

Hegel on the Unconscious Abyss: Implications for Psychoanalysis¹

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In all his works, Hegel makes very few references to the unconscious. In fact, the account is limited to only a few passages in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, and these do not explicitly develop a formal theory of the unconscious. Yet Hegel does not completely ignore the issue. In the *Encyclopaedia*, as outlined in Petry's presentation of *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*,² Hegel describes the unconscious processes of intelligence as a "nightlike abyss." It is important to understand what Hegel means by this "abyss" and what role it plays in the life of subjective spirit. But with a few noteworthy exceptions, which focus on Hegel's theory of mental illness,³ Hegel's treatment of the unconscious has been largely overlooked. In this essay, therefore, I will explore Hegel's treatment of the abyss in mental life and explain how this constitutes a position on the unconscious.

1. The Historical Origins of the Abyss

Hegel himself did not originate the notion of the unconscious abyss. Rather he took it over in large measure from Schelling, Boehme and neo-Platonism. The concept of the abyss (*Ungrund*) comes from Boehme's theosophic Christianity. Inspired by the study of Plotinus,⁴ Boehme radically re-conceptualized God as the *ens manifestativum sui*, "the being whose essence is to reveal itself."⁵ Boehme developed an elementary form of dialectic. In this dialectic, positive and negative polarities emerge out of the

Godhead's original undifferentiated non-being (*das Nichts*), and these unfold through orderly stages of manifestation as it ascends toward absolute self-consciousness.⁶ At one time, scholars thought that Boehme's term *Ungrund* originated in the Gnostic 'abyss,' since there are similarities between the two. But Koyré has cogently disputed this claim, interpreting Boehme's notion of the abyss as the "ground without a ground."⁷ Before the divine *Ungrund* emerges, there is no source of determination, there is nothing; the *Ungrund* is merely "unfathomable" and "incomprehensible." Thus:

The *Ungrund* is the uncertainty which precedes the divine will's arousing itself to self-awareness.⁸

Furthermore, Boehme's *Ungrund* acts as a subject who desires: "it 'seeks,' it 'longs,' it 'sees,' and it 'finds.'"⁹

While Hegel acknowledges Boehme,¹⁰ he probably owes more to Proclus (through Creuzer), Erigena, and most notably Schelling.¹¹ Boehme's impact on Schelling was considerable; and Schelling was one of the first philosophers to underscore the importance of the unconscious and the role of irrationality in human experience.¹² Two arch-rationalists, Leibniz and Kant, paved the way for this development. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz developed a theory of unconscious *petits perceptions*. Kant, in his *Anthropology*, discussed the nature of "obscure presentations" (*dunkele Vorstellungen*) that remain just below the level of conscious awareness.¹³ Schelling's revision of Kant's and Fichte's transcendental idealism together with Schelling's own philosophy of identity (*Identitätsphilosophie*) and philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) led to one of the first systematic conceptualizations of the unconscious.¹⁴

2. *Unconscious Spirit and the Feeling Soul*

In order to understand Hegel's position on the unconscious modes of subjective spirit, we must focus repeatedly on the dialectical organization, operations, contents, and intra-psychic structures that are developed in the evolutionary process of the unconscious. I will show that Hegel's account of the contents and operations of the mind as *aufgehoben* is also the structural foundation of the unconscious. On this point, the role of subjectivity in Hegel's philosophy, as this applies to the unconscious mind, is especially important. Throughout his philosophy, Hegel insists that a subjective ground

is the necessary precondition for any cognition that experiences something as objective.¹⁵ Although the drive toward the Concept as authentic reason progressively seeks objective truth, subjectivity as such is never abandoned for a new truth; it is preserved within its new forms and coexists with universality. Therefore, at various levels of phenomenology, the subjective components of the dialectic will have greater unconscious influence on the vicissitudes of the self in its ascendance toward the Absolute. The realm of the abyss is a central principle in the phenomenology of spirit.

Hegel first mentions the unconscious in his account of presentation (*Vorstellung*), which belongs to the development of theoretical spirit. He refers to a "nightlike abyss within which a world of infinitely numerous images and presentations is preserved without being in consciousness" (*EG* §454). Hegel does not explain the nature of this nocturnal abyss. He says only that it is a necessary presupposition for imagination and for the higher forms of intelligence.¹⁶ These more complex forms of the psychological would not be possible without the preservation of presentations and images in the "nightlike abyss." Prior to this stage in the development of subjective spirit, Hegel makes no specific reference to the unconscious abyss. But even if it is not explicitly mentioned, the occurrence of the abyss is already prepared, its existence already implicit in the most archaic forms of the individual, that of the feeling soul and immediate consciousness.

