the release of the song to do with what is set free? Much. And night has much light, paradoxically, to throw on the meaning of the immediacy.

This is one of my points, soberly put: there are modes of articulation which in one sense are quite determinate, but the manner of the determination is such as to retain a fidelity to the surplus immediacy that is given. The poetic bespeaking can be one such mode of articulation: determinate yet overdeterminate, itself a likening to the determinate overdeterminacy of the happening of surplus immediacy itself. Such a bespeaking can be more faithful to an original, in the sense of originating, beginning: a bespeaking of the surplus.

I would say that what Hegel discusses as sense-certainty is not really the beginning. It is already a *Gestalt*, set up in a manner mediated by his philosophical presuppositions. I would say that there is a more primordial happening of immediacy relative to the advent of mindfulness, and the opening of relation between us and the givenness of aesthetic happening. In *Being and the Between* I call it agapeic astonishment,⁴ which is not quite marked by the complex set of determinations of Hegel's *Gestalt* of sense-certainty. It opens to what is overdetermined rather than indeterminate; to what is not absent of determinations but saturated with determinacy, but this is not understood as a kind of set of univocal determinations, predicates, properties, or whatever. It is closer to an equivocal matrix promiscuous with interminglings, rather than any neutral space where a "this-here-now" offers itself for univocal consideration, either as a particular or a universal. It is an ethos of suggestion and presentiment prior to that, and an ethos of plurivocal communication of the otherness of being: an intimate strangeness. Agapeic astonishment opens to a happening of aesthetic givenness in process yes, but also *there* with the striking plurivocal otherness whose truth we will come to seek in perplexed thought. Aesthetic happening shows itself as a plurivocal otherness communicated to and in astonished mindfulness; and both the showing and the mindfulness each testify to a plenitude rather than indigence; and each saturated with a richness of possibility that is not mere possibility, for it is a richness of promise open to articulation on the side of the happening and the side of the mindfulness.

Hegel entirely neglects agapeic astonishment, fails in fidelity to the opening of mindfulness prior to determinate objectification and subjectification, reduces the richness of the beginning to a lacking indeterminacy which then is addressed in terms of an eros of perplexity that determines intelligibility in the other-being, wherein

thinking “subjectivity,” later become, through many self-mutations, *Geist*, *finds itself again*, that is, its *own* determinations of intelligibility. Hegel is amnesiac about the more primal *passio essendi* and driven by the cognitive distension of an overriding *conatus essendi*. The self-determining process reflects an eros of a determinative will to know that mediates its own initial indigence, namely ignorance, through its cognitive relation to other-being, that elevates itself above its given indigence through the intelligibilities posited by an immanent process of self-determining thought. The saturated happening of immediacy is assimilated to this self-determining process of self-mediated thought. Every immediacy ends up by being mediated thus by Hegelian thought.

Again, while there are important differences, there are here important overlaps between Hegel and Kant’s sense of the sensuous manifold. This may “be,” but its being there *qua* being is nothing intelligible without the categories—it is a mere there-ness, nowness, happening without intelligibility: bare indigent being. Thus Kant and existence: mere position, being posited—and this “position” referring to a relativity to the knower that is the more ultimate determining, positing power. In Hegel, there is a more total assimilation of intuition to concept: there is no qualitative difference, there is no otherness irreducible, of sensuous and conceptual. Kant has some right in that one can see him as intending to guard some important differences, even if with resources that seem to undercut the intention. In that both are transcendental philosophers, Hegel is probably the more consistent on those terms. These terms can be said to lead to the devaluation of the surplus immediacy in its given otherness. I dispute those terms.

This devaluation is at the opposite evacuated extreme to the happening of agapeic astonishment. The meaning of agapeic astonishment, and its bearing on surplus immediacy is not confined to some thin epistemological thesis. The mindfulness at stake can be concretized in different registers, one of which is intimately connected to art. This has significance for the philosophical understanding of immediacy, as I shall shortly indicate, but now to conclude this present thought with a very important consideration.

