
HEGEL ON THE UNCONSCIOUS SOUL

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One of the most overlooked aspects of Hegel's philosophy is his views on the unconscious. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that he makes very few references to the unconscious. Indeed, his account is limited to only a few passages in the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. While Hegel did not explicitly develop a formal theory of the unconscious, nor include it as a cardinal element of his Anthropology or Psychology,¹ he certainly did not ignore the issue. From the *Encyclopaedia*,² Hegel refers to the unconscious operations of subjective spirit as a "nightlike abyss." It is important to understand what Hegel means by this nocturnal abyss and specifically how it prefigures into his theory of the feeling soul where the first textual references to the unconscious occur (see *EG* §§ 403, 405). Despite a few noteworthy exceptions centering on Hegel's theory of mental illness,³ Hegel's treatment of the unconscious processes

1. For a full account of Hegel's treatment of the unconscious in his Anthropology and Psychology, see my article, "Hegel on the Unconscious Abyss: Implications for Psychoanalysis," *The Owl of Minerva*, 1996, 28:1, pp. 59-75.

2. From the *Encyclopaedia*, M.J. Petry (Ed.), outlines Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit in *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, Vol. 1: Introductions; Vol. 2: Anthropology; and Vol. 3: Phenomenology and Psychology, (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1978). Petry's edition provides a photographic reproduction of Hegel's original text published in 1830 along with the *Zusätze* added by Boumann when the material was republished in 1845. Petry's edition also indicates variations between the 1827 and 1830 editions of the *Encyclopaedia*. His edition has several decisive advantages over A.V. Miller's edition of the *Philosophie des Geistes* translated as the *Philosophy of Mind*. In addition to having the original German text and his notations of the variations between the 1827 and 1830 editions, Petry also provides notes from the *Griesheim* and *Kehler* manuscripts. He further provides an accurate translation of the word "unconscious" (*bewußtlos*) whereas Miller refers to the "subconscious." For these reasons Petry's edition is a superior text to the Miller translation. For comparison, I have also examined Hegel's 1827-28 lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994). I have mainly relied on Petry's translation but provide my own in places that warrant changes. 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. References to the *Zusätze* are identified as such.

3. See Daniel Berthold-Bond's, "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 Cristensen, "The

of the soul has been largely under-emphasized.⁴ In fact, the unconscious soul becomes the birth of *Geist*, and thus plays an indispensable role in the ontological development of the higher faculties of spirit.

When examined more closely, Hegel's theory of the soul shows many parallels to theosophic and neo-Platonic thought. It will be the overall focus of this article to explicate Hegel's position on the ontology of the abyss in relation to its theosophic and neo-Platonic origins, thus showing how his historical predecessors impacted on his thinking. This issue becomes significant because the metaphysical status of the unconscious assumes a central position in Hegel's overall philosophy.

Unconsciousness and the Unconscious

Hegel employs the term "unconscious" (*bewußtlos*) in a few limited contexts, in which it carries a variety of meanings. While not formally distinguished by Hegel, we may say there are five distinct usages of "unconsciousness:" (1) That which lacks consciousness, such as the Idea outside of itself instantiated in nature; (2) A state or condition of spirit as non or *unself*-consciousness; (3) A realm that is other-than or dialectically opposed to consciousness; (4) That which is outside of or beyond spirit in its current moment, which we may either attribute to (a) the realm of pure potentiality not yet actualized by spirit (which would correspond to the second definition), or (b) that which is negativity itself and thus a central feature in spirit's development; and (5) A pre-rational unconscious ground or abyss (*Schacht*, *Abgrund*, or *Ungrund*) that serves as the foundation for all forms of spirit to manifest themselves. This last definition will concern us the most, because Spirit emanates from and is the logical completion of an unconscious ontology.

Hegel largely limits the scope of the unconscious to individual psychology, for the "concrete existence" of spirit as "the I or pure self-consciousness" resides in the domain of "individual personality."⁵ Always in a state of turbulent activity, the "I" (*Ich*) as pure self-consciousness is individual personality in the form of Self. For Hegel, the self as a process of becoming is a complex whole whose "own restless nature impels it to actualize itself, to unfold into actuality . . . that whole,

Theory of Mental Derangement and the Role and Function of Subjectivity in Hegel," *The Personalist*, Vol. 49, 1968, pp. 433-453.

4. Errol Harris provides a comprehensive treatment of the soul in, "Hegel's Theory of Feeling," In Warren E. Steinkraus (Ed). *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); and "Hegel's Anthropology," *Owl of Minerva*, 1993, 25(1), 5-14; however, he under-emphasizes the unconscious structures and operations the soul has on spirit's subsequent development.

5. *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1812/1969), p. 583. Hereafter, all references to the *Science of Logic* will refer to SL followed by the section and page number.

of which to begin with it contained only the possibility."⁶ In its conceptual totality, the Self is the Absolute as the Concept or complex whole.⁷

Hegel's account of the concrete actuality of the Concept as individual personality may be said to account for a theory of human psychology with unconscious elements always prefiguring intrapsychic and logical operations of thought. In fact, the unconscious makes thought possible. Yet for Hegel, individuality is ultimately explained within the larger context of a collective historical anthropology that informs human relations and the coming to presence of pure self-consciousness. In this sense, we may say that the unconscious is not only non self-consciousness, which is much of world history until spirit returns to itself and comes to understand its process, but is furthermore the competing and antithetical organizations of "impulses" (*Triebe*) that are "instinctively active," whose "basis is the soul [*Seele*] itself" (*SL*, p. 37) which informs spirit's burgeoning process.