... spirit attains to absolute being-for-self, to the form which is completely adequate to it. Through this alone it rouses itself from the somnolent state in which it finds itself as soul, since in this state difference is still shrouded in the form of lack of difference and hence unconsciousness. (*EG* §389 Zusatz)

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel initially defines consciousness as the manifestation of the being of the world to a subject who is not self-conscious or reflectively aware of oneself as Self. "Consciousness is 'I', nothing more, a pure 'This'; the singular consciousness knows a pure 'This', or the single item."¹⁷ In the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology, he says the same thing:

Initially, consciousness is immediate, and its relation to the general object is therefore the simple unmediated certainty it has of it. (*EG* §418)

The presence of subjective spirit, particularly in its initial unfolding as soul and as consciousness, is what I shall refer to as the primal domain of unconscious spirit. The movement of subjective spirit has its genesis in the unconscious, i.e. spirit originally manifests itself as the unconscious. Without equivocation, the abyss is the birth of spirit. Hegel makes this clear:

Spirit has determined itself into the truth of the simple immediate totality of the soul and of consciousness . . . The beginning of spirit is therefore nothing but its own being, and it therefore relates itself only to its own determinations. (*EG* §440)

For Hegel, the unconscious is merely the immediate determinateness of spirit which manifests itself in two primary modes, namely, as soul and as consciousness. Initially, spirit remains hidden to itself, an enigma, asleep within the abyss of its own inwardness, and thus the unconscious is its presupposition.¹⁸ As incarnate, the soul is the core totality of the nascent Self as the permeation of spirit, making itself known as consciousness, which is spirit's presence as such. Hegel says, "As soul, spirit has the form of substantial universality" (*EG* §414), which then assumes its immediate shape as consciousness. However, consciousness as ego is spirit's ability to make itself an object or reify itself within its own being. Hegel explains:

As ego, spirit is essence, but since reality is posited in the sphere of essence as immediate being, . . . spirit as consciousness is only the appearance of spirit. (*EG* §414)

Sensuous consciousness only knows itself as being, a "singular," an "existing thing" (*EG* §418). Hegel refers here to the subjective existence of the Self as a personal, singular 'I', with the character of "self-identity" (*EG* §§414, 415). From this standpoint, spirit in its initial shape takes the form of 'mine', in the mode of personal identity. Within this context, the unconscious is the subjective ground of the most primitive levels of individuality. This pure or original consciousness, the formal 'I', resides within the realm of the abyss, outside our immediate self-conscious awareness of such activity. Although this immediate form of consciousness is not yet elevated to perceptive or understanding consciousness, it contains the primal content of feelings which is the "material of consciousness" and "what the soul is and finds in itself in the anthropological sphere" (*EG* §446). Hence, within the realm of the subject, unconscious spirit resonates within the soul as feeling and consciousness. The feeling soul becomes the initial domain of the abyss. Not yet explicit or developed, lacking articulation and structure, what remains is for it to become explicit in theoretical spirit.

Hegel considers feeling in relation to three different stages in the evolution of subjective spirit. First, feeling belongs to the soul awakening from its self-enclosed natural life to discover within itself the "content-determinations of its sleeping nature." (*EG* §446 Zusatz) The soul comes to feel the totality of its Self and awakens into consciousness as ego. Secondly, in

consciousness, feeling becomes the material content of consciousness, distinct from the soul and appearing as an independent object. Third, feeling becomes the "initial form assumed by spirit as such" which is the truth and unity of the soul and consciousness (*EG* §446). Before spirit's final transition from feeling to reason, every content of consciousness originally exists and is preserved within the mode of feeling. Thus, for Hegel, the life of feeling is inextricably associated with the domain of the unconscious abyss in all its archaic shapes.

Hegel's account of the feeling soul unfolding dialectically is equivalent to the nascent Self as unconscious spirit unified in the soul and expressed as consciousness. Therefore, the natural soul is the heart of unconscious spirit, intuiting itself as such, and feeling its own being. The unconscious awakening of spirit within its own internal slumbers and thus the feeling of its totality as its essence in consciousness unites the soul and spirit in the abyss of its own determinations.

