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Hegel and Bataille on Sacrifice

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Abstract

In Georges Bataille's view, the Hegelian interpretation of kenotic sacrifice as passage from Spirit to the Speculative Idea effaces the necessarily representational character of sacrifice and the irreducible non-presence of death. But Hegel identifies these aspects of death in the fragments of the 1800 System. In sacrificial acts, subjectivity represents its disappearance via the sacrificed other, and hence is negated and conserved. Sacrifice thus provides the representational model of sublation pursued in the *Phenomenology* as a propaedeutic to Science. Bataille's critique clarifies the fragments of the 1800 System, contextualizing Hegel's rehabilitation of kenotic sacrifice in the *Phenomenology*. Bataille's poetics parodies Hegelian kenosis via repetition of material difference, enacting an ecstatic temporality which Hegel perhaps suppresses as the condition of his system. Finally—if Bataille is correct in his assessment—the system would be subjected to a reversal, with radical implications for the philosophy of religion.

I. Introduction

Georges Bataille's critique of Hegelian negation in 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice' (1990), originally written in 1955, presents a startling and hermeneutically decisive correspondence with Hegel's claims about sacrifice in one of his most obscure fragments, the so-called *Systemfragment von 1800*. According to Bataille, Hegel misapprehends the philosophical and religious significance of his own sacrificial imagination precisely at the point that he interprets it as a negative propaedeutic to absolute knowledge. In Hegel's remarks on 'Revealed Religion' (*Die offenbare Religion*), Spirit emerges for Spirit through the Christian vision of 'kenosis' – the paradoxical expression of the divine nature through the self-negation or renunciation of its divinity. As a representation of the unity of God, world and human being, Christianity 'reveals' the Speculative Idea in a defective, representational form while at the same time pointing beyond this representation. The negation of the abstract transcendence of God leads to the negation of the reflective, representational standpoint of consciousness as such, and a scientific treatment of the Speculative Idea becomes possible (*PhG*: 476/571–72; 488/585–86).[1] According to Bataille,

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per contra, sacrifice marks a site not of the transcendence of finitude, but of its absolutely impassable limit. On Bataille's view, sacrifice marks what is from the standpoint of philosophy an insoluble problem, rather than being a tool to be put to work in overcoming philosophical perplexities. It is an original representation of absolute, non-dialectical negativity—death. Hegel's passage from finite consciousness to Absolute Knowledge would thus depend on the *suppression* of the non-dialectical negativity of death, rather than its successful sublation.

Jacques Derrida has commented on this relation in his well-known essay 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve' (1978), originally published in 1967. There Derrida describes Bataille's invocation of sacrifice, where this figures as absolute loss, as effecting a sort of rupture within Hegelian dialectic. In expressing the irreducible non-presence of death, Bataillean sacrifice suggests a reversal of the 'system', the exposure of the 'Absolute' to an ecstatic temporality which exceeds the dialectical recuperation of the present. Derrida's analysis is largely thematic, but Bataille's critique of Hegelian 'sacrifice' can also be fruitfully used as a point of orientation in understanding Hegel's development. Although Bataille's reading is grounded in Alexandre Kojève's notoriously tendentious interpretation, and is somewhat scantily sourced, he does in fact identify a question that Hegel himself poses in the pivotal *Systemfragment von 1800*.

The problem of death marks a central problem in the course of Hegel's transition from a position sympathetic to Classicism and Romanticism into Identity Philosophy and eventually Absolute Idealism: it is necessary to *know* death in order to represent a stable and lasting horizon of meaning, an 'infinite Life' within which finite beings arise and pass away. But to die means to lose the possibility of knowing what death might have taught me. In the *Systemfragment* Hegel theorizes sacrificial acts, and their place within the shared imaginary of a religion, as a response to this problem. In them, subjectivity represents its own disappearance through identification with a sacrificed other, and thus the subject is both negated and conserved. The act of sacrifice thus provides a representational model of sublation which is pursued in the *Phenomenology* as a negative propaedeutic to speculative thought. The subject thus represents 'infinite Life', which outstrips subjectivity, exists prior to its appearance-to-self and will persist after its disappearance-to-self. Recognizing that the act of destructive sacrifice thus provides the representational model of sublation pursued in the *Phenomenology* suggests that Bataille's critique of Hegelian negativity is more textually viable than is indicated by the very limited evidence that he adduces for it. The upshot of remarking upon this correspondence is three-fold, shedding light on both Hegel and Bataille's respective corpuses, and suggesting certain broad conceptual consequences for the philosophy of religion.

Exegetically, this essay will help to address a lacuna within Hegel's thinking on sacrifice as a practical structure of religious life, a feature of the religious

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imagination, and a moment of the speculative system. Kenotic sacrifice is resuscitated in Hegel's thinking as a response to the problem of death vis-à-vis representation and eventually cognition of the Absolute. By the same token, Bataille's literary strategies can be understood as resistance to the Hegelian reading of kenotic sacrifice and its figuration of death. Bataille's insistence on the materiality of death and the fugitivity of death reflects Bataillean poetics, a 'sacrifice in which words are victims', whereby the repetition of material difference produces an interminable chain of monstrous parodies.

Finally, if Bataille is correct that Hegel misunderstands his own sacrificial imagination precisely by effacing its character as an original representation of the irreducible non-presence of death, this would open Hegel's system to a radical reversal. Such a reversal would have implications for the philosophy of religions as well for the methodology of religious studies. The 'representational' form of religion would not be anticipation of the pure reflexivity of Spirit, as Hegel maintains in his mature system, but rather would be a phantasmatic record of failed attempts at transcendence, and a perverse return to what Hegel in his younger days called a 'polytheism of imagination and art', organised now around an absent centre (*MW*: 110–12/*DE*: 219–21).

II. Sacrifice and Spirit

Hegel invokes sacrifice (*Opfer*, *Aufopferung*)—occasionally as a theme, other times as a rhetorical trope, always as a structure of mediation—often in his early works. The different valences which Hegel gives to sacrifice as a structure of mediation are linked to changes in his approach to the intellectual and political challenges of modernity. The question of sacrifice begins for Hegel in the context of general religious reform as a means of instantiating and supporting a process of political modernization. The question for Hegel, roughly, is how sacrificial action must be imagined and theorized by religious groups in order to accord with a non-dualistic view of human freedom. Over time, the question of sacrifice as a feature of religious life and imagination comes to frame Hegel's approach to the basic onto-theo-logical perplexities of post-Kantian idealism—particularly the relation of the infinite and the finite. It is in this context that Hegel begins to invoke a kenotic model of sacrifice as the religious anticipation of his own dialectical method. The *locus classicus* of 'kenosis' is Paul's letter to the Philippians, deriving from the apostle's use of the term 'ἐκένωσεν' in his description of the act of Jesus's self-emptying or self-negation. In the context of the hymn, Paul implores the congregants to the imitation of Christ, specifically in this *renunciation* of the divine nature. '[Jesus] emptied himself' (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) (Phil. 2:7) becomes, in Luther's rendering, '*entäußerte sich selbst*'.[2] However, in his more

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straightforwardly romantic interventions (from roughly 1797–1800) Hegel finds the Christian 'kenotic' model of sacrifice, through which various paradoxes regarding the relation of the divine and human nature are conceptualized, particularly dissatisfying and of a piece with the predicament of the peoples of modern Europe—hopelessly at odds with themselves, grief-stricken and self-negating. And yet, as I will argue below, it is precisely this 'self-emptying' sacrifice, '*Entäußerung*', which Hegel eventually comes to interpret as the representational anticipation of speculative cognition, a grasping of the fundamental identity of identity and difference.