Hegel is concerned not only about explaining individual psychology, but also about providing a universal, anthropological account of humankind. For Hegel, individuality is ultimately subordinated to higher social orders constituted in society by participating in the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) of a collective community. This participation rests on the development of a continuous psychosocial matrix of relations that has its origin in the family.⁸ The communal spirit and the ethical law embodied within the family of communal consciousness arises from "the power of the nether world"—what one might not inappropriately call the collective unconscious.⁹ For Hegel, collective spirit "binds all into one, solely in the mute unconscious substance of all" (*PS* § 474). This "unconscious universality" contains the ethical order as divine law as well as the "pathos" of humanity, the "darkness" of the "underworld" (*PS* § 474). Hegel states:

[H]uman law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy—and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth; through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity. (*PS* § 460)

Almost a full century before the emergence of depth psychology, Hegel's psychological insights are profound. In this passage, he clearly recognizes that the

6. *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, & H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1817/1991) § 143. Hereafter, all references to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* will refer to *EL* followed by the section number.

7. Sean Kelly provides an illuminating and comprehensive account of Hegel's theory of complex holism in relation to Jung. Cf. *Individuation and the Absolute: Hegel, Jung, and the Path Toward Wholeness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), pp. 29-30.

8. Cf. Ch. 3. "The Psycho-Social Matrix," in Kelly's, *Individuation and the Absolute*.

9. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1807/1977), § 462. Hereafter, all references to the *Phenomenology* will refer to *PS* followed by the section number.

personal and collective unconscious developmentally and logically precedes consciousness and further sees that each domain maintains its dialectical relation with the other.¹⁰

Universal self-conscious Spirit “becomes, through the individuality of man, united with its other extreme, its force and element, *unconscious Spirit*” (PS § 463). Yet as Hegel points out, there is always a fundamental tension between the drive toward individuality and subordination to the collective:

The Family, as the *unconscious*, still inner Concept [of the ethical order], stands opposed to its actual, self-conscious existence; as the *element* of the nation’s actual existence, it stands opposed to the nation itself; as the *immediate* being of the ethical order, it stands over against that order which shapes and maintains itself by working for the universal. (PS § 450)

The family is the locus of identification and the determinant stimulus for the internalization of value—the Idéal. As a result, it becomes the matrix affecting the deep structures of the unconscious and the organization of social life. Yet for Hegel, the dialectical tensions organized within the unconscious of the individual and the collective unconscious of the community will always insure “a conflict of self-conscious Spirit with what is unconscious” (PS § 474).

The universalization or actualization of the unconscious becomes important for Hegel in the depiction of spirit as a dynamically informed, self-articulated totality or complex whole. Thus he not only focuses on human psychology and collective unconscious forces that determine individual and social relations, but also points to the generic structural operations of the mind that have their origins in the unconscious which make human consciousness and thought possible. It is this latter point that we will be concerned with here. In the Second Preface to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel states:

The activity of thought which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions is, as we have said, *unconsciously busy* . . . [E]ach individual animal is such individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed. (SL, pp. 36-37, italics added)

Hegel is clear that unconscious activity underlies all dimensions of human subjectivity, from the determinate negativity of death and desire to the emergence of thought and higher forms of reason. He further underscores the point that the unconscious is tied to our natural constitution or animal evolutionary past. The notion of the unconscious as determinate negativity is the dynamic foundation or ground of spirit and is therefore at least partly responsible for its dialectical ascendance toward the Absolute. In the night of the mind, desire and reason co-exist in dialectical tumult as spirit attempts to develop a unity from its unconscious beginnings. For our purposes here, it becomes important to explore this

10. See Kelly’s discussion with reference to Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious, p. 62.

fundamental relation between desire and reason first instantiated as a primal ground or *abyss*.

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 organizations, operations, contents, and intrapsychic 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 *Aufhebung* 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.¹¹ 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 however, preserved within its new forms and co-exists with universality. Therefore, at various levels of the phenomenology, the subjective components of the dialectic will have greater unconscious influence on the vicissitudes of the self in its ascendance toward the Absolute. By virtue of its implicitness, the realm of the abyss is a central principle in the phenomenology of spirit.

Hegel first makes reference to the unconscious within the stage 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* § 453, p. 153). Hegel offers no explanation of the nature of this nocturnal abyss; he says only that it is a necessary presupposition for imagination and for higher forms of intelligence to occur.¹² In fact, 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. Although not formalized, Hegel anticipates the abyss:

... 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*, Zusatz to § 389, p. 9)

11. See § 18, p. 10 of the *Phenomenology*. Cristensen (1968) also discusses in depth the role and function of subjectivity in Hegel's philosophy.

12. See Petry (1978), Notes to Vol. 3, p. 405.

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" (p. 59). 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, p. 19)

The presence of subjective spirit in its initial unfolding as soul only to become the ego of 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 birthplace of spirit.

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, p. 79)

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.¹³ 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 articulates, "As soul, spirit has the form of substantial universality" (*EG* § 414, p. 9); 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, p. 9)

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,' a subjective ownership 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 under-

13. Hegel discusses this in the Introduction of the *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), Vol. 2 of the *Encyclopaedia*. Berthold-Bond (1991) also discusses this point.

standing 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 §§ 418, 446, p. 19). 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 in 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, Zusatz to § 446, p. 119). 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. In the third instance, feeling becomes the “initial form assumed by spirit as such” which is the truth and unity of the soul and consciousness (EG § 446, p. 119). 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 tantamount 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.

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 Boehme, neo-Platonism, and Schelling. The concept of the abyss (*Ungrund*) derives from Boehme’s theosophic Christianity. Inspired by the study of Plotinus,¹⁴ Boehme radically reconceptualized God as the *ens manifestativum sui*, “the being whose essence is to reveal itself.”¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ At one time, scholars thought that

14. See Eric von der Luft’s “Comment,” in *History and System: Hegel’s Philosophy of History*, Ed. by Robert L. Perkins, (Albany: SUNY, 1994), p. 39.

15. Refer to David Walsh’s, “The Historical Dialectic of Spirit: Jacob Boehme’s Influence on Hegel,” in Perkins’ *History and System*, p. 16.