3. *The Intelligence of the Abyss*

Subjective spirit, in its theoretical modes, expresses itself as cognition actively concerned with finding reason within itself (*EG* §445). As the stages of theoretical spirit unfold, the unconscious abyss appears to be the primary domain of this activity. Hegel points out that intelligence follows a formal course of development beginning with knowledge as (a) intuition of an immediate object, to (b) presentation, as a withdrawal into itself from the relationship to the singularity of the object and thus relating such object to a universal, leading to (c) thought in which intelligence grasps the concrete universals of thinking and being as objectivity. In the stage of intuition as immediate cognizing, intelligence begins with the sensation of the immediate object, then alters itself into attention by fixing on the object while differentiating itself from it, and then posits the material as external to itself, or as "self-external," which becomes intuition proper. The second main stage of intelligence as presentation is concerned with recollection, imagination, and memory, while the final stage in the unfolding of intelligence is thought which has its content in understanding, judgement, and reason.

As the dialectical forms of intelligence progress, unconscious spirit posits intuition as its own inwardness, recollects itself within it, becomes present to itself, and thus by passing into itself raises itself to the stage of presentation (*EG* §450). From the standpoint of presentation (*EG* §451),

the various forms of spirit manifest themselves as "singularized and mutually independent powers or faculties." Within recollection, the unconscious content in which intelligence activates itself is "involuntarily" called forth. The presented content is that of intuition, not only intuited as being, but also recollected and posited as "mine." This unconscious content of intuition is what Hegel calls "image." In the sphere of imagination, the presented content enters into opposition with the intuited content, in which "imagination works to gain for itself a content which is peculiar to it" and thus seeks to universalize it. As presentation enters into the stage of memory, the unification of the subjective and the objective constitutes the transition to thought. (*EG §451 Zusatz*)

Within its initial recollection, however, the "image" that becomes the focal point of intelligence is posited as feeling the inwardness of its own space and time (*EG §452*). This is spirit taking up what has been put forth by intuition and positing it as spirit's own content.

Intelligence is not, however, only the consciousness and the determinate being, but as such the subject and implicitness of its own determinations; recollected within it, the image is no longer existent, but is preserved unconsciously. (*EG §453*)

Here, Hegel points to the Concept of intelligence as being-for-self, capable of presenting itself to itself as a determined object, and preserving the image within the most remote regions of the abyss. "In another respect therefore, it is intelligence as this unconscious abyss" (*EG §453*). Unconscious spirit first becomes aware of its existence as feeling, it feels its very life and senses itself as such united in the most rudimentary forms of its intelligibility. Hegel continues:

The image is mine, it belongs to me: initially however, this is the full extent of its homogeneity with me, for it is still not thought, not raised to the form of rationality, . . . and being not free but a relationship according to which I am merely the internality, while the image is something external to me. Initially, therefore, I still have an imperfect control of the images slumbering within the abyss of my inwardness, for I am unable to recall them at will. No one knows what an infinite host of images of the past slumbers within him. Although they certainly awaken by chance on various occasions, one cannot, as it is said, call them to mind. They are therefore only ours in a formal manner. (*EG §453 Zusatz*)

Hegel's characterization of the unconscious life within the subject points to the activity of the unconscious which becomes unified in consciousness as the "internality" of the self, and yet is a distinct form of consciousness

which the subject does not control. Hegel acknowledges the activity of the unconscious abyss as limitless, infinite, and inaccessible to the conscious will. This conceptualization is similar to psychoanalytic accounts of the unconscious in which instinctual impulses in the form of wishes as "image" simultaneously press for expression, yet remain repressed within one's "internality" as the abyss of "inwardness," unavailable to immediate introspective self-reflection.

As theoretical spirit continues on its journey from intuition to thought, the role of imagination within presentation becomes important for understanding the influence of the abyss.¹⁹ For Hegel, as for Kant, imagination mediates between intuition and thought. Therefore, imagination belongs to spirit. More precisely, imagination has its place almost exclusively within psychological spirit. Within presentation, imagination is an intermediate faculty of spirit, surfacing between recollection and memory. As Hegel noted in recollection, the content of intuition in its new form as "image" is "preserved" as "unconsciousness" (*EG* §453). Therefore, images sleeping in the depths of the abyss can be called forth, related to an intuition, yet separated from both the abyss and intuition. Thereby, the birth of the image for-us becomes the contents of imagination. From this standpoint, imagination determines images, first in reproductive imagination (§455), as reproducing images called forth by intuition, secondly, in associative imagination (§456), by elevating images as presentations to the level of universality, and thirdly, in phantasy (§457), as a determinant being in the forms of symbols and signs. Hegel ultimately sees imagination through to its end. Following a dialectical course, the image becomes surpassed and integrated into higher shapes of theoretical spirit.