Hegel often reduces immediacy to mere “fact,” something that is a problem for him to be raised to the level of self-positing necessity (see, for instance, his treatment of Jacobi). He misses here one of the

deepest senses of immediacy that is almost always taken for granted: *the givenness of creation*. What is, as being granted, creation, is taken for granted. Nevertheless, what is taken for granted is, in its being granted. There is a primal *passio essendi*, or ontological patience of being in the given receiving of being at all. This signals an "It is" entirely different to Hegel's mere fact or indigent being. This deepest ontological immediacy is not the spontaneous happening of this or that, or the living participating in this or that experience, undergoing, or whatever, of life. It is a more primal ontological immediacy: that things are at all: in being and not nothing. This is an ultimate immediacy in that, without it nothing finite, or nothing within finitude, could mediate its being there at all. For this *being there at all* is presupposed by all such mediations; and indeed all such mediations are made possible by it as the primal immediacy of being given to be. Before it there is agapeic astonishment before there is determinate or self-determining cognition. Yet also this primal immediacy enables all subsequent self-mediations and intermediations in the happening of the finite between or *metaxu*. "Creation" is an immediate ontological intermeditation that brings being to be, enabling the finite between to be, and possibilizing its plurivocal promise. This immediate intermeditation of "creation" is a surplus happening presupposed by all intermediations *within* the *metaxu* of the finite given world.

5.

The above elemental points have application all the way to more "ultimate" levels, and now, in this light, I want to consider Hegel's attitude to the surplus immediacy, as we find it in art and religion. What is at stake is not only a different account of "givenness" in art and religion, but also a different sense of philosophical thought and system bearing on what the idealistic interpretation overlooks or underplays. The richness of surplus immediacy counters the inflated claims made for knowing as completely autonomous and self-determining, and asks a metaphysics closer to what I call the metaxological approach rather than to Hegel's (and indeed to others in the post-Kantian line, even when they deconstruct idealism). Reflection on art and religion indicates something of the saturated richness of "immediacy."

The point with respect to *art*: Importantly, art is given an absolute status by Hegel, but it is just its immediacy that finally creates a

defect for him in terms of the absolute requirement of thinking. The immediacy of art evidences a not yet overcome otherness that still burdens thinking that would be absolutely self-determining—conceptual thinking that here, I would say, defects from the *passio essendi*, and absolutizes its own *conatus essendi*, as pure self-thinking thought. Great art, I would argue, is truer in its sensuous witness to the *passio essendi*, and what is enigmatically communicated in the surplus immediacy. The great art work is a articulated concretion of surplus immediacy, that communicates something of its significance in excess of complete conceptual determination. (Kant has a better intuition of this in his “aesthetic idea.”)

The point I suggested above in relation to *nicht* might be seen to draw our attentions to the articulating powers of art. Not incidentally I cited a song, or poem. That it is by Nietzsche/Zarathustra is another matter. Remember the “either/or” I mentioned at the outset. Here philosophers have had a predilection for the concept or category as *the* most proper way to articulate the happening of immediacy, and justified as such often because it putatively can *account for itself*. This often means a depreciation of other modes of articulation, such as poetry or art generally. We tend to forget that there are other modes of *articulation*—they are not “mere” happenings of immediacy. They essay to speak, hence sing, something of the happening, and also its significance. Song sings significance, significance that remains in tune with the happening *qua* participation in the *passio essendi*.

The choice is not between a certain form of philosophy as *the* articulated significance and the inarticulate. Poetry was called by Eliot a “raid on the inarticulate.” Not quite: it not just a *raid*, since this implies a kind of rustling, or robbery, or attack; we are not thieves. And the move to poetry is not just an opening onto the inarticulate, since the happening of immediacy already is not mute—it speaks, it sings itself. The poem is a response that sings to respond to the first song of the happening. (Michelangelo: the voices in the rock calling.) Its point is not just an articulation that accounts for itself. It is not just *itself* that is in question; it is the happening, and the happening as calling into question such modes of articulation that make the *self-accounting* into the most important. If this is so, then the determination of the philosophical task purely in terms of thought’s ability to account fully for itself is also in question.