16. Cf. Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology*, (Albany: SUNY, 1994), p. 70.

Boehme's term *Ungrund* originated in the Gnostic 'abyss,' since there are shared similarities between the two.¹⁷ But Koyré has cogently disputed this claim, interpreting Boehme's notion of the abyss as the "ground without a ground."¹⁸ Before the divine *Ungrund* emerges, there is no source of determination, there is nothing; the *Ungrund* is merely "unfathomable" and "incomprehensible."

The *Ungrund* is the uncertainty which precedes the divine will's arousing itself to self-awareness.¹⁹

Furthermore, Boehme's *Ungrund* acts as a subject who desires: "it 'seeks,' it 'longs,' it 'sees,' and it 'finds.'"²⁰

While Hegel does give testimony to Boehme,²¹ he probably owes more to Proclus (through Creuzer), Plotinus, Erigena, and Schelling.²² Boehme's impact on Schelling was considerable; and Schelling was among the very first philosophers to underscore the importance of the unconscious and the role of irrationality in human experience.²³ However, it was two arch-rationalists, Leibniz and Kant, who paved the way for this development. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz propounded a theory of unconscious *petites perceptions*. Kant, in his *Anthropology*, discussed the nature of "obscure presentations"

17. There are many different systems of Gnosticism that offer varying accounts on the nature of first principles and the coming into being of God and the universe. However, a cardinal element of Gnostic thought is a radical dualism that governs the relation between God and the world. Gnostics conceive of God as the "Alien" or the "first" "Life." This appears in a standard introduction of Mandaean compositions: "In the name of the great first alien Life from the worlds of light, the sublime that stands above all," and is reflected throughout gnostic literature such as Marcion's concept of the "alien God," "the Other," "the Nameless," "the Hidden," "the Unknown," and the "unknown Father." Belonging to another (nether) world, the divine 'alien' is "strange" and "unfamiliar," hence "incomprehensible." Estranged from the comprehensible world, the "great first Life" is conceived of as possessing both positive and negative attributes of superiority and suffering, perfection and tragedy, transcendence and alienation from its original being. Further competing dialectical forces are attributed to the godhead which are understood differently by various gnostic myths and theories on cosmology, cosmogony, and anthropology. The second century gnostic, Basilides, is said to have postulated a primal "non-existent god," which was later taken up by Valentinus who claimed that "there is in invisible and ineffable heights a pre-existent perfect aeon (i.e. a supernatural being), whom they also call Pre-beginning, Forefather and Primal Ground (*Bythos*), that he is inconceivable and invisible, eternal and uncreated (or begotten) and that he existed in great peace and stillness in unending spaces (*aeons*)" (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 11). Due to the indescribable nature of the "divine Absolute," the Valentinians were content with using a few alchemical symbols as "Abyss" or "Silence" to represent the ineffable. See Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 42, 49-50, 199; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 62; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. W.W. Harvey, 2 vols., (Cambridge, 1857; reprint Ridgewood, New Jersey, 1965).

18. Cf. Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, (Albany, SUNY, 1991), p. 148.

19. Weeks, p. 149.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

21. See David Walsh's essay in Perkins, *History and System*, Ch. 2.

22. Cf. Eric von der Luft's "Comment," in *History and System*, pp. 37-39.

23. Cf. Edward Allen Beach, 1994, Ch. 3.

(*dunkle Vorstellungen*) that remain just below the level of conscious awareness.²⁴ 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.²⁵

Boehme's Influence on Hegel

Perhaps remembered more for his legend rather than his ideas, the 17th-Century philosopher, mystic, and theosophist, Jacob Boehme, is considered an intellectual giant among early German philosophers. As a forerunner of the German Romantic movement, Boehme was an inspiration to poets and intellectuals and was also praised by philosophers such as Baader, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel—leading Hegel to further credit Boehme as “the first German philosopher.”²⁶ Through Boehme, German philosophy had come into its own. Heralded as the self-proclaimed *Philosophus Teutonicus* or the *Philosophus der Einfältigen* (“philosopher of the simple folk”), Boehme's major works include the *Aurora* or the *Morgenröthe im Aufgang* (1612) and *Mysterium Magnum* (1623).²⁷ Known for his supposed insights into the divine nature, the origin and structure of the universe, and the hidden mysteries of the bible, Boehme was above all concerned with the human subject, and particularly the soul.

In *Forty Questions on the Soul* (1620), Boehme provides an account of the origins of the soul and for the first time refers to the mystical being of the deity as the *Ungrund* (the “unground”).²⁸ Prompted by Balthasar Walter, Boehme's friend who had researched the secrets of the Jewish Kabbalah in the Near East, Boehme set out to describe ten forms of the soul. Andrew Weeks (1991) informs us that Walter may have influenced Boehme's questions as well as his answers

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48 and footnotes 3 and 4 to Ch. 3.

25. Cf. F.W.J. Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*. Peter Heath (Trans). *System of Transcendental Idealism*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1800/1978). Schelling's *System* offers an ontological account of mind that no philosopher until him had dared to postulate—the unconscious became the *sine qua non* of psychic life. While having its rudiments in neo-Platonism, advanced by Boehme, posited by Leibniz but merely implicit in Fichte, Schelling was the first to offer a coherent and systematic theory of the unconscious. His insistence on the primacy of the unconscious may be summed up by comments like this: “nature begins as unconscious and ends as conscious” where “unconscious activity operates . . . through the conscious” (*STI*, p. 219). Nowhere do we encounter a more transparent account of the centrality of the unconscious until von Hartmann and Freud.

26. Hegel, “Jakob Böhme,” in *Werke* 20 (*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* 3) (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 91-119.

27. The readily available German editions of Boehme's works are *Die Urschriften*. 2 vols. Edited by Werner Buddecke. (Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1963 and 1966); and *Sämtliche Schriften*. 11 vols. Edited by Will-Erich Peuckert & August Faust. (Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1955-61) (originally published in 1730). Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, citations are referenced to the reprinted facsimile 1730 edition of *Sämtliche Schriften* by volume, page, and section number.