Hegel's account of spirit's movement within presentation ultimately ends with spirit discovering and subsuming itself within "phantasy as reason." Thus, for Hegel, imagination is subordinated to cognition as spirit recovers itself in the image. At this point, Sallis raises the question: "Does phantasy exceed reason? Or, more generally, is imagination in excess of spirit?"²⁰ This question leads one to envision imagination as being out of the realm of the dialectic, on the periphery of spirit, not susceptible to its movement, transcending spirit's powers to determine the activity and content of the abyss. This has greater implications for understanding the potential faculties of the abyss, independent from spirit. Is it possible that the nocturnal pit of images is beyond the call of spirit? Is it possible that the unconscious abyss can influence the very course of imagination and resist integration into spirit?

And even if the abyss were to become subordinated to spirit, would not the pit bring with it its own material, its nightness that would be absorbed in spirit's universalization? Is not the pit bound to leave its residue? And what would this residue be? Could it perhaps be fragments of inclinations and passions that coexist with spirit in its transcendence toward reason? Is the host of images drawn from the pit susceptible to the sway of desire that seeks a life and fulfillment of its own? To what degree is spirit itself influenced by the psychological?

As unconscious spirit dialectically proceeds from consciousness to self-consciousness, desire becomes its new shape as drive. Hegel states, "... desire still has no further determination than that of a drive, in so far as this drive, without being determined by thought, is directed toward an external object in which it seeks satisfaction." (*EG* §426 Zusatz) For Hegel, like Nietzsche and Freud, the subjective nature of the unconscious, as unconscious spirit, is indissolubly linked to the body, nature, or instinct.²¹ Hegel anticipates Freud when he alludes to the instinctual motivations of the unconscious.

Feeling subjectivity is the totality of all content and the identity of the soul with its content. Although it is not free, neither is it bound, what is bound, what is present being merely a limitation of it. What we called genius is instinctive, active in an unconscious manner, in opposition to particular determinations. Other oppositions fall within reflection, within consciousness. What we have before us here is feeling subjectivity, which realizes itself, is active, proceeds forth from simple unity to liveliness. This activity belongs to the determination of the liveliness, and although it awakens opposition within itself, it also preserves itself by sublimating it and so endowing itself with a determinate being, with self-awareness. This activity is the expression of drive, of desire, its determination or content being drive, inclination, passion, or whatever form this content is given. (*EG* §407 Zusatz)

In this passage, Hegel points to the dialectical activity of the unconscious whereby it generates its own oppositions and transcends itself within itself as sublimation. Hegel also tacitly suggests that self-awareness is born out of such unconscious activity, thus giving the unconscious a primary role in psychic organization and conscious motivation. Furthermore, Hegel states that the nature of unconscious content is itself activity, as drive or desire. This points to the primacy of psychic (unconscious) determination providing the structural organization and the content of its own determination which transcends itself in conscious determinism. Hegel has paved

the way to understanding more precisely the organization, structural integrity, and telic operations of the unconscious.

4. *The Dialectical Structure of the Unconscious*

At this juncture, it should be clear that unconscious spirit is the very structural foundation of the Self, as pure activity always in flux and in a psychic state of turbulence. "It is just this unrest that is the self."²² Hegel refers here to the unrest of *Aufhebung*, as dialectical process continuously annulled, preserved, and transmuted. As Hegel would contend, the dialectic is both the inner organization and the content of unconscious spirit. It is the dialectic that provides the Self with intra-psychic structures and operations that can never be reduced or localized, only conceptualized as pure activity. This pure activity of the dialectic as Self is constantly evolving and redefining itself through such movement. The unconscious forms of spirit (initially as feeling soul and sensuous consciousness) are thereby necessarily organized around such dialectical activity of the abyss. These structural operations, however, are not mechanistic, reductionistic, or physical as in the natural science framework of traditional psychoanalysis. They are mental, telic, and transcendental, always reshaping spirit's inner contours and the internalized representational world within the night of the mind. Therefore, as a general structure, the unconscious is *aufgehoben*.