In 1793 Hegel interprets sacrifice as being of two types: sacrifice that is compatible with universal rationality is that of thanksgiving or '*Dankbarkeit*', he suggests. Such sacrifices evince an awareness of the human being's place within the whole. On the other hand is sacrifice which seeks to redress some offence of the deity by the human being, what Hegel calls '*Sühnopfer*', or sacrifice of propitiation (*MW*: 64–66/*HTJ*: 23–26). Sacrifices of propitiation seek to transcend the enmity and opposition between humanity, nature and the divine, but ultimately produce the very conditions of alienation they are meant to overcome. Through a kind of economic ruse they aim to placate the divine will and align it to human purposes—quite unaware, the young Hegel insists, of the senselessness of making finite offerings to an infinite being (*MW*: 10/*FS*: 42).

While working as a *Hofmeister* in Berne, Hegel moves away from the language of thanksgiving and propitiation. Religion, Hegel believes, will be crucial in producing the free, self-actualizing subjects essential for the emergence of a modern, republican political order. But all religion, in Hegel's view, requires sacrifice as a part of its 'structure' (*Gebäude*)—how is this practical structure to be understood with respect to putatively autonomous reason? For sacrifice implies the response of the subject to a heteronomous moral or religious exigency or norm—quite different from rationality that recognizes only its own normative legitimacy. Kant's moral philosophy suggests one avenue for harmonizing these: the structure of 'sacrifices' (*Aufopferung*), which must be made for the sake of pure practical reason (Kant 2015: 69).

Exploring whether a form of sacrifice appropriate to the modern religious imaginary can be found in Kant's account of practical reason and religion, Hegel proceeds to reconstruct the Gospels with Jesus as Kantian moral sage *avant la lettre* (see *TE*: 'The Life of Jesus'; see also *ETW*: 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion').

But around the time of his reunion with Hölderlin in Frankfurt, Hegel's position on the structure and function of sacrifice shifts again. He now claims that the Kantian structure of sacrifice is inadequate to its task, describing Kantian practical reason, much as with his earlier realization about propitiatory sacrifice, as reproducing the opposition it was meant to overcome. This reproduction of

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heteronomy occurs both at the level of shared religious imagination and at the level of individual moral psychology. Kant opposes duty and inclination such that humans are always at odds with themselves in making sacrifices to practical reason (hence struggling against their sensible and empirical natures) (*HTJ*: 237–40; see also Ameriks 2000: 333). Further, Kant reintroduces a heteronomous standard of moral judgement through the practical postulates (*ETW*: 211/*HTJ*: 265–66).

What is needful for the religion of modernity then, on Hegel's view, is a conciliatory form of sacrificial action (rather than a suppressive one) which operates within concrete, historical life, and which unifies these oppositions. An integral conception of sacrifice is found by Hegel in the disposition of self-sacrificial love with empirical motivations reflected in the law, rather than opposed to law, such that the formal character of lawfulness is superseded in the very acts which fulfil the law's demands (*ETW*: 302–8/*HTJ*: 378–82). The earliest articulations of this view appear in some fragments just prior to Hegel's move from Berne. He evokes figures of Greek heroism who, with no hope of personal reward, die for the good of the *polis*. Although this model of sacrifice is meant to overcome the reproduction of heteronomy present in Kant, a certain isomorphism is clearly present. In both cases, the individual's willingness to give themselves up to negation of their empirical particularity is linked to the formation of a horizon of meaning and value that outstrips them as an individual subject, wherein the subject is both negated and preserved: either as a necessary moment of the religion of reason or as in the continued life of the *polis*. The latter case is a transitional moment toward a more integral, less suppressive account of self-sacrifice than is found in Kant, on Hegel's view. Hegel is working toward an account of sacrifice that overcomes the appeal to a transcendent deity and guarantor, but maintains the moral intelligibility of self-sacrifice. In such instances, Hegel hopes, objective moral constraint of conduct and subjective inclination would not be opposed: instead the formal opposition between subject and object would be be suspended in a higher, more comprehensive unity of disposition.

Hegel deploys this understanding in a new account of Christianity, found in 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' (*ETW*: 182–301/*HTJ*: 241–342). In these early writings, it is essential for Hegel that religion *represent* the practical structure of reconciliation in a sensuous form. For to grasp (*begreifen*) the Absolute is not possible by way of reflective, finite understanding (*Verstand*) (always implying, as it does, a finitization of its content in the very articulation of a given judgement; Hölderlin 1986). This is the standard against which Christianity is judged and found, ultimately, wanting. For Hegel, at this period, Christianity's way of representing sacrifice as divine kenosis and resurrection ultimately leads to a kind of confusion and grief. The Eucharist is the incarnate God that 'melted away in

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the mouth' (*ETW*: 248–53/*HTJ*: 297–302). The apotheosized Christ bears the wounds of human finitude, even in his ascent to the infinite, supernal realm. That is to say, the union of subject and object in the disposition of sacrificial love is not given properly durable representation in the religious imagination of the apostles (*ETW*: 252–53/*HTJ*: 300–1). The sacraments and narratives bequeathed by Jesus in his life, teachings and death leave them with a sense of mourning and expectation—not a feeling of lived, absolute unity, but of grief, infinite longing and dissatisfaction.

By the time he composes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, however, Hegel has changed his mind about the significance of the 'grief' inspired by this kenotic confusion. In that work, Hegel describes the kenotic imagination of Christianity as the revelation of Spirit for Spirit, the necessary historical condition of its reflexivity. In mirroring this kenotic movement, suffering violence at its own hands, emptying each of its determinations and passing into contradiction and eventually reconciliation, Spirit pursues as propaedeutic to a scientific treatment of the Speculative Idea. This propaedeutic is undertaken as the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The work is rife with gallows-imagery and figures of self-loss, but none loom larger than the suffering and death of Jesus. Jesus's death and resurrection, as noted above, takes on a specific and decisive systematic meaning. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel articulates an account of Spirit coming to know itself as Spirit, thus enabling the scientific exposition of the Speculative Idea: the absolute unity of reality and ideality, objectivity and subjectivity, humanity and God, finite and infinite, in an integral and rationally comprehensible totality.