28. Boehme, *Forty Questions*, (III 11/1.15); Cf. pp. 146-149 in Weeks.

which correspond to the sefirot or the ten emanations of the Kabbalah, thus providing the prototype for the ten forms the soul may assume. Ten is also of eschatological significance to Boehme, because the number ten contains a one and a null. The *Ungrund* is everything yet nothing, both unification and void.

While Boehme may have borrowed the Kabbalic notion of cosmic evolution that precipitates from the Divine Unity,²⁹ another major source of influence on Boehme was hermeticism,³⁰ an occult practice thought to have been known to Boehme through the writings of Paracelsus,³¹ a tradition employing the use of alchemical symbols and allegories that explain the Deity.³² Drawing upon the use of astronomical world-models that were often designed by mathematicians and scientists during his time, Boehme diagrammed his own model of the solar system in *The Threefold Life of Man* (1620). It is in the *Forty Questions*, however, where he provides an intricate interpretation of the subtle symbolism that characterizes the spheres of the Divine Being. Boehme's mystical circle-symbolism stands in a tradition that dates back to Cusanus and ultimately Parmenides.³³ Symbolized by Boehme's mystical configurations of the Divine Being, the V (designating the *Ungrund*) is dialectically opposed to the A (for *Anfang* or *Alpha*) which is encased in the empty mirror or eye of eternity, designated by O. In constructing the mystical cell of the Divine Being, Boehme further designed a "Philosophical Globe" or "Wonder-Eye of Eternity" that encompasses numerous other philosophical elements constituting his theosophic cosmology. Boehme's "Globe" is designed to show the interface and circumscription of the created world by the mirroring spheres of night and light. Eternity—the Godhead—is the polarization of life and death, light and darkness, being and nothingness.

In *Forty Questions on the Soul*, Boehme moves toward the neo-Platonic pole of his thought, for he focuses on the eternity of forms within the soul. In response to the question: "Where, from the beginning of the world, does the soul originate?" Boehme replies that by way of reason (*aus der Vernunft*), all things have their origin in eternity (III 8/1.3ff). "Before the divine *Ungrund*, there is nothing, no source of determination."³⁴ Following Koyré's interpretation: "L'*Ungrund* . . . est l'Absolu absolument indéterminé, l'Absolu libre de toute détermination,"³⁵ the *Ungrund* is the Absolute, absolutely indetermined,

29. Cf. Will-Erich Peuckert, *Das Leben Jakob Böhmes* (Jena: E. Dieterichs, 1924), p. 101.

30. Cf. Ingrid Merkel, "Aurora; or, The Rising Sun of Allegory: Hermetic Imagery in the Work of Jakob Böhme," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in early Modern Europe*, ed. I. Merkel & A.G. Debus (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988), pp. 302-310.

31. See R.H. Hvolbel, "Was Jakob Böhme a Paracelsian?" *Hermetic Journal* (Spring, 1983, 19), pp. 6-17.

32. Refer to Beach's review, p. 69.

33. See Weeks, p. 147 and footnote 29, p. 240.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

35. Alexandre Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (New York: Franklin, 1968; originally published in Paris: Vrin, 1929; reissued, 1979), p. 281.

the Absolute free of all determination. Here we may see the idealism that parallels Hegel's thought. Spirit first awakens from within itself and then takes itself as its first form, only to progressively move away from itself and then back into itself through its many appearances on its long dialectical ascendance toward absolute self-consciousness. Hegel's notion of spirit in its initial unfolding closely resembles the coming to presence of Boehme's Divine Being. Boehme's *Ungrund* is the abyss of eternity that is absolutely indeterminate subjectivity. For Boehme, like Hegel, the 'unground,' as the groundless ground, behaves as a desiring subject who grounds itself within its own determinations through its burgeoning process of becoming.

Weeks notes that prior to the textual occurrence of the noun *Ungrund*, Boehme uses the adjective *ungründlich*, meaning "unfathomable" or inconceivable. This may correspond to the Kantian view of the noumenal realm of pure reason; absolute knowledge of the *Ding-an-sich* is foreclosed from our awareness—it must always remain unknown.³⁶ As such, the *Ungrund* is ineffable, in a word, indescribable. And like Koyré, whatever exists is always in relation to the "impossible."³⁷ But Boehme was not content with the silent impotence of reason; the impossible must be named and given substantive form. Thus, what is 'abysmal' for Boehme is retrieved from the lair of the unknown and assimilated into the experience of the devout subject.

'About the final ground of God one cannot be certain.' And: 'The final ground of God is Uncertainty.' In the first instance, the seeking subject is cut off from the unknown object of its contemplation. In the second instance, the subject has recognized its inner longing for the deity as akin to the Divine Unknown . . . the uncertainty and tormented freedom of the self has been recognized in its relationship to the ultimate ground of divinity. The unknown divine object is reflected in the self-knowledge of the subject. The *Ungrund* is the uncertainty which precedes the divine will's arousing itself to self-awareness (though in the deity this 'happens' in eternity).³⁸

Like Boehme, Hegel was also intent on showing the knowability of the unknown. But unlike relying on the faith of the devout seeker, Hegel argues that there is nothing we can know more easily than the thing-in-itself, because the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal is a distinction in thought.³⁹ For Hegel, Kant's view of the noumenal was "completely abstract, or totally empty." Positing something that is out of reach of the mind is incoherent; if it were out of reach, one couldn't be positing it in the first place. And it is

36. In the context of Lacanian psychoanalytic thought, *ungründlich* would be equivalent to desire. For Lacan, desire is always beyond itself, it is the realm of the transcendent. Encased in the domain of the unconscious, the *Ungrund* is that realm of psychic territory we can never know in-itself, it is simply the Real (*réel*), or more appropriately, the *unreal*.

37. Koyré, *Galileo Studies* (Brighton: Harvester, 1977); Cf. Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 104 and endnote 3, p. 187.