Do not misunderstand: I am not arguing against efforts to account for oneself. I am suggesting that such an accounting could never just be a pure self-accounting, since it draws on sources of articulation that could not be described in the language of autonomous knowing, or self-determining thought. I am saying also that there is a fidelity to the happening from which we defect if we are so exclusively focussed on self-accounting that we forget the primal *passio*. There are forms of art that enact this fidelity, and that remain modes of articulation; and interestingly, modes of articulation that, while determinate, resonate in themselves with what exceeds determinability. This resonance of excess is not necessarily a defective equivocity that with better univocal thought would be entirely dispelled. Such an attitude is false, in the name of truth; untrue in thinking that to be true is a matter of univocally dispelling all ambiguity of immediate happening.

Thus comes *night* again. Night may be a benighted condition from which we must be freed, as those prisoners in the cave of Plato are to be released towards truth. But night may also be the mysterious matrix in which the most intimate ontological perplexities emerge. The truths of day may be false to that night, not because the night is false, but because day saturates us with a light that strangely topples us into a different fall into darkness. Excess of light produces darkness. It is the day that can then be dark, not night.

Excesses of the intimate—this is what spontaneously draws us to the immediate; happening that addresses us directly at a level which can circumvent the police guards of categorial correctness. A song does that by articulating this rapport with the *passio essendi*. It hence has a relatively involuntary aspect. It does not ask permission to arouse us; it comes over us; we hear a music, and we are transported. Kant hated this, as when he speaks of the power of music on analogy with the perfumed handkerchief of the dandy: its odor is diffused throughout the room and we are overtaken by it, though we have given it no express rational permission to effect us at all. As if Kant were saying: What a cheek music has to effect us so! For Kant it violates our rational autonomy, indeed our predilection to determinate logos, since the meaning of the music is not thus determinable in words. Though again, revealingly, the piece of music can have singular thereness of presence. The true song sings a word that no other word can substitute. The true incantation is a singular incarnation. Is the singular happening of being as a song of songs? What would a singing philosophy be?

A mindfulness not just of thought thinking but of thought singing its other? Vico knew the primal roots of articulation in song. What does that mean for philosophy? I find no help from Hegel.

I insist again: my point is not at all to counterpose art and philosophy and indict the defections of the latter in terms of the fidelities of the former. It is not “Newton versus Homer” (Kant), or “Homer versus Plato” (Nietzsche). Rather perhaps the issue is something exceeding both art and philosophy, considered as supposedly distinct activities. It has to do with the intimate sources of the *passio essendi* that flowers in all forms of human articulation; that subtends the difference of art and philosophy; that exceeds both in terms of the intimate overdeterminacy of the happening of being; that has to do with the excess of the primal givenness of being that no human articulation could possibly exceed; that has to do with the deeper source of original creativity in which both art and philosophy participate without exhausting. It has also much to do with the ethos of thought itself: the culture, the cultus in which thought is offered form. If this cultus and ethos, this culture is porous to the communication of art, it may well be that philosophical articulation will carry the resonances of these significant others. In a culture which emphasizes a scientific or technical univocalizing, the way philosophy understands itself may be deficient of these enabling or possibilizing porosities.

You might think my view is very postmodern in relation to art. In one sense, yes: there is an important porosity of art and philosophy. In another sense, no. Postmodern art, one fears, is sometimes devoid of the spiritual seriousness we find in the great art of the past. (Elephant dung paintings, a dishevelled bed and soiled underwear, an empty room in which the lights go on and off—some recent winners of the Turner Prize.) Postmodern philosophy can mirror postmodern art in its studied banality. Think here of Andy Warhol, and then of Richard Rorty as the Andy Warhol of our philosophical culture—except one suspects that Andy was superior in not taking himself with the seriousness Rorty does, all appearances of irony notwithstanding. Warhol was getting away with it, and winking as he did; Rorty is getting away with it, and not quite winking. The wink is a small gesture communicating honesty about something not there. By contrast, Rorty has now become a preacher, more absurd even than the preachers of old, for they believed there was some ground in truth to their homilies. Rorty explicitly denies any such ground, and

yet he expects us to listen to his sermons. In moments of idle musing, as I listened to the sermon, I have wondered if, in the past, the travelling performing hypnotist would answer to that line of work. We went happily to the hypnotist, both desiring we would fall under his spell and dreading it; and we did see leprechauns up trees when we left the hall; but on waking up later, we had a good laugh at the nonsense of it all, and maybe the good laugh at the nonsense was the point of significance of it all. But the edifying philosopher has become serious and solemn about the nonsense of it all—which is the truth, if what Rorty says is true—which, of course, it cannot really be, if what he says is true, for then there is no truth.