As the very foundation, structure, and organizing principles of the unconscious are informed by the movement of the dialectic, the architecture of the abyss is continually being reshaped and exalted as each dialectical conflict is sublated by passing into a new form, that in turn restructures, reorganizes, and refurbishes the interior contours of the core Self. Therefore, the structural foundations of the Self are never static or inert, but always in dialectical movement which has its origin and source in the unconscious and revamps the framework in which spirit emanates. This self-generating dialectical movement of the unconscious is the evoking, responding, sustaining, and transcending matrix that is itself the very internal system of subjective spirit.

The concept of the Self as subject in Hegel is of particular importance in understanding the unconscious nature of spirit. Essentially, the progression of the dialectic is an epigenetic theory of self development. As *aufgehoben*, Hegel's notion of the self encompasses a movement in which the subject is opposed to an object and comes to find itself in the object.

During the dialectical movement of spirit, the subject recognizes or discovers itself in the object. This entails the mediation of its becoming other to itself, with the reflection out of otherness back to itself. The process of the development of the self is, therefore, a process of differentiation and integration. For Hegel, Being is characterized by an undifferentiated matrix which undergoes differentiation in the dialectical process of becoming and in turn integrates into its being that which was differentiated through its projection, reclaiming it and making it part of its internal structure.²³ The outcome of the integration is once again differentiated then reintegrated; unification is always reunification. Therefore, it comes to be what it already is, it is the process of its own becoming.

As the darker side of spirit, the unconscious educates itself as it passes through its various dialectical configurations. Parallel to the path of natural consciousness that ascends toward the Absolute, the unconscious also comes to a unity constituted by the bifurcation and rigid opposition that it generates from within itself. Furthermore, it is precisely through such opposition that the unconscious becomes and brings itself into reunification. Thus, the abyss in its evolution undergoes violence at its own hands. By entering into opposition with itself, it raises this opposition to a higher unity and thus sublates it in a new structure. As each unconscious shape or content is confronted with radical opposition, each shape is made to collapse when its non-absolute form is exposed. Indeed, it is always driving the movement on from one shape to the next. Thus, the character of the unconscious is that of negativity and conflict; it is tempestuous, feral, powerful, and dynamic. As such, the unconscious is the source of its own negativity as inversion and destruction pave the way of its progression forward.

There is a necessity in the dialectic that informs the internal structures of the abyss, i.e. there is a certain determinism to negation. The operation of such determinant negativity comes about through the collapse of each shape. As the negation of a certain content takes place within the realm of the abyss, it derives a certain content from the negation. Therefore, it links shapes into a necessary progression as each form turns into a new one. However, as each form is surpassed, the experience of its alteration is that of death, its end. But for Hegel, death always leads to rebirth. The dialectic is therefore the oscillation between life and death, never separate from one another. Hegel elucidates this point thus:

... what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom—this is the

tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure *T*. Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength . . . But the life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself.²⁴

As determined negativity, the unconscious vanquishes itself as it destroys itself. It kills itself as it gives itself life. As each shape alters, however, one assumes that the most primal regions of unconscious spirit, that of the feeling soul, experiences, retains, and preserves such destruction. It would follow that the abyss itself undergoes a loss of self, and as feeling soul it enters into despair over its death, a suffering it must endure and preserve, a mourning it perpetually encounters. Indeed, it destroys itself in the service of raising itself, although it remembers and feels its suffering. Yet, it is precisely through such negativity that there is progression. Perhaps it needs to hold onto its suffering, its death, in order to advance or take pleasure in its elevation.

From this standpoint, we might say that the unconscious is masochistic, it must suffer in order to gain. Perhaps the double edge of the dialectic, (as negativity resulting in higher unity), possesses a dilemma even for spirit itself. Does spirit fight within itself such a process, thereby leading spirit to retreat back into the nocturnal pit, to withdraw itself from its suffering and return to the warm blanket of the abyss? Is this dilemma a natural inclination of spirit or is it merely the result of disease, that of madness?