38. Weeks, p. 149.

39. See *Encyclopaedia Logic*, § 44.

precisely the distinction between what can be experienced and what can only be thought that Hegel is attempting to annul. The very movement of thought hinges on a negative dialectic—something can only be known in relation to what it is not.

For both Boehme and Hegel, the origin of God and Spirit respectively, may be viewed as original Being, an eternal abyss from which both awakened to their own immediate determinateness. As Hegel states: “The beginning of spirit is therefore nothing but its own being, and it therefore relates itself only to its own determinations” (*EG* § 440). Similarly for Boehme,

God is in Himself the *Ungrund*, as the first world, about which no creature knows anything, for it stands with its body and spirit in the ground alone: Even God would therefore not be manifest [*offenbar*] to Himself in the *Ungrund*; but His wisdom has from eternity become His ground, for which the eternal will of the *Ungrund* has lusted, from which the divine imagination has arisen. (*The Human Genesis of Christ*, 1620; IV 127/II.3.5)

Boehme, like Hegel, points to the notion that the *Ungrund* is the presupposition for the manifestation of God (or Spirit) to occur. Like God who would not be manifest to himself in the abyss itself, Spirit also must emerge from its unconscious fountain to take its initial forms as soul and consciousness. For both thinkers, the *Ungrund* is “the first world,” the *underworld* that precedes all else from which desire and thought arise. Yet this underworld is eternal—As original Being, God and Spirit may not be properly said to have a beginning or end, even if they are coextensive with the temporal unfolding of world history.⁴⁰ In the *Aurora*, Boehme says, “In his depth (i.e., in the *Ungrund*), God himself does not know what he is. For he knows no beginning, and also nothing like himself, and also no end.”⁴¹ God and Spirit respectively, must project their own essence into the world in order to arrive at complete self-actualization as the coming to presence of pure subjectivity. It is only when God and Spirit encounter their own opposition as self-willed independence that self-consciousness (self-revelation) occurs. Within their dialectical polarities, perhaps the *Ungrund* is also an *Überwelt* (overworld); the supernatural space where under and over are equivocated, for they are one and the same. For spirit and the deity, they “seek,” they “will,” and they “lust” for “wisdom,” a longing to complete themselves. Here we

40. Hegelians are unresolvably divided on the question surrounding the ambiguity of the end of world history due to the self-actualization of Absolute Spirit. I am inclined, however, to interpret the dialectical unfolding of spirit as a continuous, temporal process of becoming. While Hegel saw spirit through to its end, that is, to its pure self-consciousness, this does not mean that spirit no longer permeates world history nor does it imply that spirit completed itself during the time Hegel completed his System of Science. If we are to conceive of Hegel’s dialectical system as a never-ending teleological development, then spirit is a temporal process that always seeks to understand its own process of becoming in the moment (in *this* moment); an activity that never completely vanishes, but rather seeks to incorporate history within its higher forms of self-understanding.

41. *Morgenröte*, Ch. 23, par. 17; cf. trans., par. 18, p. 230.

may further see a symmetry between the *Ungrund* and Freud's notion of the unconscious; reason (mediated by ego) and higher levels of self-consciousness (superego) develop out of natural desire (id) from its primordial subjectivity. Furthermore, for Hegel and Boehme, spirit is self-positing—the deity may only manifest through an act of will.

The mystical speculations of Boehme draw on the use of antithesis to explain the *Ungrund*.

“God's emergence out of pure oneness into differentiated actuality required a confrontation with opposition. It was out of this creative struggle that the sensible universe issued forth.”⁴² God is a world beyond this world and beyond direct knowledge as such, yet the divine object is mirrored in the self-knowledge of the subject. As the soul impregnates itself by reflection, yearning, and imaginative faith, the believer approaches knowledge of the divine by “transforming itself into the mirror of the hidden God.”⁴³

Furthermore, God comes to know himself as “ground” through his desire for self-actualization; “His wisdom has from eternity become His ground, for which the eternal will . . . has lusted” (IV 127/II.3.5). This statement by Boehme may suggest that the deity had experienced eternal wisdom that had at some point been alienated from his being. As alienated knowledge, the *Ungrund* awakens from within itself only to desire what had been previously both eternal and estranged. Here we may see an allusion to the desire for recognition that is such a prevalent theme of the Hegelian corpus—The deity desires *itself*, his own self-recognition. Yet for Boehme, the *Ungrund* is originally a primal “darkness,” a nocturnal will that proceeds through a series of developmental stages that forms the world-creative process. It is through this self-unfolding that the deity initially draws into itself, into its darkness before it manifests as a creative will. The initial withdrawal into itself forms the core of being which becomes the ground (*Grund*) of all subsequent stages.⁴⁴ The process of God's will toward manifestation as a spiritual “hunger” for “wisdom” may also be said to mirror Hegel's account of unconscious spirit that awakens from within its “nightlike abyss” and “intuits” itself as feeling soul before it unfolds toward the Concept as its Absolute self-knowing. Both philosophers employ a dialectic that emerges from undifferentiated unity and passes through a process of differentiation and reunification, constituted in and through a dialectically self-articulated holism. It is Hegel, however, who places more emphasis on the dynamic circularity of the drive toward reason, while Boehme's dialectic is less rational and more volitional, thus becoming more attractive to Schelling's conceptualization of the divine will and the ontology of irrationality.

