

Faith and Enlightenment

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In a short chapter of his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* Hegel defines the relation to Enlightenment of that Christian faith which in the sixteenth century had divided the medieval church, reformed it from without and provoked its internal reformation.¹ He asks what faith and 'pure insight' — the principle of Enlightenment — are each in itself, then how each is related to medieval culture in its last form — what is called the Renaissance —, then how each is related to the other. The last of these questions can only be answered when first the two others have been answered rightly. Enlightenment the historian knows as a movement which refashioned European culture radically in the eighteenth century, the religion, government, the artistic and practical interests of both Catholic and Protestant states. If faith and pure insight — the Cartesian subjectivity which is certain of its being — are the causes and moving principles of this great revolution which neither secular nor ecclesiastical powers could stay, then they were not separate from the general culture of peoples, or parts of their life, but each comprehensive of the whole culture. When it is known that both have subordinated to themselves the whole culture and that they are opposed forms of the same totality, then one can find in their relation the first and true cause of the revolution.

In a superficial consideration Enlightenment appears to be merely destructive of faith. When Hume in his theological writings looks back to the Calvinism in which he had been formed as a child he can find no sure evidence in experience of an absolute divine teleology. Enlightenment popularly is thought to have made an end to a rational knowledge of the doctrines of the Christian religion, to be virtually the culture of the present time which knows only a humanized religion. But if Enlightenment and faith are the same totality, then this destruction can only be the proximate result. For in it Enlightenment does not have what it is in principle — knowledge of the same total content as belongs to faith.

Faith and pure insight are both a knowledge that the humanistic culture of the Renaissance does not have as it supposes a true reconciliation of nature and thought. The intelligible world has been given sensible being in the art of the time. The individual and the objective institutional order in church and state may be thought to have attained their true relation. The papal sovereignty of the thirteenth century was hardly realized when it was found impotent

1. *Phän. des Geistes*, VI, B.II: 'Das Glaube und die Reine Einsicht', ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1952, pp. 376-383 [Henceforth *Phän.*].

against an emerging individual freedom. The political monarchy of that time — of Louis IX or Edward I — was formal and impotent against the privileges of the nobility and the towns.² The papacy and the political kingship of the Renaissance were firmly established against their former opponents. The humanistic culture of the age drew rebellious particular interests into a harmonious, aesthetic relation of individuals to sovereign authority. The ancient culture which had given to the medieval world its concept of humanity and an institutional authority through which the faithful might be corrected and made capable of the kingdom of grace was thought to be complete, to be equal at last with its original. Philosophically this completion was a return to the Platonism of Proclus and Dionysius, in which also was exposed the limit of this culture. The aesthetic synthesis of individual and universal is known in this Platonic thought as an ever incomplete relation of positive and negative moments, whose unity is beyond rational apprehension and only approachable asymptotically.³

What is undermined in Renaissance culture is the presupposition of all medieval thought that there is being which is other than

2. What a political community is, as against a feudal, contractual relation of the monarchy to particular interests, is perfectly well-known to Aquinas: the subjective condition is a unification of the soul through the virtues; then objectively the end to which the powers of the soul are thus related has reality through the monarch and the natural law. But when the passions and interests of the soul have been subjected to one end, so is the rebellious spirit consolidated. The state also when it has attained a political unity can more effectively pursue its aggressive ambitions against other states. One may think of the strong concept of the imperial power in Dante, at the same time as the reality of political power in Philip the Fair is extremely offensive to him ("il mal di Francia", *Purg.*, VII, 109). The separation of imperial from papal sovereignty for Dante rests on this, that the former is also a total relation of humanity purged and restored from its fallen condition. The limit of his political theory, as of the political reality of the time, is that the relation of these moments remains immediate. Dante's ardent attachment to the imperial idea can for this reason seem ambiguous. Some have thought that in the *Comedy* he abandons the confident formulation of imperial sovereignty in the Monarchy. But see *Purgatorio*, XXXII, the eagle, and the prophesy of Beatrice, XXXIII, 34 foll.