Christianity is 'revelatory', Hegel claims, because it represents the entire problematic of overcoming the fixed antitheses of the understanding, and passage to the Idea or Absolute Knowledge. The central mediating moment of this representation is *negative*. It is the moment of kenotic sacrifice that unites Substance with Subject and that, appropriated in the right way, marks an overcoming of the parallel construction of the opposed but mutually necessary systems characteristic of Schelling's view of transcendental philosophy and philosophy of nature (Förster 2017: 223–49).

> Spirit has two sides which are presented as two converse propositions: one is this, that substance alienates itself from itself and becomes self-consciousness; the other is the converse, that self-consciousness alienates itself from itself and gives itself the nature of a Thing, or makes itself a universal Self. Both sides have in this way encountered each other, and through this encounter their true union has come into being. The self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] of substance, its growth into self-consciousness, expresses the transition into

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> the opposite … that substance is *in itself* self-consciousness. Conversely the self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] of self-consciousness expresses this, that it is *in itself* the universal essence […] two moments through whose reciprocal self-emptying [*Entäußerung*] each become the other, Spirit comes into existence as this their unity. (*PhG*: 457/549–50)

The above passage outlines kenotic self-sacrifice, ascribed to Jesus, as the model for addressing two central, interrelated logico-metaphysical concerns of post-Kantian (and post-Fichtean) idealism. First: how can two logically incompatible perspectives on the relation of ideality and reality can be integrated into a single, synoptic account? Second, how can the infinite be expressed in the finite, hence through its self-finitization, while nonetheless remaining identical to itself as infinite? (*UHK*: 173–74, 177). *Spirit,* realized through the representation of kenotic sacrifice, is the historical condition of the possibility of a scientific treatment of the Speculative Idea which addresses these inter-related post-Kantian logico-metaphysical concerns. The language of kenotic self-emptying (*Entäußerung*) in the context of Hegel's discussion of the philosophical meaning of Christianity should be understood as an echo of Luther's rendering of the Epistle to the Philippians. '[Jesus] emptied himself' (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) (Phil. 2:7) becomes '*entäußerte sich selbst*'. God becomes flesh, thus divesting himself of his divinity and truly dying, a divinity of whom we must say 'God Himself is Dead', according to Hegel (*PhG*: 476/572). God must become flesh and die, to be 'arisen *in the Spirit*' (*PhG*: 462/555–56).

> In the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be absolute Being the immediacy receives its negative moment; Spirit remains the immediate Self of actuality, but as the *universal self-consciousness* of the community […] not the individual by himself, but together with the consciousness of the community and what he is for this community. (*PhG:* 462/556)

In its becoming-human and taking on death, and being resurrected in the 'Spirit' of the community, the finitude of the particular subject is overcome and contextualized as a historical individual within a community which outstrips and outlasts her.

> Death loses its natural meaning in spiritual self-conscious, i.e., it comes to be just its stated Notion; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz., the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected. (*PhG*: 475/570–71)

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In other words, death takes on an 'ideal' meaning over-and-above its abstract, material significance. It is only in imagining death and resurrection in Spirit that we can grasp the unity of finite and infinite, here and beyond, which, as we saw above, must be described in their integral and mutual self-expression, as *moments* of the Absolute. And this can only occur where, '[t]his self-consciousness … does not actually die, as the particular self-consciousness is pictured as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e. in its knowledge, which is essential Being reconciling itself with itself' (*PhG*: 475/571).

In as much as the religious community thinks in *representations*, however, Absolute knowledge is not yet complete. 'The mediation' Hegel writes 'is still incomplete', in as much as the Christian religion is burdened with the representational form of 'picture-thinking' (*Vorstellung*). Only when these elements are grasped as integral, mutually necessary moments of a single, infinite process will the representational content of Christianity be expressed in its proper, conceptual form (*PhG*: 463/556–57). This occurs through the immanent development of the representation of divine self-sacrifice in Christianity: 'The death of the picture thought contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as Self. That death is the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God Himself is dead*' (*PhG*: 475/571–72). Representing the kenotic self-sacrifice of God, the death of God, points the way to a sacrifice of God as representation, to the negation of the absoluteness of the reflective, representational standpoint itself. In the context of Christianity's 'picture-thinking', the kenotic sacrifice of God in the person of Jesus, ideally, marks the death of God as something 'beyond' humanity. Jesus is resurrected in 'Spirit' amongst his followers. But the representational form of religious thought means that each element of the narrative is understood as a discrete event that is only 'externally' and not immanently related. Christianity represents for Hegel, in a finite, representational form, the content of the Absolute Idea that expresses itself through self-finitization and then recuperates itself as 'Spirit'. Christianity presents in the religious imagination the idea of an infinite life in which all finite beings partake, a horizon of identity as the identity of identity and difference. Where Spirit finally learns to make this movement on its own, to undertake a kind of phenomenological *imitatio Christi*, the potential of Christianity to overcome representational consciousness as such is realized:

> The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself [*sich aufzuopfern wissen*]. This sacrifice [*Aufopferung*] is the externalization [*Entäußerung*] in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit. (*PhG*: 492/590)

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III. Sacrifice as subterfuge

For Bataille, the idea of Spirit—reflexivity realized in the rational comprehension of death—can only ever be a sort of ruse. It is customary in explicating Bataille's systematically anti-systematic *détournement* of Hegelian concepts to refer to the specific moment of twentieth-century French Hegelianism in which Bataille's philosophical and literary interventions occur. Such discourse has its place of course. Though not strictly Bataille's first encounter with Hegel, it is only after his attendance at the influential (if tendentious) lectures of Kojève at *l'École Pratique des Haute Études* (1933–38) that Bataille begins to understand Hegel as both kindred spirit and intellectual foil (Kendall 2007: 92–93). Indeed, Bataille's resistance to Hegelian dialectic must be understood in terms of Kojèvean theses: the anthropological reading of Hegel, which foregrounds the dialectic of 'master' (*Herr*) and 'slave' (*Knecht*) (Kojève 1980: 11–34); the profoundly and self-consciously *un*-Hegelian commitment to 'ontological dualism'; and the (in) famous 'end of history thesis'. This historical-anthropological reading of Hegel bequeathed to Bataille, much as it did the existentialists and Surrealists, a set of diagnostic tools for understanding the violence of the twentieth century, and tentative hopes for new forms of community arising from that violence. Taken together, ontological dualism and the end-of-history thesis provide the theoretical framework that allows Bataille to refine his erotic, religious and literary obsessions, and form the basis of a post-historical account of human action as 'non-productive expenditure' (*G*: 111). This debt to Kojève is long-recognized and has received detailed comment.[3]

As a result of this emphasis, very fine scholars have at times too quickly dismissed Bataille's reading of Hegel, pointing to the clear partisanship of Kojève as grounds for Bataille's marginality. This seems to be a clear case of genetic fallacy. But of course simply noting this provides no credibility to Bataille's reading whatsoever. The assertion that Bataille's critique of Hegelian negativity has real purchase on the broader Hegelian corpus (much of which Bataille likely did not know first-hand) remains to be demonstrated. As I will note in what follows, however, I think Bataille is on the trail of something decisive with respect to our understanding of Hegel's transition from 'educator of the people' (*Volkserzieher*) to speculative philosopher.