At this point it becomes important to emphasize the essential metaphysical

42. Beach, p. 71.

43. Weeks, p. 149.

44. Cf. Beach, *The Potencies of God(s)*, 1994, p. 72.

similarities and dissimilarities between Boehme's divine being and Hegel's concept of spirit. Like subjective spirit, Boehme's *Ungrund* is a desirous subject who seeks to become fully self-actualized. It is only through a self-imposed aspect of limitation that the godhead can emerge and experience his epiphany in nature so he may become self-conscious. Edward Allen Beach (1994) explains this process:

In the finite creature . . . God found his own revelation reflected as, in a mirror. Böhme reasoned that because God desired to reveal himself to himself, and because revelation required a sensible (i.e., experienceable) embodiment, therefore God had to become sensible in order to satisfy his need for self-revelation. Thus, the dialectical drive toward self-awareness within God's originally inchoate will was what gave rise to the spiritual as well as the material universe.⁴⁵

But unlike Boehme whose god is only known sensuously, Hegel's spirit is ultimately the embodiment of Absolute Being. As pure self-consciousness, spirit transcends its corporeal, sensuous nature through reason while at the same time it becomes instantiated within the concrete universals that comprise nature and culture.⁴⁶ For Hegel, spirit moves beyond intuition to thought that belongs to its self-conception proper, viz., its non-sensuous self-actualization. Nature is only an intermediate step in the process for spirit to realize itself. Yet despite this divergence, the ontology of spirit and the godhead emerge from a process of self-negation.

There are remarkable similarities between the initial stages of spirit and the deity's coming into being: (1) Both emerge from an initial darkness, a nocturnal abyss that contains the potentiality of becoming actual and concrete; (2) Both seek self-manifestation, a longing or desire to know itself; (3) This necessarily gives rise to a negative dialectic. The darkness of the will conflicts with its will to manifest which sparks the creative process, or in Hegelian terms, spirit moves from its initial intuition of itself as inner feeling to external sensuousness as consciousness and eventually self-consciousness through the process of negation; (4) Moreover, the initial movement of drawing in upon itself is present in both concepts and forms the foundation or ground of all succeeding stages to transpire; (5) Both spirit and the deity achieve self-recognition through the form of concrete self-alienation; and (6) Both seek to acquire (or return to) an original unity.

The positive significance of the negative that informs the dialectic is unmistakably a central aspect of both systems. However, Hegel's dialectic is significantly distinct and more rigorously articulated from Boehme's who relies on a firm antithesis between god's three distinct wills. Although Hegel's dialectic offers the theoretical sophistication of a formally logical system, Boehme's emphasis on conflict, self-destruction and lack informs the very process of becoming,

45. Beach, p. 70.

46. Especially see sections 721-723 of the *Phenomenology*, pp. 436-438.

the driving force behind Hegel's articulation of *Geist*. Beach informs us that for Boehme, the primal abyss of god undergoes a suffering due to the "darkness" that envelops his will, thus preventing him from becoming manifest to himself. Analogous to the indeterminate Void in Buddhism or to the *ain soph* in the Kabbalah,⁴⁷ the "no-thingness" of god's undifferentiated unity underwent its initial differentiation through the experience of "longing" or "hunger," a hunger to know itself, to become manifest—"the craving to draw into itself" (*die Sucht, in sich zu ziehen*).⁴⁸

Boehme argued that there must be a transition between the unmanifest (nonbeing) *Ungrund's* need to become manifest to itself and the coming-to-presence of a manifest being that stands in opposition to itself. Like unconscious spirit, the unmanifest *Ungrund* precedes all existence and is completely undifferentiated (homogenous), yet it paradoxically has the innate propensity to divide itself into contraries, and thus pass from an undifferentiated unity into a self-differentiating unity. In the deity's initial inwardness, as inverted will, will-as-desire, Boehme reasoned that there must have been a prolonged longing that was incapable of being satisfied, and thus took its form as a fierce "fire" of chaos that burned internally without giving light. The inner blaze was the quality of the divine wrath or bitterness (*Grimmigkeit*) that turned on itself and consumed its own substance. Such self-consumption gave rise to a self-destruction that took the form of a painful anguish which the deity suffered.⁴⁹ And after the divine bitterness turned its destructive drive toward itself, a dramatic reversal occurred. "The anguished negation of free self-manifestation was itself negated: with a violent thunderclap, that harsh first principle overcame its own harshness, and a joyous light supervened. This symbolized the emergence of harmony and order out of original chaos."⁵⁰ Boehme speculated that the polarization of the two wills was mediated by a third will that formed the creative impulse in which the universe evolved. The bifurcation of the positive and negative wills of the godhead are the necessary conditions that sustain the cosmos. Negativity and conflict form the very foundation for all subsequent stages to occur.

The ontology of the *Ungrund* has important implications for Hegel's system, a system that feeds off its own circularity as spirit elevates itself to the pinnacle of self-actualization. The *Ungrund* becomes the primal ground of spirit, its original Being, an edifice that always informs the shapes of Spirit. While Boehme's reasoning was far from systematic or exacting, he nevertheless attempted to account for the emergence of existence out of possibility and multiplicity out of

47. Cf. Beach, p. 72

48. Cf. Boehme, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 3, chap. 1, par. 66; also *Forty Questions*, in vol. 2 of *The Works*, Law edition, par. 81, p. 16.

49. This original aggression turned inward may be seen operative in the psychodynamics of the death drive and depression. Cf. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, and "Mourning and Melancholia," 1917, Standard Edition, vols. 18 & 14.

50. Beach, p. 73. Cf. *Drey Princ.* chap. 2, par. 9; trans., par. 9, p.14.

unity, a task Hegel's system specifies. Conceiving of the divine principles based on the supernatural fusion of psychological and alchemical properties rather than on formally logical or objective laws, Boehme's theosophy may be said to be merely a preface to Hegel's system, a preface that nevertheless appears over and over again in a new guise. By emphasizing the experience of absence, craving, striving, and conflict that characterizes divinity and human consciousness, Boehme was a harbinger for modern philosophies of the will.