5. Hegel's Theory of Madness

Perhaps the implicitness of the abyss has been made most clear in its relation to mental illness. In reference to the role of the unconscious, Hegel's theory of mental illness has received the most attention in the literature.²⁵ For Hegel, the unconscious plays a central role in the development of insanity (*Wahnsinn*), or more broadly conceived, mental derangement (*Zerstreuung*). Hegel explains:

. . . the spiritually deranged person himself has a lively feeling of the contradiction between his merely subjective presentation and objectivity. He is, however, unable to rid himself of this presentation, and is fully intent either on actualizing it or demolishing what is actual. (*EG* §408 Zusatz)

Hegel explains madness in terms that modern psychiatry and psychology would label as thought disorder: the inability to distinguish inner subjective

states of psychic conflict from the objective reality of the external world. In madness, the person attempts to cling to the belief that his or her subjective presentation is objectively valid despite the contradictory evidence against it. Thus, the person is delusional. Hegel continues:

The Notion of madness just given implies that it need not stem from a vacant imagination, but that if an individual dwells so continually upon the past that he becomes incapable of adjusting to the present, feeling it to be both repulsive and restraining, it can easily be brought about by a stroke of great misfortune, by the derangement of a person's individual world, or by a violent upheaval which puts the world in general out of joint. (*EG* §408 Zusatz)

Here Hegel comes remarkably close to Freud's general theory of neurosis as the unconscious fixation of conflicted libidinal impulses, feelings, and experiences from the past that are transferred onto the present. This projected conflict, therefore, ultimately attenuates ego capacities that preclude the individual from effectively adapting to one's objective environment. Hegel's notion of madness hinges on the dialectical tumult that ensues between desire and reason, emphasizing the struggle to gain mastery over the mind's experience of pain and suffering. Ironically, insanity is a regressive withdrawal back to the abyss; rational consciousness reverted to the life of feeling as a therapeutic effort to ameliorate the "wounds of spirit."²⁶

For Hegel, the phenomenon of mental illness is primarily associated with the domains of the feeling soul, as the result of irreconcilable oppositions between the subjective and the objective.²⁷ In the face of perpetual contradiction and disunity, unconscious spirit engages in a retrogressive withdrawal back to the primordial tranquility of the abyss, and thus projects a sense of unity from within itself. Berthold-Bond has labeled this phenomenon as the "second face of desire," which constitutes a regression to an earlier nostalgia, a yearning calling consciousness back to the most archaic depths of its peacefulness. In madness, the archaic world of the unconscious draws the mind back to its original shape; subjective spirit is once again an undifferentiated oneness, as a return to the primitive merger within the symbiosis of its blissful inwardness. No longer driven by rational consciousness in its search for unity within the external world, spirit resorts to its earlier form, projecting its desires within fantasy. Perhaps on the most primitive level, spirit seeks to go to sleep once again, to return to a tensionless state and recover its lost unity with the Absolute. Therefore, the fundamental striving for unity leading to the movement

of withdrawal back into the abyss, is the basic structural dynamic of madness.²⁸ From the abyss spirit emanates, and from the abyss madness is informed. Thus, the unconscious becomes the playing field in both mental health and psychopathology.

6. Conclusions

Throughout this project, I have been primarily concerned with the realm and range of the unconscious abyss and its manifestations in the phenomenology of subjective spirit. Hegel focuses his attention primarily on the role of the abyss in the recollection stage of theoretical spirit. But by showing how it is anticipated in other parts of his philosophy, we have seen that the unconscious plays a central role in his overall philosophy. Throughout the evolution of spirit, there is unconscious spirit asleep within its nocturnal abyss only to be awakened from its internal slumbers to discover itself as soul, as the "life of feeling," and then it takes yet another shape as consciousness. As consciousness ascends toward the Absolute, every content of consciousness originally exists and is preserved unconsciously within the mode of feeling. Thus, the life of feeling is primordially associated with the domain of the abyss in all its archaic shapes. Therefore, originally, spirit manifests itself as the unconscious.

As a general structure, the unconscious is *aufgehoben*, continually being annulled, preserved, and elevated. The unrest of the dialectic perennially provides and re-provides the intra-psychic structures, operations, and contents of the unconscious as it redefines and re-configures itself through such movement. As a telic structure, "intelligence as this unconscious abyss," unconscious spirit is grounded in the subject. Thereby, the subjective ground of the abyss continually informs the dialectic throughout spirit's unfolding, transforming into new shapes in its drive toward unity and Truth, preserving old ones within the domain of the psychological.