'The problem of Hegel' Bataille writes, 'is given in the action of sacrifice' (*HDS*: 18). According to Bataille, Hegel invokes a kenotic interpretation of the Crucifixion narrative, 'the forgetting of his eternal divinity' (*HDS*: 13), in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* for precisely the same reason that the 'man of sacrifice' is enthralled by spectacles of violence and loss.[4] Identification with the victim of sacrifice provides an original representation of death. For *my* death, as such, is

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never present within my experience. And yet my death, appropriating the reality of death, is essential to the self-knowledge of Spirit, through which the speculative system is realized. It allows me to imagine dying, to represent this movement to myself, and so form the idea of a stable horizon—in the form of a certain shared 'life', i.e., Absolute Spirit within a community—which outlasts my own finite being.[5] The 'problem of Hegel' to which Bataille refers is the integration of the negativity of death into the Absolute as one of its 'moments':

> The privileged manifestation of Negativity is death, but death, in fact, reveals nothing. In theory, it is his natural, animal being whose death reveals Man to himself, but the revelation never takes place. For when the animal being supporting him dies, the human being himself ceases to be. In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but to do it while living—watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-)conscious at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being (*HDS*: 19).

The disappearance of the I cannot be experienced first-hand, in so far as it truly disappears. And it only appears *as* disappearing in so far as it has, in fact, *not* disappeared. There must remain an 'I' which sees the 'I' die, but if the 'I' dies then it cannot take stock of its own death. It thus follows, Bataille claims, that if we can make the reality of our own 'death' present within consciousness, it must be as a simulacrum or constellations of simulacra.

> In a sense, this is what takes place (what is at least on the point of taking place, or which takes place in a fugitive, ungraspable manner) by means of a subterfuge. In the sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself with the animal that is struck down dead. And so he dies in seeing himself die, and even, in a certain way, by his own will, one in spirit with the sacrificial weapon (*HDS*: 19).

Figures of loss and self-loss might thus serve as original representations of the irreducible non-presence of death which, properly construed, would affirm the absolute character of this loss, and the limit of possible purposive actions. But for Hegel, the retrieval of Christianity as 'Absolute' religion marks a qualitative leap in the knowledge of what knowledge is—what Bataille identifies as a ruse is something of absolute and eternal significance for Hegel. It represents the passage through the immanent contradictions of the representational understanding itself, and to its sublation in purely conceptual consciousness, i.e., into

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spirit, and subsequently the systematic expression of the Speculative Idea. The passage beyond 'representational' consciousness, hence beyond what can for Bataille only ever be a 'fugitive' experience of death in the sacrificial spectacle, is enabled for Hegel through the kenotic self-discipline of Spirit which constitutes the *Phenomenology* itself as a 'way of despair', a kind of *imitatio Christi* (*PhG*: 49/72).

Hegel's thinking is not aberrant with respect to the problem of death and the representation of death in sacrifice, on Bataille's view:

> I have sought to demonstrate that Hegel's reaction is fundamental human behavior. It is not fantasy or a strange attitude, it is *par excellence* the expression endlessly repeated by tradition. It is not Hegel alone, it is all of humanity which everywhere always sought, obliquely, to seize what death both gave and took away from humanity (*HDS*: 20–21).

There is a decisive difference between the 'man of sacrifice' and Hegel, however: 'Hegel was conscious of his representation of the Negative: he situated it, lucidly, in a definite point of the "coherent discourse" which revealed him to himself' (*HDS*: 21). Hegel's mistake is not that he seeks to expose himself to the reality of death on Bataille's reading, but is his misinterpretation of the significance of death for the project of 'Absolute Knowledge'. On the one hand, Hegel cannot account for 'Spirit' as the expression of a shared, infinite life unless it 'includes' the death of the finite as one of its moments. But in ultimately understanding death as a species of logical negation, the expression of the Idea, Hegel 'misses' the missed encounter that is death, non-dialectically negates death's non-dialectical negativity. That is to say, it was necessary to suppress the dialectically irrecoverable negativity of death in order to form the stable horizon of the absolute within cognition. This operation of idealizing death, of assimilating it as a 'moment' of the absolute—which finds its decisive expression in Christianity for Hegel—forms the *a priori* condition of the *Phenomenology*. It provides a representation of the self-moving, immanent negativity of the Speculative Idea, of which the death of the finite is only a moment for re-appropriation, and thus for the methodological frame of the *Phenomenology* which brackets any reference to the 'in-itself' beyond phenomenologically considered consciousness.

Bataille's textual evidence for this reading is limited almost entirely to the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* and is largely allusive. This is in part due to the assumption of a general familiarity with Hegel on the part of Bataille's intended public. Many of the passages I adduce in the discussion of 'Revealed Religion' above are indirectly referenced, but not cited with great textual specificity, or a clear statement of their place within the architectonic of the *Phenomenology*. But—as is clear from the foregoing exposition of Hegel's interpretation of Christianity—Bataille has a point, despite a relative paucity of documentation. For Hegel is

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quite clear in the *Phenomenology* that it is precisely the interiorization of this kenotic self-sacrifice and death of God that allow death, as abstract negativity, to be sublated in a higher conceptual context.

'Death' is for Hegel, ultimately, an expression of logical negation, the disappearance of the particular individual within, and as a moment of, the horizon of absolute identity of which she was a part. In the person of Jesus and his kenotic self-sacrifice, death loses its 'naturalness' and becomes ideal or thinkable in this way. We grasp ourselves as part of the tide of historical movement *only* in grasping death—the death of the God 'beyond', and the reality of our own death in time. This is the form of Spirit that now, as a sort of propaedeutic to philosophy proper, elevates the content of Christianity's kenotic imagination into a science of the Idea.

