Berlin cobweb. The late Heine: Jewish wisdom, Hegelianism

van Heemst, J.R.

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CHAPTER III. THE BANNER OF FREEDOM

In 1818, after he had accepted Fichte’s former chair in philosophy, Hegel moved to Berlin. In his inaugural address, he awakened his students to insist on truth. In the realm of truth, philosophy is at home, for philosophy has built it herself; and we will enter by studying philosophy. All that in life is true, grand, and divine, is so because of the Idea. Philosophy’s primary objective is to comprehend the Idea in its real and universal essence. Whereas Nature is bound to implementing Reason only of necessity, the Kingdom of Spirit is the Kingdom of Freedom. All that holds human life together, all that is valuable, resides here. This Kingdom of Freedom is of spiritual nature; it exists only in being conscious of truth and justice, in comprehending the Ideas.1

When Heine began studying in Berlin in the summer term of 1821, Hegel’s teachings exerted a powerful influence on German intellectuals. To some of them, he was the greatest philosopher, the living culmination of the drastic change in thought initiated by Kant. Others claimed that Hegel stood for a fundamental transition from religious to philosophical cognition which marked a turning point in culture. Hegel invited this scrutiny, especially once his readers began to understand his claim to be the summation and supercession of contemporary philosophy. By the 1820s, an appreciable number of students were willing to identify Hegel as the definitive voice of modernity, as the philosopher of the Absolute, and as the epitome of the rationalist, critical spirit which had spawned the revolutionary developments in the past decades.

As Hegel gained prominence, his philosophical programme became a central issue in a public debate. In the early 1820s Hegel’s philosophy evolved into a school of thought where different and even opposite interpretations flowered. Whatever its appearance, opposition to this Hegelian School united otherwise disparate groups, ranging from biblical fundamentalists to more sophisticated philosophers of religion and politics.2 Bitter dispute over his politics was stirred up by the publication of his 1821 Philosophy of Right, in which he polemicized against the Historical School of Law, the reactionary Carl Ludwig von Haller, and the Romantic nationalist J.J. Fries. Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion, first given in 1821, provoked even more reaction. Hegel was accused of pantheist, Spinozist, or panlogist aberrations. He was blackened as atheist by conservative Protestants such as Hengstenberg, one of Heine’s targets.3

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2 Breckman, Marx, the Young Hegelians, 22, 32-53.
3 Introduction, note 17, on Hengstenberg.
Heine echoed Hegel’s tremendous appeal among his supporters when, at the height of pantheistic enthusiasm, he still called Hegel ‘the profoundest of German philosophers’ in his 1834 *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (DHA VIII/1, 113). Despite Hegel’s formidably difficult and abstract style, his lectures were thronged. Between 1821 and 1823, Heine too was attracted to the audience. He had been forced to abandon his law studies in Göttingen by virtue of a *consilium abeundi* issued in an atmosphere of intense prejudice against Jewish students. Though he was to leave for six months, his Berlin studies stretched into four full semesters.

In a letter to Immanuel Wohlwill dated 7 April 1823, he looked back on his attendance. Since his mind was still full of an unhappy interlude in Hamburg shortly before, where he came under increasing pressure from the Heine-clan to enter upon a commercial career under his uncle’s tutelage, he was keen to contrast the philosopher’s lecture-hall to Hamburgian affairs:

> I know I may be wronging the fair city of Hamburg terribly, but when I lived there for a short period I was trapped in an atmosphere which made me incapable of judging myself impartially. Whereas my inner life was one of a dark, brooding sense of sinking into the depths of a dream world only lit by fantastic flashes of lightning, my outer life was frantic, confused, cynic, repulsive, that is, I moulded it into a harsh contrast to my inward feelings, so as to prevent them from exercising a devastating power over me. For my sake, it was quite a mercy indeed, *amice*, that no sooner had I left the lecture-hall than I entered the world’s colourful scene, versed in philosophy and thus ready for a life capable of being objectively construed by myself – though I was lacking in superior unperturbability and presence of mind, prerequisites of a lucid view on this enormous stage of life. (HSA XX, 73)