There is a preponderance of evidence in traditional and contemporary psychoanalytic theory to conclude that the unconscious is dialectical both in its structural organization and its internal content.²⁹ This discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this investigation. In general, psychoanalysis would contend that the modes of the dialectic are themselves ego mechanisms of defense. For example, the process of the self returning to itself due to its own self-estrangement is what in psychoanalysis is called projective identification. This defensive maneuver of the ego or self is generated by

the projection of a certain aspect of the self onto the object world, which is then identified with and finally re-introjected back into the subject. In effect, the self rediscovers itself in the product of its own projection and then reintegrates itself within itself as reunification. The fundamental theoretical incompatibility, however, between the Hegelian unconscious and traditional psychoanalysis is that psychoanalysis seeks to reduce the dialectical functions of the mind to properties of defense, as the distinct operations of an independent agent within the mind, not as a unified and singular agent. The unconscious is overshadowed by negativity in both Hegel and psychoanalysis. For Hegel, however, the tempestuousness of the nocturnal abyss as dialectic is in the service of elevating spirit to higher forms, while in classical psychoanalysis, the dialectical maneuvers of the ego is in the service of defending itself from the monster within.

Despite fundamental differences in theory and method, Hegelian and psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the unconscious share many similarities, particularly in reference to the nature of desire and instinct, madness and neurosis, and the role of the dialectic. While Freud's metapsychology has incurred criticism due to its mechanistic and reductionistic natural science framework, its problematic epistemology, and its existential shortcomings,³⁰ there is much room for a reinterpretation of the unconscious, one that preserves the integrity of the self (and of spirit) as a telic agent without resulting in a conceptual scheme of the unconscious that is lost in biological reductionism. Perhaps Hegelian and psychoanalytic theory can offer something to one another.

At this point I wish to raise the question once again: to what degree does the unconscious resist being exalted or surpassed by the dialectic? Does the abyss resist being integrated into spirit? This would imply that the abyss would seemingly appear to have a will and a purpose all to its own. Is the urge for unity as the drive toward the Absolute simultaneously in opposition to a competing urge to withdraw in the face of nostalgia within the abyss of spirit's unconscious beginning? As the soul passes through its various configurations on the ladder toward Truth, does it draw itself back toward the pit of its feeling life? Such a tendency to withdraw back toward the pit, "could perhaps broach a wonder that one could never aspire to surpass."³¹ And if the abyss resists the call of spirit, to what degree does the unconscious inform reason yet remain "behind the back of consciousness?" Or is there simply a duality of purpose that spirit fights in-itself? Does desire have a double edge, that of moving forwards and backwards, of transcendence

and descendance? Does spirit struggle between competing inclinations of reason versus feeling, sublimation versus regression, elevation or withdrawal? Is the duality of desire spirit's nature; does it belong to spirit as such, or is spirit its slave?

Perhaps spirit is merely returning to itself, to the symbiotic abyss of its immediate determinant being. Does spirit merely seek to transform or to go to sleep once again? In this sense, the yearning for unity is a return to unity, always its end. Yet for Hegel, this end is always its beginning, the eternal return of the same. Thus, unconscious spirit remains a "riddle to itself."³² Perhaps the greatest conflict is spirit surpassing itself. In this sense, spirit resists itself, it resists the movement of its own becoming. Perhaps subjective spirit resists such integration for fear it will lose its sense of self in the collective; it fights its own process for fear of losing its individuality. From this standpoint, spirit can never rid itself of its desire for the recovery of its lost unity, of the yearning to return to its primitive existence, as its original condition. Perhaps the Absolute is merely the archetypal image of spirit's original unity. Perhaps spirit is even empathic to its own dilemma. I wonder. And with wonder comes wonder, as the abyss redefines itself one more time.