Although the profusion of kenotic language and imagery in the final passages of the *Phenomenology* was committed to paper under considerable personal duress—(Hegel's continued failure to make publishing deadlines while in Jena)—and the encroachment of historical events of considerable moment (Napoleon's decisive victory over Prussian forces at Jena)—it should not be assumed that they were selected willy-nilly, as mere rhetorical expedience. As I have noted above, Hegel writes about sacrifice early, often, and in a variety of contexts. Indeed, the kenotic interpretation of sacrifice that figures so crucially in the *Phenomenology* is decried by Hegel a few years earlier as a 'confusion' (*Vermischung*) between subject and object that radicalizes the tension between them, and fails to achieve a stable synthesis in the representations that populate the Christian imagination (*ETW*: 251; *HTJ*: 299–300). Over the course of about six years, it is precisely the grief engendered by its inability to achieve a stable synthesis on the level of 'representation' (*Vorstellung*) that Hegel comes to see as being of chief value in the kenotic interpretation of Jesus's self-sacrifice. For it is by appropriating this instability and 'grief' (*Schmerz*) in a certain way that the representational limits of consciousness can be transcended and a scientific exposition of the Idea can begin.

IV. Sacrifice in the *Systemfragment von 1800*

Space does not permit documentation or analysis of the entire scope of Hegel's development with respect to sacrifice (*Opfer, Aufopferung*) and its place among representation (*Vorstellung*), understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*), although the broad contours have been intimated above.[6] In what follows I will focus on a text of particular importance in Hegel's emergence as a speculative thinker, and which corroborates in part the Bataillean reading of Hegel's retrieval of kenotic Christianity vis-à-vis the 'problem' which is 'given in the action of sacrifice'. This pivotal text is found in the extant fragments of the 1800 System,

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Systemfragment von 1800. It consists of two brief fragments wherein Hegel attempts to express the 'ideal of [my] youth' in 'the form of reflection [*Reflexionsform*] and thus at once a system' (Hegel 1984: 63–64).

It is in these fragments that we find Hegel articulating the problem of death as establishing the parameters of his retrieval of a kenotic interpretation of sacrifice from dogmatic Christianity. As far as their place within Hegel's early writings is concerned, these fragments represent Hegel's last stab at the mythopoetic task of 'founding' a religion capable of expressing the 'monotheism of reason' through a 'polytheism of religion and art'. However, they quickly pass into a different conceptual framework which suggests two essential points: 1) that for the mediating function of sacrifice as a practical structure to be taken up in the religious imagination of a community and to be stable and deployable in various contexts, the oppositional character of understanding (*Verstand*) itself must be overcome. 2) A rehabilitation of Christian sacrifice, specifically the idea of incarnation and death as expressions of kenotic sacrifice, may in fact be appropriate for this task, despite Hegel's earlier misgivings. These elements are over time co-opted and directed toward a specifically theoretical task as Hegel transitions into identity philosophy and eventually articulates his own system (*FK*: 180–81, 190–91; cf. also Hegel 2011: 109; Hegel 1993: 171). It is only via a 'speculative Good Friday', Hegel claims in *Faith and Knowledge*, that a science of the Idea can arise within history. Taking up the kenotic ideal as a mode of vision, a way of attending to and dismembering experience, becomes the basis for a negative propaedeutic to philosophy which empties representational cognition of its content and leads to its *arche* and *telos* in the Idea. At the level of religious representation, the death of God, which empties the abstract beyond and integrates it with the finite in the incarnate God who dies, is uniquely suited to this task. In other words, Hegel here signals for the first time that he will rehabilitate the kenotic conception of sacrifice that he derided as confusion (*Vermischung*) in 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' (*ETW*: 251–53/*HTJ*: 300–1) but which only a few years later becomes the privileged representation of sacrifice in the *Phenomenology* as a negative propaedeutic of constitutively auto-critical experience on its way to the Idea.

How can we understand this turn? What changes in the interim? Bataille's remarks on the Hegelian use of sacrificial subterfuge, brought to bear in the reading of the *Systemfragment*, seem to clarify matters considerably as to the motivation for Hegel's reversal regarding kenotic sacrifice within the modern religious imagination. The first gestures of a retrieval of Christianity and kenosis accord precisely with the aporetic situation of death in attempting to reflexively grasp one's place within an absolute or infinite whole (which Hegel terms 'Life' (*Leben*), during this period of his career). The problem and solution suggested in

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the *Systemfragment* text correspond with the 'problem of Hegel' and the 'action of sacrifice' identified by Bataille.

The 1800 fragments are quite clear: philosophy can indicate the need for an absolute synthesis, but can never achieve it because of its character as 'reflection' (*Reflexion*). The identity of content in the reflective understanding is constituted through exclusion or negation and thus 'Reflection is thus driven on without rest' (*MW*: 154/*HTJ*: 348). This restlessness is checked by a 'reality which is beyond all reflection', Hegel claims, which unites opposition and unity as such. Hegel is here still working within a non-Hegelian understanding of systematicity, reflecting on the mode of reconciliation which occurs via the practices and representations of the religious life of a community. These fragments of this 'system' can indicate this reconciliation, but, unlike in his later works, Hegel does not hold that the reconciliation of ideality and reality occurs within the system itself. The rites of religion must enact a unity which cannot be made actual within the understanding.

Unity and opposition must themselves be grasped together: the true Absolute, 'infinite life', must be expressed as 'the union of union and non-union [*die Verbindung der Verbindung und Nichtverbindung*]' (*MW*: 154/*HTJ*: 348). The problem is not the inadequacy of some specific finite determination of understanding (*Verstand*) to grasp the Absolute, but understanding as such. Hegel's earlier critical positions on religion (as found in writings from 1793–97) are perhaps also implicated in this reproduction of opposition. Each conceptualizes religion in terms of the opposition of opposition and non-opposition, union and non-union, thinking and non-thinking, and, finally, life and death.

The only way to grasp the Absolute as the 'union of union and non-union', Hegel believes, is to overcome the limitations of reflective consciousness as such. This occurs in the recognition of the Absolute or infinite Life as Spirit (*Geist*).

> This self-elevation of man, not from the finite to the infinite (for these terms are only products of reflection, and as such their separation is absolute), but from finite life to infinite life, is religion. We may call infinite life a spirit [*Geist*] in contrast with the abstract multiplicity, for spirit is the living unity of the manifold. (*MW*: 153/*HTJ*: 347)

Hegel continues, 'The elevation of human beings to infinite life', he argues, is the meaning of religion.

> When he takes the infinite life as the spirit of the whole and at the same time as a living being outside of himself (since he himself is restricted), and when he puts himself at the same time outside his restricted self in rising toward the living being

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> and intimately uniting himself with it, then he worships God. (*MW*: 153–54/*HTJ*: 347)

There is a problem, however, when we reflect on infinite 'Life' as the 'union of union and non-union':

> Although the manifold is here no longer regarded as isolated but is rather explicitly conceived as related to the living spirit, as animated, as organ, still something remains excluded, namely the dead, so that a certain opposition persists. In other words, when the manifold is conceived as an organ only, opposition to itself is excluded; but life cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as this opposition as well. (*MW*: 154/*HTJ*: 148)

The unity of life and death, the inclusion of the dead and of death within the infinite horizon of the whole, is a 'reality beyond all reflection' (*MW*: 154/*HTJ*: 148). 'Within the living whole there are posited at the same time death, opposition, and understanding' (*MW*: 154/*HTJ*: 148).