3. So above all Cusanus, who also in his *Concordantia Christiana* gives the logic of the accord between the monarchy and the estates of the Renaissance state, as best exemplified in England and France. It is a secondary distinction that the balance of monarchic and popular elements is different in these cases. For Dante or Aquinas the state is not a 'concord' in the sense of Cusanus because the submission of the estates to the monarch is not mediated by their mutual limitation. Their submission is not contingent and retractable but necessary, at the same time as it is through the inmost desire of the subjects and thus is free. This relation is the primary theme and interest of Shakespeare's historical plays.

thought, whose difference from thought is not transcended only in the absolute One but also for self-consciousness. That this is the true completion of humanistic culture was not for philosophical knowledge only, nor only for the artists who knew the limits of their trade. Humanists in imitation of Plato might invent ideal polities. But the other face of the benevolent reason they thought should rule human affairs was the natural will which pursued its particular end against the good with diabolical resolution. Machiavelli knew that what maintained the unity and order of the state was not an abstract Ciceronian reason only but also the power of the ruler to overcome this evil will with its own weapons. There was not present in the evil will itself the tendency to overcome its own evil, as was afterwards taught in a reformed culture by Hobbes and Spinoza.⁴

To his first question, what is faith considered in itself, Hegel gives the same answer as one finds in Luther and Calvin or in those Roman theologians who opposed the Pelagian humanism of the Jesuits. The content of this faith, to which he refers very succinctly,⁵ differs in nothing from the classical exposition of it in Calvin's *Institutio Religionis Christianae*. This renewed Augustinian theology does not so much depart from the intention of Augustine himself as sharpen the opposition of grace and predestination to a presupposed human freedom. The ambiguous and contradictory nature of this freedom had come fully to light in Renaissance culture. Theology could not assume a sure knowledge of man through his rational powers, even though their relation to his embodiment and sensuous nature might be obscure. In that division the rational soul could be thought to have a certain autonomy, even if this freedom was at once denied to be of itself capable of any good. This residue of a human nature is treated in the new Augustinianism as an abstraction. The divine image is not in the rational powers but in the concrete individual, the product of the creative and redemptive divine will. This theology, as Calvin says, begins with the knowledge of God, not of man. But the subject which makes this beginning has reacted from the dividedness and evil which he finds in himself to that concrete unity which is through the divine predestination. Hegel says of this faith that its element is pure consciousness, a consciousness which is not a mixture of rational and sensuous moments. The subject for whom

4. A 'concord' of wills in the state can easily degenerate into their discord, when differences are carried to their extreme. Extreme conflict, as in tragic actions, can expose the underlying unity. The necessity which holds the state together is beyond the radical conflict of interests, not, as for Spinoza and Hobbes, what moves primarily in the conflict itself.

5. *Phän.*, 380-81.

the doctrine and sacraments of the Christian religion are in this element is implicitly the same as the self-consciousness which is the principle of Enlightenment. The difference is that the division of this subject, the difference of his rational and sensuous nature and the process of their unification, is not referred to itself as in Enlightenment but is received as the movement of the Trinitarian idea. The divided moments are for this pure consciousness as eternally united in the Trinity, as revealed in creation and in the restoration of the fallen spiritual creature.⁶

The logical form of this pure consciousness was not of interest to those who first restored the strict predestinarian doctrines of Augustine. Its discovery was the work of the seventeenth century philosophy. With Descartes and his successors there is a new beginning of philosophy as radical as that of Anselm in an earlier age. The philosophers of that time recalled the celebrated argument of the *Proslogion*, and likewise discovered the principle of a true theoretical and practical knowledge in the infinite idea of God whose being follows necessarily from the concept. The argument recurred at the point where the science founded by Anselm had lost all stability. If one would follow Hegel's argument, it is necessary to attend to the difference of the new from the older form of the argument from the concept to the being of God. The being of the infinite idea is for Anselm its self-relation in all that is other than itself. The division and finitude of being is a falling away from this inner identity. In the new philosophy the infinite idea founds the relation to self-consciousness of what is separated from it. There is not, as in medieval philosophy, a lapse into the difference of self-consciousness from being. Their relation is known, but in the form of an opposition of consciousness to self-consciousness, of necessity to freedom.⁷