From Boehme to Neo-Platonism

The exact nature of the historical influence on Hegel's conception of the unconscious may never be fully known. There is some debate regarding just how much Hegel was directly influenced by Boehme—ranging from a profound indebtedness to Boehme, to the claim that he was merely a peripheral figure. David Walsh (1984) argues that Boehme's impact on Hegel was considerable, which substantially influenced his conception and subsequent articulation of *Geist*. His claim relies on four factual elements: (1) Hegel's endorsement of Boehme within his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*;⁵¹ (2) A thank-you letter Hegel wrote to one of his former pupils for sending him an edition of Boehme's collected works, a letter in which he praises Boehme;⁵² (3) Two essays from Hegel's Jena period, one on the Trinity and the other on spirit; and (4) The various thematic similarities that exist between Boehme's theosophy and Hegel's philosophy. Perhaps the strongest evidence comes from Hegel's early years at Jena when his mature thought was first beginning to take shape.⁵³ Hegel's textual admiration for Boehme also shows his support, a support however that is always riddled with reservations about the completeness of the Silesian theosophy's philosophy, a system which lacked logical rigor and consistency.

While Walsh makes a compelling case for Boehme's direct influence on Hegel's system, Eric von der Luft (1984) attributes more significance to neo-Platonism. Despite Hegel's testimonial to Boehme and the striking similarities that exist between Hegel's treatment of the triplicity of trinities in the Jena fragment and Boehme's conception of the three principles constituting the godhead,⁵⁴ Hegel explicitly rejects Boehme's mystical treatment of religion as mythological "picture-thinking"⁵⁵ and grows increasingly more critical of Boehme's contributions as his thought matures.

51. Published posthumously by Karl Ludwig in two different versions and separate redactions of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

52. Hegel's note of July 29, 1811 was written to Peter Gabriel van Ghert thanking him for the gift.

53. Walsh, pp. 22-31.

54. Cf. von der Luft, p. 37 and footnote 2, p. 42.

55. See the *Phenomenology* (A.V. Miller trans) pp. 465-466 and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (E.B. Speirs & J.B. Sanderson trans, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962 [1895]), 3: 32.

Because mythologized religion, theosophic religion, a religion of nature, tends to lose the individual in contemplation of an infinite or transcendent beyond, Hegel, for whom the rational individual is the ultimate locus of spirit, and especially of free spirit, has no choice but to reject such religion and to substitute for it a knowledge that both explains and includes the full richness of this individual developed from spirit as consciousness.⁵⁶

While there are thematic similarities in Hegel that can be traced back to Boehme, such similarities may also be traced farther back to neo-Platonic thinkers such as Eckhart, Erigena, Proclus, and Plotinus.⁵⁷ Although Walsh places Boehme in a tradition that goes back as far as Gnosticism, due to his lack of formal education,⁵⁸ Boehme would not have been familiar with these systems of thought and thus may be said to have formulated his own tradition of natural-mystical theosophy independently. Hegel, on the other hand, would have been familiar with the more classical, strictly philosophical neo-Platonic texts which were a likely source for his ideas.

It may be argued that Hegel's generic conceptualization of the dialectical self-unfolding of spirit and Boehme's account of the process of self-revelation as the coming into being of god is a standard neo-Platonic idea. Von der Luft points out that in *The Elements of Theology*, Proclus tells us that the One must give of itself or else lack fertility and honor (Prop. 23) and that the One is equated with the Good and must produce the manifold phenomena of nature in order to become complete (Prop. 25). John Scotus Erigena in *On the Division of Nature*, Book 1, further describes how god shows himself to rational creatures each according to its own capacities and that he moves from within himself and toward himself.⁵⁹ Boehme's and Hegel's characterization of the process of god and spirit's own self-recognition may be said to be present in Erigena's dialectic in which

God proceeds from Himself as uncreated creator, through his self-manifestations as created creators and created noncreators, and returns to Himself, thus realizing and fulfilling Himself as Himself, as the uncreated who does not create because He then no longer needs to create.⁶⁰

These dialectical characterizations of the activities of Spirit and God may be all said to originate and emerge from an unconscious *Ungrund*. The coming to presence of self-consciousness through inner contemplation, separation, projection, and self-recognition as self-reintegration is a general structural organization (as process) of spirit and Boehme's deity. The Divine Essence of Boehme's

56. von der Luft, p. 38.

57. *Ibid.*; Rufus M. Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 67.

58. See Weeks.

59. Joannes Scotus Erigena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, Ed. & trans. by Myra Uhlfelder, summaries by Jean Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), p. 7, p. 15.

60. von der Luft, p. 39.

godhead as the Being whose essence is to reveal itself is not only present in Erigena's text, but is articulated by Plotinus in the *Enneads*⁶¹ where god as the One must manifest and cause its own essence which is to reveal itself. Boehme's postulation of the polarities of god's will, at once both loving and wrathful, may be seen as a correlate to standard Plotinian "theodicy." For Boehme, evil was a residue of god's original "darkness" and was part and parcel of god's creative process. For Plotinus, evil is the outward extreme of god's dialectical manifestation, "matter conceived as a negative factor, *when* the soul turns toward it, away from the One, instead of remaining faithful to its ultimate source, and directly *before* the soul realizes the sterility of this choice, and initiates its epistrophic dialectic."⁶² Von der Luft convincingly shows that Hegel's use of the positive significance of the negative cannot be primarily derived from Boehme's theosophic speculation and is more likely attributed to the cosmology of Proclus and Plotinus whom Hegel would know quite well since his friend and Heidelberg colleague, Georg Friedrich Creuzer, prepared standard editions of both philosophers.

Concluding Remarks

Hegel was too broad and systematic of a thinker to have borrowed concepts limited to only one or even a few sources. Because Hegel never offered a formal theory of the unconscious abyss, allusions to Boehme and neo-Platonism are not surprising and may be seen as a product of Hegel's own dialectical assimilation of philosophical knowledge that had formed a sediment on his thinking. But as with any current of thought dealing with first principles, metaphysical tenets may be ultimately traced back to antiquity on some archaic or unrefined level. Yet Hegel was an independent thinker and his dialectic lives up to its name. Hegel's system surpasses his predecessors while simultaneously canceling but preserving their insights. What is most interesting about the influence of the *Ungrund* that figures so prominently in Hegel's system, albeit unintended by him, is that it forms the foundation for spirit to manifest. Because the retentive element of the dialectic prefigures into the self-unfolding of spirit in all its subsequent stages, the unconscious is always present in the most exalted forms of spirit, although in a preserved and subordinated mode.