How is it possible to represent the absolute negativity of death within the horizon of the infinite life of Spirit? Bataille has claimed that it is through a certain 'subterfuge' which characterizes the unconscious significance of religious sacrifice. The 'impossibility' of death is grasped only indirectly through representation. Hegel, in this passage, suggests the same. In 'religious life', which Hegel has identified as the elevation of finite life (human beings) to their place within an infinite life, a historical and spiritual movement outstrips them: '[B]oth man's relation to objects and also his action were interpreted as a preservation of objects in life or as an animation of them, but man was also reminded of his destiny, which demands of him that he […] make of the living being an object' (*MW*: 155/*HTJ*: 349). That is to say, the finite human can only represent the absolute as an 'infinite Life' to which she belongs by means of the representation of her own disappearance, of the reduction of the subject to constituent objective elements—abstract negativity. It is only possible to imagine an absolute horizon, an infinite totality which outstrips and includes me if, as a finite being, I can represent the reality of my death, and in so doing intimate the reality of infinite life prior to my emergence as a subject and after my disappearance as a subject. In order to ascend to 'infinite Life' one must be exposed to the reality, beyond all reflection, of absolute self-loss in death. Without recognizing the reality of death, it is not possible to represent a horizon which outstrips and outlasts what is present to the *I* I am. Again, what Bataille calls the 'subterfuge' of sacrifice is necessary.

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Hegel's prose is difficult to parse here, but in the context of Bataille's critique its meaning suddenly seems much clearer. Sacrificial offerings represent the self-loss of death—they remind humanity of its 'destiny'—which must be included within 'infinite Life' which, as we see above, Hegel has now begun to describe as *Geist*. 'It is necessary that life should also put itself into a permanent relation [*bleibendes Verhältnis*] with objects and thus maintain their objectivity even up to the point of completely destroying them' (*MW*: 155/*HTJ*: 349). Sacrifice evinces a certain dual aspect, a destruction which is a conservation. The destruction of the object guarantees its objectivity vis-à-vis the subject who remains. The self-loss of the subject is intimated in the destruction of the object with which the subject identifies, and hence is reminded of his 'destiny'. This seems to repeat what we might understand as opposed to logics of sacrifice in Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. There Schelling claims that dogmatic rationalism is, as in the case of Spinoza, characterized by a logic of self-sacrifice: the subject's disappearance into the infinite substance (*UHK*: 178). Critical thought, by contrast, implies the reduction of all objects to modifications of the self-positing subject, as in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslslehre* (*UHK*: 186). To say that 'the problem of Hegel is given in the action of sacrifice' is thus perhaps to identify the challenge of uniting the dogmatic interpretation of humanity as passive, and the critical interpretation of humanity as essentially active. The question is implied in the interpretative dilemma of sacrifice: is it economic or aneconomic? Is it primarily a matter of giving something away, or of receiving something in return? In the young Hegel's case, the logical dilemma of dogmatism and criticism can be overcome through religion, by appeal to an action that is both passivity and activity, a giving away which is also a receiving, the negation of the subject and the object, as well as their preservation in 'infinite Life'.

An original substitution occurs. Something—another person or an object—dies, is destroyed in my place, so that I might reflect on death, the absolute-loss of self in death, which I must represent if I am also to represent the unity of 'infinite Life' or 'Spirit'. Acts of sacrificial destruction address the problem of death as it inflects Hegel's attempt to represent, at this period, the infinite whole or totality. We can compare what occurs in sacrifice in the 1800 System fragments with a passage from the *Phenomenology* previously adduced above: 'Self-consciousness… does not actually die, as the particular self-consciousness is *pictured* as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e. in its knowledge, which is essential Being reconciling itself with itself' (*PhG*: 475/571). As the finite negates itself to commune with the infinite, so also is the infinite self-negating, expressing itself in finite time and space: 'The infinite being, filling the immeasurability of space, exists at the same time in a definite space' (*MW*: 155/*HTJ*: 349). The model for such self-negation of the infinite is

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incarnation. Hegel expresses this in terms of one of Luther's hymns, slightly amended: 'He whom all the heavens' heaven ne'er contained/Lies now in Mary's womb' (*MW*: 155/*HTJ*: 349). The problem of death as a moment of 'infinite Life' leads to a recuperation of Christian dogma, providing Hegel with 'the general, final formula of the relationship between God and the world' (Balthasar 1991: 583–84), and thus the revelation of the Speculative Idea in representation—a representation which points beyond representation as such.

V. 'Sacrifice in which words are victims'

Hegel was wrong, Bataille believes, to think it possible to use the representation of sacrifice as a negative propaedeutic of the Speculative Idea. The disappearance of the I, never present and originally represented in death, is both the condition of the possibility and the impossibility of Spirit. Spirit, the representation of infinite life, is a simulacrum of death. By the same token, Christianity's 'revelatory' status is not only suspect from Bataille's perspective, but also 'laughable'. The representation of death, in the person of Jesus, is something 'endlessly repeated by the tradition' rather than a definitive historical revelation. And more problematic still, this repetition of the materiality of death within various traditions, in a strict sense, 'reveals nothing' (*HDS*: 19). If Hegel's view in the *Systemfragment* comes somewhat close to the Bataillean interpretation of sacrifice and death, it is nevertheless distinguished by its revelatory function: for Hegel, religious life reveals Spirit, infinite life, through the representation of death. But for Bataille human beings can only acknowledge our inability to grasp the irreducible non-presence of death where we accede to the necessarily representational, or phantasmatic character of our relation to death, and the hiatus it marks within the horizon of meaning. Within this hiatus, language dramatizes the slippage of sense into non-sense, the non-arrival of definitive interpretation.

In *Inner Experience* (1988), begun by Bataille in October of 1941, he seeks among other things to 'mimic' absolute knowledge of the Hegelian system and in so doing expose it to the non-dialectical negativity of death which it disavows. According to Bataille 'absolute knowledge', which Hegel believes is revealed in Christianity and only consummated in philosophy, is thus not knowledge at all but 'definitive non-knowledge' (*le non-savoir définitif*). The 'circle' of Absolute knowledge is itself afflicted by a final and insoluble contradiction which Bataille sums up thus: 'Even supposing that I were to attain [absolute knowledge], I know that I would know nothing more than I know now' (*IE*: 108). Bataille's 'mimicry' here suggests that Hegel's demonstration of the pure reflexivity of Spirit ultimately reproduces the post-Kantian problems of opposition and

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scepticism he sets out to solve. But 'definitive non-knowledge' does not function in the same way as abstract transcendence, 'the beyond', *l'au-delà, das Jenseits*. It is neither God, nor Kantian noumenon. It is, rather, the continual interruption of ideality by an intractable materiality that yields no knowledge. What is described in this form of writing which attends to the irreducible non-presence of death is indeed the unknown, but always as a vertiginous possibility into which experience may slip, which interrupts and destabilizes ideal forms, rather than standing beyond them or grounding them. 'Sovereign' writing traces this process, the effects of the definitive non-revelation of death in language. 'Desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to slip in the opposite direction [from the known and the understanding], moving from the known to the unknown' (*IE*: 109).