Far from endorsing that kind of postmodern banality—perhaps the deflated defection that mirrors in reverse the inflated defection of Hegel's concept—I would argue for a secret intimacy of great art with sources of origination that bring it more truly into communication with being religious. Vico knew something of this, and I mean it in a more Vichian than Hegelian sense. There does seem a kind of *doppelgänger* of Hegel here, who binds art, religion, and philosophy together. While the appearance is not entirely untrue, it is not entirely true either. Hegel is quite right to treat art and religion with the same seriousness of ultimacy he treats philosophy. But because of the defection of his concept from the overdeterminacy of the happening of immediacy, there is a “carry-on” effect in how the character of art and religion is conceived, as well as their relation to his conception of the philosophical concept. All are teleologically bound towards the completion of absolutely self-determining thinking. This latter is what his concept is, in fact. But this is from the outset systematically to miss what is at issue in the porosity of art and philosophy to the *passio essendi*.

6.

In conclusion I want to say a few things on this, with our sights on being religious more so than being aesthetic. Elsewhere I have said a few things about the so-called “end of art” and being religious.⁵ An analogous point pertains to religion as to art, though here even more radically we meet resistance to the categorial determination of immediacy in terms of self-determining thinking. Here surplus immediacy suggests something that exceeds our determination and self-determination, and

with a deep bearing on a much stronger sense of the otherness of the human and the divine than Hegel allows, or can allow. While there are many relevant points here, such as this otherness and transcendence, I will offer a few words about what might be communicated in terms of a crucial instance of religious surplus immediacy—the happening of prayer. If there were no immediacy to prayer as a happening, it is hard to know if any sense could finally be made of being religious. Yet this happening as immediate need not be a defect of being but the communication of the surplus overdeterminacy of the divine. We may be graced amazingly with a “too-muchness,” an exceeding, hyperbolic immediacy.

Hegel is not guilty of any simplistic conceptualization of being religious—quite to the contrary. But the complexity of his conceptual appropriation of religion is entirely equivocal. It see it as embodying a dialectical equivocality rather than the superior speculative dialectical resolution of equivocality. I mean a dialectic that hides or evades the equivocality rather than addressing it honestly. But I do not deny Hegel’s acknowledgment of some immediacies related to being religious, and I will mention the most important.

Very relevantly in the present context is when Hegel speaks (for instance, in the *Encyclopedia Logic*) of faith itself in relation to *immediate knowledge*. This concerns Hegel’s debate with Jacobi concerning immediate knowledge of the absolute or “God” (if the absolute is God, something to be questioned).⁶ Interestingly also, immediate knowledge is the third attitude of thought to objectivity after metaphysics (first attitude) and empiricism and the critical philosophy (second attitude). Immediate knowing is granted by Hegel, but Hegel’s “yes” now, often turns out to look more like a “no” later, when fuller dialectical speculative qualifications are brought into play. The granting of immediate knowing is immediately followed by its critique just as immediate. Immediate knowing entrenches dualisms between the human and the divine, hence cutting off the relation of the two it ostensibly affirms. Hegel will claim to affirm the “immediate” relation differently in a fully mediating, self-mediating form: God known by the concept, and God as the Concept.

I do not want to speak for Jacobi but I would say that the immediacy of being religious pertains again to the *passio essendi* in which we awaken to a primal porosity between ourselves and the divine beyond us, even in the most intimate immanence of our own being

for ourselves. This is not something we create, but is a given opening and communication in virtue of which all our self-transcending is possibilized. It is a porosity preceding the more normal determinate doublet of "passivity" and "activity," and also exceeding that double and more determinate forms of passivity and activity. If it is such an opening, it is also precedent to and exceeding of every finite form of determinate openness. It is not a mere indefinite openness, but an overdeterminate opening that makes possible the determinate forms of finite openness. Because, as communicated in being religious, it is a porosity *between* the human and divine, it can never be accounted for in terms of any determinative thinking, nor of any form of self-determining, be this attributed to the human or the divine (as Hegel, in fact does).