There is thus for faith a difference between the content and the form in which it is known, between the idea of spiritual freedom and the relation of external contingency to an inner divine necessity. The consideration of this difference leads to the second question about faith — its relation to the divided culture from which

6. The principal differences between the original Augustinianism and that of Calvin or Jansenius have their origin in this, that the latter is a reaction against a medieval Augustinianism in which the opposition between this and a Neoplatonic logic has not come fully to light. Augustine's theology was likewise formed in relation to the Neoplatonism of his time. He did not have before him a Platonized Augustinianism.

7. When the new Augustinianism of the 16th century turns from philosophy and would be a direct spiritual reading of scripture, this is not an unmethodical, irrational reading. To learn what the method is, and also the conflict latent in it with the revealed content, one will best study the Cartesian Augustinianism of Malebranche.

it turned to the pure inwardness of thought. There is here a two-fold relation. The separation of the individual from the universal movement of the divine idea through nature and the return to the spiritual community is first given up immediately. The individual is justified by faith without the mediation of works — without virtuous acts and fulfilment of a moral law. This righteousness is not of the individual as such but the universal or divine self-consciousness present in him. Then secondly the relation of the individual to the spiritual community is through the difference in him of a moral and sensuous will. His real correction and justification is mediated by this division. In this relation it might appear that he has fallen back to the former culture. But the world is for faith partly good, as the work of the primal good, partly it is vanity.⁸ These moments do not fall apart as in the humanistic culture as such but both are inwardly related to faith. The logic of this two-fold relation was best expressed by Leibniz: the monads or individual substances have their relation to what is other than themselves in their self-identity, but their otherness and negativity has also its ground, and the unity of these moments does not appear but is hidden in God. One has here not the best world, as the actuality of the divine predestination, but “the best of all possible worlds”. The difference of the positive and negative moments remains within the knowledge that in truth they have been united. The subjectivity which is and moves everything nowhere itself appears.⁹

This inner moving spirit of faith is the ‘pure insight’ which in its expansion as a universal historical movement is called Enlightenment. ‘Pure insight’ does not however have its origin in faith, but rather in a skeptical rejection of Renaissance culture, a doubt which is not appeased by the new Cartesian science and the relation through it of faith to the ‘civitas Dei’. Hegel cites as a striking example of the formation of enlightened subjectivity the *Neveu de Rameau* of Diderot, the description there of a man who is at once inwardly free of the cultured world, of the collision in it of moral reason and corrupt nature, and at the same time wholly in it and

8. In its relation to the world “hat das glaubende Bewußtsein teils selbst seine Wirklichkeit in der realen Welt der Bildung [that is, humanistic culture] und macht ihren Geist und ihr Dasein aus . . . ; Teils aber tritt es dieser seiner Wirklichkeit als dem Eiteln gegenüber und ist die Bewegung, sie aufzuheben.” (*Phän.*, 381). The world of culture in relation to the reforming spirit, Catholic and Protestant, becomes what is called ‘baroque’. The art so designated knows how to express at once a rational relation to the world and the vanity of this relation. So in the culture generally.