'Incompletion in Bataille's texts must always be considered as one of the constitutive gestures of his writing, never as a mere accident' (Hollier 1992: 162). Death is the privileged form of this incompletion, a hiatus within the horizon of all possible meanings. How can writing—generally presumed to function within the context of some economy of meaning, the completion of a task, the conveyance of sense, the establishment of identity in a concept—give voice to the irreducible non-presence of death that can only be represented since it can never be present? What sort of language is capable of expressing the irreducible non-presence of death? Clearly the interruption of literary-generic forms in Bataille's wartime writings is one of the major 'gestures' of such a practice of inscription (e.g., *Guilty* is a journal written under erasure, *Inner Experience* is a mystical practice which yields no truth, etc.). Such language frustrates the demand to articulate conceptually the limits of conceptuality itself. It enacts instead a representation of those limits whereby absolute non-knowledge is loosed within language (quite the opposite of Hegelian writing). Thus what is true of sacrifice vis-à-vis dialectic is true of certain 'sovereign' i.e., non-servile, non-utilitarian, uses of language. They must make use of 'drama' or representation. Just as sacrifice is a representation of that which is strictly speaking never present, Bataille's writings draw attention to sense that is not present and that does not arrive.

> I invoke *what doesn't happen,* which is, which was, which will be, without anything happening […] Could I ever say something about *what doesn't happen,* what, miserably, in my mind, would resemble death […] words, at the summit, reveal what words themselves plunge into the night? (*US*: 214–15)

Just as Bataille's view of sacrifice insists upon the materiality of death to the point of death's absolute fugitivity, a hiatus within ideality and meaning, so also does Bataille's poetics aim to register the effects of non-knowledge. What in *Inner Experience* Bataille says of 'poetry', specifically, seems to be true of his poetics, generally: 'Of poetry, I will now say that it is, I believe, the sacrifice in which

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words are victims' (*IE*: 135; cf. *VE*: 120). This does not mean that Bataille's writing seeks to do something as absurd and self-defeating as to show that all knowledge *is* non-sense, or that there is no such thing as knowledge within some specific, or indeed any, field of discursive practice. Rather, it shows that the experience of the impossible anguish of death, which the utilitarian use of language keeps at bay, uncouples particular instances of knowledge from any final and definitive contextualization. If for Hegelian dialectic everything turns upon grasping Spirit as both substance and subject, Bataillean writing perhaps can be understood as seeking to show that the attempt to grasp Spirit as the *both/and* slips repetitively into the *neither/nor*. 'Non-knowledge does not abolish particular knowledge, but removes it from all sense' (*IE*: 153). Just as death is never present prior to its representation, and can never become present in some future, so does Bataillean writing seek to un-work sense in language. These non-utilitarian uses of language—which abjure the idealization of death, the impossible aim of Hegel's kenotic sacrificial imagination—function by means of repetition of material differences, rather than the ideality of conceptual identity. Like death, 'sense' is not yet present in Bataille's writings, nor does it ever quite arrive.

Much as Bataille's critique of Hegel's sacrificial imagination can help us to read Hegel forwards, so it can also help us to read Bataille's *oeuvre* backwards. For sacrifice's meaning as an effect of 'non-knowledge'—i.e., representation of the irreducible non-presence of death as sketched above in the interruption of form, writing under erasure, and intentional incompletion—echoes some of Bataille's earliest literary efforts. The fugitive 'logic' of irreducibly non-present death, '*what does not happen,* which is, which was, which will be, without anything happening' (*US*: 214)—which is also to say a hiatus or a 'hole' within the 'whole'—is present in the 1927 'urtext' of Bataille's literary life, 'The Solar Anus' (Bataille 2008; Kendall 2007: 57).

The opening claim of 'The Solar Anus' is, on its face, absurd: 'It is clear', he writes, 'that the world is purely parodic, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form' (*VE*: 5). I take this as the opening salvo of Bataille's war against idealism and the cultural logic it engenders from the Enlightenment forward. Parody is announced here as a 'principle' and is deployed through Bataille's writings as the essential generic gesture for a way of writing that does not take up idealism in materialist guise. Such a writing would be thoroughly materialist, not only in its content as a tool of ideological activism, but formally, as the repetition of material difference. 'Parody' is a 'counter' (παρά) 'song' (ᾠδή). It does not elevate the elements of a text into ideal comprehension but degrades them, inscribing them into other material registers: the rotation of celestial bodies is translated into coitus. The spinning wheels of a locomotive transfer their circular motion into the pumping of pistons. Human bodies are erections that penetrate the atmosphere during the day and become flaccid at night, collapsing in sleep. We find

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here the earliest images of 'general economy', an oneiric slippage of material transformations, rather than elevation into the ideal.

Repetition is key. Just as sacrifice (and its putative misconception in Hegelian dialectic) becomes for Bataille the 'gesture which is endlessly repeated by tradition' in attempting to represent the impossible and irreducible non-presence of death, so also the stable horizon of meaning into which all the parodic significations would finally coalesce into an ideal form is organized around a hiatus or 'hole'. The full force of Bataillean parody comes to light with the central gesture of the text. The form-conferring figure of transcendental 'given-ness', the *anneau* of the Platonic sun, is described as a parody of the *anus* where wasted, disintegrated forms are expelled.[7] In the case of death as hiatus within the horizon of possible meaning, we find an irreducible non-presence in the figure of a 'hole' (rather than a completed 'whole'), an absence as the organizing principle of the text, blindness within vision. But, like death behind the sacrificial subterfuge, it is a principle which reveals nothing, instead setting into play a chain of monstrous parodies, mutations of materiality. Each material form is re-inscribed in another material register, rather than ascending to an ideal interpretation. Like the death that 'does not happen', definitive meaning does not arrive in a world that is 'purely parodic'. Indeed, the world's purely parodic character lies, Bataille claims, in the fact that 'it lacks an interpretation' (*VE*: 5).