There is further the matter of *feeling*, where we sense ourselves to be in the region of this porosity. Religious feeling is granted as important by Hegel. But once granted, again it is seen as a "mere" immediacy that must be also dialectical negated and mediated; feeling does not carry the cognitive certification, justification, validation that can only come from rational knowing, and in the form of self-determining reason. The "yes" to the immediacy of feeling is so qualified by the dialectical speculative considerations that flow from self-determining reason that we wonder what, *at the end*, the "yes" can amount to. It is a provisional "yes," yes, but a "yes" that looks more like a "no" when we come to the end, when the tolerance of the provisional must yield to the self-certainty of absolute self-knowing.

Similar considerations apply to the "*heart*." The same pattern of thinking is exhibited by Hegel. The heart is a seed, he suggests, and this is not a bad metaphor if we remember the fullness compacted in the seed. But as is Hegel's way, it is not this compacted fullness he stresses. In his hands, this "seed" is all but nothing, outside of its teleologically driven development. But not forgetting the porosity of being religious, suppose what is there is a surplus immediacy—perhaps suggested when Pascal says the heart has reasons of which reason knows knowing. Perhaps a mindful finesse might come to some understanding of this surplus reason. Suppose the heart is a *reserve*. And the kind of reserve it is, is not fully described in the metaphor of the seed; a reserve out of which extraordinary expression comes, but one that remains reserved no matter what determinate expression of itself is forthcoming. The heart is an intimacy of being that even

when communicating itself remains in the reserve of intimate(d) surplus. The heart reaches into the root of the *passio essendi* more intimately than the diurnal cognitions of reason. The heart is night, now is night in the heart, though the heart is not just dark. Is night a religious-poetic name for the primal porosity? Of this, do we not have some intimation when the heart is released? We speak of living with a free heart. Can the self-transcending of the free heart be fully determined in the language of Hegelian reason? No. The heart is a reserve in the idiocy of being, but on the heights in that intimacy. The religious heart is put on the line—it is as a *being put on the line*—between itself and the divine. It is daimonic: between the monstrous and divine, though not the divine. Something of this is known in night. Something of transcendence is known in the intimacy of immanence, and transcendence as other to immanence communicated in the endowment of immanence itself.

Hegel's version of mediation inverts this into an immanence of transcendence in which there is no true transcendence. It often requires a certain feel for nuance to be able to detect this with Hegel. Hegelian immanence mimics transcendence, and often to the point of being a *parodia sacra*, perhaps even without knowing that it is so. As an example of this, I cite a very revealing account of cultus from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1827:⁷

In the cultus, on the contrary, God is on one side, I am on the other, and the determination is *the including, within my own self, of myself with God*, the knowing of myself within God and of God within me. The cultus involves giving oneself this supreme, absolute enjoyment. There is feeling within it; I take part in it with my particular, subjective personality, knowing myself as this individual included in and with God, knowing myself within the truth (and I have my truth only in God), i.e., joining myself as myself in God together with myself.

This is a dense statement, for it condenses something essential about Hegel's views. Notice how Hegel speaks of "giving oneself" the supreme, absolute enjoyment. Can we give ourselves this absolute enjoyment, or is there a more ultimate "being given"? Notice how, even when I find myself in God, the inclusion of my being within God is *within my being with myself*. Not only 'giving oneself,' and 'knowing myself,' but note the concluding hyperbole of immanence to self 'joining myself as myself in God together with myself'—the