9. “Der Begriff aber, die sich selbst gegenwärtige Wirklichkeit des Geistes, bleibt im glaubenden Bewußtsein das Innre, welches alles ist und wirkt, aber nicht selbst hervortritt.” *Phän.*, 381.

dependent on it. 'Pure insight' is the termination of this criticism of culture which is also a self-criticism — not a retreat from the cultured world, but the negation in oneself of its division. This subjectivity when it has freed itself from its involvement in the world, has realized its inner freedom, brought into one its universality and division of reason and the sensuous will, which it is as in that culture. This subjectivity is the inner moving spirit of faith come to light.¹⁰

'Pure insight' has no particular relation to the world of culture, once it has come forth from it and rests in itself. That to which it has relation is faith and the objective content of its world. But that relation is at first immediate and 'pure insight' is not master of the logical form which divides it from faith.¹¹ Its relation to faith has a likeness to that of the nominalist theology of the late middle age to the systems of the thirteenth century. There is in that theology, as already in Duns Scotus, a unity of individual and universal which has not before come fully into view. In this theology the rational knowledge of God which the older systems attained appeared to have been lost. At the same time the 'via moderna' made possible a criticism of the finite logic which intervened before between the objects of belief and the knowledge of them. Enlightenment likewise in the Kantian philosophy, its most developed form, became a criticism of understanding and came to a knowledge of the relation of this to the other powers of the soul. The concrete unity of the soul in its relation to God was concealed from faith by its logic.

Another example illustrates more exactly what lies in the relation of faith to the pure insight of Enlightenment. Faith, as already observed, is a renewed Augustinianism. For Augustine himself there were two complementary methods in his contemplation of the revelation. The one was an objective consideration of the revealed content itself. By this method the persons of the Trinity were known through the form of essential relations. The Trinity is thus thought through the logic of the understanding. This knowledge Augustine then extends by considering the Trinity not in itself but as reflected in the rational powers of the soul. He thus approaches more nearly the concreteness of the Trinity, and this knowledge contains properly a criticism of the former. These reciprocal methods are united in the modern Augustinianism, if one thinks through to the end the relation of faith to pure insight.¹²

10. *Ibid.*, 372 foll.

11. *Ibid.*, 382 foll.

12. It is not for Augustine the thinking of God as Trinity directly and that

Enlightenment is easily disparaged and misconceived by the existential spirit of the present time. It is better to say with Hegel that there is in it a realization of the Christian religion beyond that of earlier times. Through Enlightenment the theological differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics were in principle overcome. What divided the church were various and opposed apprehensions of the relation of Renaissance culture and the renewed Augustinianism. The Roman church, in which the Renaissance concept of order and government was primary, could not accommodate Augustine. The Protestant churches in various ways subordinated order and government to Augustinian faith. But the two continued together often in uneasy peace or at war, if one sought to impose itself on the other. With Enlightenment, however little it might be noticed at the time, Augustine triumphed over Dionysius.¹³

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which is through the 'imago' in man are not complementary. This twofold reflection when brought into one mediates the relation of the intellect to the content of the revelation as what underlies both. The logical relation of these methods to each other has not become a problem. They have not for him an historical embodiment as opposed cultures.

13. The Anglican church could learn from the *Ecclesiastical Polity* of Hooker how it might be Calvinist and at the same time subject to a Renaissance monarchic government. The condition on which this accommodation was possible was that no particular form of ecclesiastical government should be thought to be 'divino jure'. Jurisdiction is thus subordinated to faith, this taken as by Calvin. This accommodation must however be unstable so far as these elements simply existed together in the same body without further clarification of their relation.

In the Roman church a qualified Augustinianism could be found at Trent to agree with the relation of the faithful to the papal monarchy. When afterwards the implications of both principles had come fully to light in the conflict between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, no more than a formal and imposed resolution was possible.

In saying that in Enlightenment Augustine in principle prevailed over Dionysius it is not intended either that the one is true and the other erroneous or that the one is more convenient to ecclesiastical purposes than the other. The two are rather complementary and necessary ways of thinking the objects of Christian belief, of which the one builds on the other. The argument, finally, shows Enlightenment as no more the product of one part of the divided church than of the other. The same forces worked in both parts; and, if Augustine prevailed over Dionysius, it was initially for the ruin of both parts.