There is an analogy—or perhaps a parody—between Bataillean parody and the irreducible non-presence of material death that is, by his account, originally represented in acts of sacrifice. Bataillean sacrifice is a parody of Hegel's 'determinate' negation which does not yield to the Speculative Idea, but instead gives itself over to this repetition of materiality and loss. Parody and mortality are principles that, ultimately, militate against their own priority. This returns the analysis, in a roundabout fashion, back to the initial claims made about representation of death: the hiatus within the horizon of meaning, the 'hole' within the 'whole' cannot be conceptually grasped. Its 'effects' can only be represented:

> Representing incompletion, I've found the coincidence of intellectual plenitude and an ecstasy, something I had not attained until then. I am hardly concerned with reaching Hegel's position in my turn: the suppression of the difference between the object —which is known—and the subject—who knows (even though this position responds to the fundamental difficulty). From the dizzying slope I am now ascending, I now see truth founded on incompletion (just as Hegel founded it on completion), but there is no longer any other foundation but appearance! (*G*: 21)

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VI. Conclusion

What is essential is the relationship of representation to the hiatus of meaning intimated by death and written in forms of 'parody' that interrupt dialectic. If Bataille is correct in rejecting Hegel's view of kenotic sacrifice as that by which death becomes 'ideal' and representation itself is overcome, and is thus motivated to interrupt this dialectical movement with parodic counter-gestures, what becomes of Hegel's system generally? It might open upon a 'Hegelianism without reserve', a way of re-calibrating inscriptive practices vis-à-vis the cultural logic of Enlightenment and capitalism (Derrida 1978: 251–76). But there is a specific point about the philosophy of religion that should be made explicit here. If Bataille is correct about Hegel's assessment of negativity (his apparent suppression of the irrecoverable and un-anticipatable reality of material death via a certain appropriation of Christianity's dogmatic content, specifically the idea of kenotic self-sacrifice) then a non-Hegelian reading of time and history is made necessary (history organized around the temporality of the 'missed encounter' intimated in death, rather than comprehension and self-presence). By the same token, this 'missed encounter', the writing of 'what does not happen', inflects Hegelian philosophy of religion in a new way. Hegel's repetition of Christian dogma would be understood in a way that runs counter to the tendencies of generically 'Left' and 'Right' Hegelian alternatives. The Hegelian rendition of Christianity, within the context of a Bataillean reversal, would not be disparaged as mere crypto-religious baggage, a sly attempt to re-establish the hegemony of a discredited world-view in a logical guise. Nor would it be celebrated as a triumph and justification of Christianity as the historical anticipation of Spirit's reflexivity in the form of *Vorstellung*. Religion would be, rather, the phantasmatic record of abortive attempts to realize such pure reflexivity. In a way, Bataille's counter-interpretation of Hegelian sacrifice tosses a Nietzschean wrench into Hegelian dialectic (and perhaps Marx's as well). The 'dreams' or representations produced by religion are the fantasy life of an abortive actuality (*verunglückte Wirklichkeit*) (Nietzsche 1990: 137–38), an expression of real suffering—suffering that cannot in the last analysis be made intelligible, which soothes itself with the palliative of the imagination. But to recognize the irretrievability of the irretrievable, the un-anticipatability of the un-anticipatable, it would be necessary to accede to the originally representational character of the non-present which is evinced, Bataille claims, in sacrifice.

This marks a reversal of Hegel's understanding of religion from the Jena period forward, and a sort of return to, and perversion of, an earlier phase within his development. Philosophy of religion would occupy itself with what Hegel once called the 'polytheism of imagination and art' in 1796–97, but with a key difference. No longer would such a 'polytheism' be the imperfect adumbration of

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a self-transparent, reflexive 'monotheism of reason', but instead it would be a chain of monstrous parodies which enact the fugitivity of meaning represented in sacrifice. Their polymorphic character would not be the expression of absolute identity but of an ecstatic temporality, of the impossible, of the hiatus of meaning most forcefully announced in self-loss and originally represented in sacrifice. Such a 'polytheism' would propose that the various configurations of the shared life of 'Spirit' constellate around simulacra of impossible death.

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Notes

[1] Abbreviations used:
DE = Hegel, *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1936).
ETW = Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. R. Kroner and T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
FK = Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY, 1977).
FS = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke Band 1: Frühe Schriften*, ed. F. Nicolin und G. Schüler (Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1989).
G = Bataille, *Guilty* (revised edition), trans. S. Kendall (Albany: SUNY, 2011).
HDS = Bataille, 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice', trans. J. Strauss (*Yale French Studies* 78: 9–28).
HTJ = Hegel, *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. H. Nohl (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1907).
IE = Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. L. A. Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
MW = Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. J. Stewart (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).
PhG = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. W. Bonsiepen und R. Heede (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980).
TE = Hegel, *Hegel: Three Essays 1793–1795*, trans. P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).
UHK = Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays, 1794–1796*, trans. F. Marti (Lewisburg PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980).
US = Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, trans. M. Kendall and S. Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
VE = Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, ed. A. Stoekl, trans. A. Stoekl, C. R. Lovitt and D. M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

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[2] This same Greek verb appears, in various forms, five times throughout the New Testament. Phil. 2:7 in particular has served, historically, as the seminal passage for kenotic theologies which attempt to resolve paradoxes surrounding incarnation by appeal to the idea of a voluntary self-divestment by Jesus of his divinity, and pursuit of a kenotic theological ethic which mirrors this self-emptying movement.

[3] For an intellectual-historical perspective on the significance of Kojève for Bataille's thought see 'Bataille: Negativity Unemployed', in Baugh (2003).

[4] *Pace* Paolo Diego Bubbio, kenotic sacrifice by no means remains 'totally unexplored' in Bataille's account of Hegelian negativity. On the contrary, as the passage above shows, kenosis constitutes an essential moment in Bataille's reading of Hegel. Bataille's counter-interpretation certainly roams far afield from Hegelian kenosis, comparing it to a myriad of forms of 'destruction' and 'suppression'—but that is precisely the point. Bataille's essay should be read, in fact, as a polemic against kenotic sacrifice as a propaedeutic to absolute knowing and, by extension, against the idea that religion should be understood primarily under the rubric of Reason's self-revelation in representational consciousness (cf. Bubbio 2014: 149–52).

[5] Derrida describes a similar operation in the very different context of Husserlian phenomenology (Derrida 1973: 54, 88–89). The formation of a transcendental horizon of presence requires the disappearance of the *I*. *I* must imagine presence that outlasts my absence. As in the case of Bataillean 'sacrifice', the for-itself of self-presence (*für sich*) is a 'primordial substitution'. The representation of death in sacrifice thus seems to anticipate the logic of the supplement.

[6] The story of this concept and its role in Hegel's nascent speculative system is the focus of my forthcoming dissertation, tentatively entitled 'Hegel's Sacrificial Imagination', University of Chicago, expected filing date, Autumn 2019.

[7] *Anneau* is derived from the Latin *annulus*, the diminutive of the Latin '*anus*' meaning 'ring' or 'hole'.

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