'self' of 'myself' that gives itself all this is surely an extraordinary self. It seems more extraordinary than any God "on one side," not least because this self gives itself, within its own immanence, the absolute relation between itself and the absolute (God). It articulates a complex relation of the self with itself in which it finds God in its own relation to itself, a relation that seems entirely immanent. Not marked by any transcendence beyond itself, immanent self-transcendence enfolded in itself ultimate transcendence. *Instead of the surplus immediacy of the givenness of prayer, we have the necessity of an absolute self-mediation, inclusive even of "God," and to which there is nothing more surplus.*

What Hegel speaks of as cultus *completely reverses* what the giving of a surplus immediacy might mean, as pointing to what is beyond all self-mediation, beyond all our self-determination. The relation implied by him is not agapeic, as a gratuitous communication of the generous God; it is not erotic as released to the beloved as more than my self-mediation; it is auto-erotic in coming back to itself through the other that is itself. And we look closely to see any line of difference between our self-elevation to God and God's communication from God's own being as other to us. (Indeed we look and have to squint to see what seems to be for Hegel God's own strange self-elevation in and through us.) We cannot see anymore the asymmetry of the hyperbolic God, and the "more" of our being gifted from beyond ourselves. And this point about asymmetry applies whether we are dealing with eros or agape.

In Hegel's version of prayer, eros is not a *passio essendi*, perhaps not a *conatus essendi*, but it is an *auto essendi*. By contrast, the surplus immediacy of the happening of prayer makes it more like night. Suppose it happens that a secret generosity is communicated in the night, as those who pray have often said. (There is a strengthening in the night of Gethsemene garden: passion of being—becoming nothing—porosity—secret strengthening.) Generosity is an intermediation with the other but a mediation which enacts the happening of the surplus immediacy of free giving: giving for nothing—nothing beyond the good of the giving.

If there were no immediacy to prayer as a happening, it is hard to know if any sense could finally be made of being religious. Yet this happening as immediate need not be a defect of being—it may be a form of the surplus immediacy in which the *passio essendi* of the

mortal creature is awakened to the porosity between itself and the divine, an awakening that exceeds the power of the creature's own self-determination. As a surplus immediacy and a porosity, this may not be an autism of being (*auto essendi*), but rather a communication of the ultimate: the communication may be within the intimacy of the finite being, but it is not closed into that intimacy; but rather solicits a communication, religious and ethical, beyond all determinate closure.

This might seem to desert the ground of philosophical thinking, but I would suggest that reflection on surplus immediacy here rather deepens the sense of what it means to think philosophically. Instead of the defect(ion) of the Hegelian concept, we may need, so to say, a different *poverty of philosophy* to remain mindfully true to the happening of being religious. Paradoxically, the surplus of the happening asks for a poverty that, even despite itself, is rich beyond itself. It is more awakened to the porosity in the intimacy of its being, waked to the reception of what of ultimacy is given to it from beyond itself.

NOTES

1. In *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). In the text I will refer to the A.V. Miller translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) as *PS*.

2. See my "Neither Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Metaphysics and the Intimate Strangeness of Being," in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, March (2000): 37–49.

3. Memory, a theme Donald Verene has addressed with finesse, would require another study, memory is an essential mode of mindfulness in the between, involved in intricate affiliations with imagination, mimesis, eros, and mania. See my *Art, Origins, Otherness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), chap. 1.

4. *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), chap. 1.

5. See *Art, Origins, Otherness*, chap. 8.

6. Jacobi attacked rationalism (and Spinozistic pantheism) as leading finally to nihilism. Either God or nothing—the choice. Immediate knowing is identified with *faith*. What is here called "faith" is not the set of determinate doctrines of the Church, but an immediate knowing of the unconditioned. Hegel

discusses issues such as intellectual intuition, the unity and mediation and immediacy, and criticizes Jacobi for an *exclusive* "either/or" between immediacy and mediation. See above, my opening remarks about such kinds of "either/or." Very interestingly, Hegel says that the entire second part of his *Logic*, the book two on essence, "deals with the essential self-positing unity of immediacy and mediation" (*Encyclopaedia Logic*, par. 65). Notice the revealing phrase "self-positing unity." I engage with, and take my distance from, Hegel's "God" in *Hegel and God: The Question of the Counterfeit Double* (Ashgate Press, 2003).

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One Volume Edition, The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 191.