NOTES

1. I wish to sincerely thank John Sallis, Department of Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University, for his helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this project.
2. Cf. M. J. Petry (ed.), *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), Vol. 1: Introductions; Vol. 2: Anthropology; and Vol. 3: Phenomenology and Psychology. Hereafter, references to the Philosophy of Spirit (*Die Philosophie des Geistes*), which is the third part of Hegel's *Enzyklopädie*, will refer to *EG* followed by the Section number.
3. See Daniel Berthold-Bond, "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud on Madness and the Unconscious," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. V, No. 3 (1991), pp. 193-213; "Intentionality and Madness in Hegel's Psychology of Action," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (1992), pp. 427-441; "Hegel on Madness and Tragedy," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1994), pp. 71-99; *Hegel's Theory of Madness* (Albany: SUNY, 1995); and Darrel Christensen, "The Theory of Mental Derangement and the Role and Function of Subjectivity in Hegel," *The Personalist*, Vol. 49 (1968), pp. 433-453.
4. See Eric von der Luft's "Comment," in *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Albany: SUNY, 1994), p. 39.
5. See David Walsh, "The Historical Dialectic of Spirit: Jacob Boehme's Influence on Hegel," in Perkins, *History and System*, p. 16.
6. Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), p. 70.

7. Cf. Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), p. 148.
8. Weeks, p. 149.
9. Weeks, p. 148.
10. See Walsh, "Historical Dialectic."
11. Cf. Luft's "Comment," pp. 37-39.
12. Beech, Ch. 3.
13. See Beach, pp. 47-48 and footnotes 3 and 4 to Ch. 3.
14. Cf. Beach, p. 48.
15. Christensen discusses in depth the role and function of subjectivity in Hegel's philosophy.
16. See Petry, Notes to Vol. 3, p. 405.
17. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §91.
18. Hegel discusses this in the Introduction to his *Philosophy of Nature*. See *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). See also Berthold-Bond, "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud."
19. John Sallis explores this issue in depth in *Spacings—of Reason and Imagination in Texts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
20. Cf. Sallis, *Spacings*, p. 152.
21. Berthold-Bond, in "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud on Madness and the Unconscious," demonstrates how Nietzsche and Freud have parallel psychologies of the unconscious that are linked to the body as instinct.
22. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §22.
23. Jerome D. Levin, in *Theories of the Self* (Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere, 1992), also discusses this point.
24. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §32.
25. See note 3.
26. Berthold-Bond, in "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud on Madness and the Unconscious," points out how Hegel's notion of insanity is spirit's self-attempt at healing itself via regression and withdrawal. This notion runs parallel to Freud's theory of repetition compulsion as an expression of the death instinct. In contemporary psychoanalysis, the compulsion to unconsciously repeat traumatic past experiences may be generally interpreted as a means of gaining mastery and control over internal conflict or as an attempt to procure object detachments or love.
27. Christensen, in "The Theory of Mental Derangement," interprets Hegel's central theory of mental derangement as centering on the dialectical opposition between the feeling soul and the physical soul.
28. See Berthold-Bond's general review of Hegel's theory of madness in the works cited in Note 3.
29. Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious is organized by the dialectical exchange of psychic forces that seek to maintain homeostasis within the closed system of the organism. Within all psychoanalytic disciplines since Freud, there appears to be a universal dialectical interplay between the subject and the object. Historically, the post-classical movement in psychoanalysis emphasized the role of the ego as agent of unconscious activity and focused on the ego's motives toward mastery and adaptation of inner forces via defensive construction and cognitive transcendence over instinctual demands. While the

classical position emphasized the pleasure-seeking aims of instinctual drives, object relations theories have emphasized the primacy of object (people) seeking as the central motive of unconscious activity oriented toward interpersonal involvement and relational attachment. Self psychology introduced the centrality of the self as agent unconsciously motivated toward fulfilling "selfobject" needs of empathic attunement and validation from others, mirroring of self-worth from the object world, and the pursuit of idealized relationships all in the narcissistic service of the self. While the field of psychoanalysis has radically departed from Freud's metapsychology and presently centers on theories of object relations and contemporary selfobject theory, Freud's psychoanalytic theory remains subsumed as the theoretical foundation of contemporary thought. However, whether unconscious motivation emanates from the influence of instinctual drives, the ego, object relations, or the self, all disciplines within the historical development of psychoanalysis observe the phenomenology of the dialectic. For a review, see Howard A. Bacal and Kenneth M. Newman, *Theories of Object Relations: Bridges to Self Psychology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Steven A. Mitchell, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, eds. A. Goldberg and P. Stepansky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

30. Cf. Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "The Crisis in Psychoanalysis: Resolution through Husserlian Phenomenology and Feminism," *Human Studies*, Vol. 14, (1991), pp. 33-66; Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Charles Hanly, *Existentialism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: International Universities Press, 1979).

31. Cf. Sallis, *Spacings*, p. 157.

32. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §365.