Drawing on the ontological speculations of Boehme and the neo-Platonists, Hegel could not elude the inclusion (perhaps even unconsciously) of an implicit theory of the unconscious that plays such a central role in the metaphysics of spirit. While Hegel's system is a formally articulated rational enterprise, the presence of the concept of the unconscious allows for an elaborate articulation of irrationality (that Schelling heavily emphasized) as well as a theory of abnormal psychology that Daniel Berthold-Bond⁶³ has so brilliantly illuminated

61. *Enneads*, vol. 5, bk.1, sec. 10, p. 6.

62. von der Luft, p. 39.

63. Cf. *Hegel's Theory of Madness* (Albany, SUNY, 1995).

within Hegel's philosophy. Therefore, the unconscious is instrumental in the normative processes of cognition, emotion, and mental adjustment as well as in illness.

Although Hegel was influenced by theosophic and neo-Platonic thought, as we have seen, he shows greater affinity for Aristotle rather than neo-Platonism in regarding *Nous* (reason, mind, spirit) as Absolute and underived. In fact, Hegel maintains a clear allegiance to Aristotle with respects to the soul, the principle of internal teleology, the unification of form and matter, the process of the actualization of pure thought, and in elevating *Sittlichkeit* to the apex of human reality through self-realized freedom.⁶⁴ While I cannot elaborate on these comparisons here, Hegel's re-appropriation of Aristotelian teleology allows him, through his Logic, to introduce an inner principle of self-derivation in which all particularization is developed from within the universal. This is why Hegel enlists Aristotle in his initial discussion of the soul: the soul in its implicitness is the "sleep of spirit; — the passive nous of Aristotle" (*EG* § 389), a simple universality. As with Aristotle's *de Anima*, Hegel's depiction of the soul moves from immediate potentiality to mediated actualization through the modification and differentiation of its nascent corporeality. Thus the soul, as with spirit, is the process of moving from indeterminate, undifferentiated immediacy to determinate, differentiated mediacy. And this is partially why Boehme and neo-Platonists are attractive to Hegel: spirit becomes a self-generating movement.

The implications of Hegel's theory of the abyss far surpass those of Boehme's and the neo-Platonists by virtue of providing a systematic and rigorous justification for the dialectically self-articulated process of human consciousness and subjectivity. As a result, the unifying and synthetic nature of the dialectic finds its origins in an unconscious teleology that underscores the positive significance of negation as spirit elevates itself to its highest potentiality-for-Being.

The positive significance of the negative is a cardinal element in the organization of the *Ungrund* and subsequently the self-manifestation of spirit. This point opens potential vistas that merit careful exploration yet is beyond the immediate scope of this discussion. If the *Ungrund* is indeed negativity as Being-in-and-for-itself, then it is essential to the dialectic and may be seen as the fertile source of all psychic reality. This notion poses difficulties in reconciling the dual intentionality of spirit as an upward synthetic and unifying movement and a destructive and regressive drive that is both the source of all rational and irrational determination. The dialectic as determinate negativity is both constructive and destructive, harmonious and chaotic, insofar as all harmony exists within unrest and upheaval and all chaos within a unifying purposeful order. The disharmonious unity that comes with spirit's sublation is itself a paradox. Negative activity is both the power of death and desire and the elevation of spirit as it

64. See Charles Taylor's discussion in *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975/1995), pp. 321, 332, 378, 515-516.

reasons a unity through pure self-realization. The *abyss* therefore becomes the darkness of the "not" which undercuts itself and becomes the source of all. Unlike Nietzsche, this is not an abyss we must confront in order to make sense out of our lives, rather it is an abyss we are continually emerging out of, only to sink back into as finite individuals. It is this "tarrying with the negative" that defines the life of spirit who "wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself."⁶⁵ Such can be said for the quest of self-consciousness: not only does spirit find its culmination in the unity of aesthetic, religious, and rational life, its very attainment is contingent on the epigenesis and exaltation of the soul.

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SOMMAIRE

La conception de l'inconscient chez Hegel est certainement un des aspects les plus négligés par les commentateurs. Sans avoir produit de théorie formelle de l'inconscient, ni l'avoir incluse dans son Anthropologie ou sa Psychologie, Hegel n'a toutefois pas ignoré cette question. Sauf quelques exceptions portant notamment sur sa théorie de la maladie mentale, le traitement hégélien des processus inconscients de l'âme n'a pas reçu beaucoup d'attention. En l'examinant de plus près, la conception hégélienne de l'âme présente bien des parallèles avec les approches théosophiques et néoplatoniciennes. Cet article donc vise à expliquer la position hégélienne sur l'inconscient à la lumière de ses origines théosophiques et néoplatoniciennes, montrant par là comment ses devanciers ont pu influencer sa pensée. Cette question revêt une importance notable dans la mesure où le statut métaphysique de l'inconscient occupe une place centrale dans la pensée hégélienne.

SUMMARY

One of the most overlooked aspects of Hegel's philosophy is his views on the unconscious. While Hegel did not explicitly develop a formal theory of the unconscious, nor include it as a cardinal element of his Anthropology or Psychology, he certainly did not ignore the issue. Despite a few noteworthy exceptions centering on Hegel's theory of mental illness, Hegel's treatment of the unconscious processes of the soul has been largely under-emphasized. When examined more closely, Hegel's theory of the soul shows many parallels to theosophic and neo-Platonic thought. It will be the overall focus of this article to explicate Hegel's position on the ontology of the abyss in relation to its theosophic and neo-Platonic origins, thus showing how his historical predecessors impacted on his thinking. This issue becomes significant because the metaphysical status of the unconscious assumes a central position in Hegel's overall philosophy.

65. *Phenomenology*, § 32, p. 19.