The last sentences signal what I would call Heine’s basic attitude to Hegelian philosophy. To him, Hegel’s philosophy somehow could be associated with the Promethean ideals of a new era, with the divinization of humanity, with freedom and individual self-determination so typical of Hegel’s political views which were based on a claim for the emerging secularization of the sacred in the wake of the French Revolution. Such knowledge would offer a positive account of the whole of a sadly scattered present. The actuality Heine is ‘ready for’ in the early 1820s is a life of a Jewish newcomer to the political and ideological scene which existed in post-Napoleonic Germany. The ‘objective construction’ he has in mind by then is the imaginative knowledge of these conditions in a Hegelian register. That this commitment cannot be unmitigated, is indicated by hinting at an atmosphere of confusion. Philosophy is no guarantee of ‘unperturbability’. In this chapter I will go into details about the restrictions of Heine’s involvement in Hegelianism. For as a starting writer, Heine was quite

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4 Heine’s acquaintance with Hegel’s Berlin philosophy has been specified in the Introduction.
aware of the friction of Jewishness against the front of non-Jewish society, a friction which made him also weary of Hegelian premises.

In the cultural climate of the early 1820s, the era known as the Biedermeier Age, Heine tried to orientate himself on the ‘enormous stage of life’ in the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies. He also frequented the famous salon of Rahel Varhagen von Ense, née Levin, one of his Jewish friends (though by far his senior), who attracted the cream of Berlin’s artists and intellectuals. Among them Hegel figured as part of expectations that post-Napoleonic stagnation would not endure; his analyses offered answers to the serious setback presented by the Vienna Restoration. As we will see below, in Heine’s Hegel-reading there is much typical of a German-Jewish intellectual in the early 1820s. Preliminary to his formation is the acknowledgement that Hegel’s philosophy hints at the possibility of freedom, which must not be restricted to the realm of thought only. But Hegel’s visions cannot be accepted unconditionally. To Heine, as we will see below, Hegel’s philosophy remains basically doubtful, as its liberating brilliance was dimmed by the dogged subjectivity of the Jewish ‘misfit’; Hegel is studied with an ingrained mistrust, a feeling which Heine tried in vain to overcome in his pantheistic revolutionism of the 1830s. To analyse Heine’s mistrust, we must return to his deliberate use of ‘Babylonian imagery’; it is a strong reminder that life means exile, captivity, and martyrdom, instead of progress, liberty, and emancipation. In citing the biblical lament from the ‘Babylonian’ Psalm 137, Heine pinpoints the ineluctable context of his writing: exiled Jewry. The concreteness of exile is the source of ‘eccentric’ writing.

In order to analyse Heine’s intricate manoeuvring into literature, away from the bankers, merchants, and traders in Hamburg, we now must turn back to his ambiguous yet critical absorption with Hegel’s Berlin philosophy, to those formative years in Berlin, when an attitude crystallized which was to recur throughout his writing, till it started to ferment in the creative memorizing of the final years.

1. Comprehending the Present

In the 1823 letter to Wohwill we just cited, Heine registers the importance of philosophy Hegel had stressed himself in his 1820 philosophico-political manifesto, the Preface to the Philosophy of Right. Here, Hegel had contrasted the internal machineries of scholastic philosophizings to genuine philosophy. Philosophy, he had articulated,

means the fathoming of the reasonable, and hence the comprehending of the present, which is reality, and not the assembling of a world beyond – God only knows where.6

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6 Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, 14.
To Heine, law student from Göttingen, the comprehending of the present is all but phraseology; to him, the Hegelian way 'reason' is intertwined with 'present' and 'reality' is a crucial issue, since Prussia had made the emancipation edict of 1812 subject to the administrative practice of bureaucratic liberalism in which the Jews' rights were by and large abrogated on an ad hoc basis after the defeat of republicanism and the continent-wide restoration of monarchy in 1815. By then, the political reshufflings in Prussia were basically attempts at authoritarian constitutionalism, products of a rationalized sovereignty in the service of anti-revolutionary goals.  

In 1822, ecclesiastical reform climaxed in the creation of the Prussian Union with the king designated prime bishop. The social order characteristic of this restoration reflected the Pietistic Awakening which permeated the political debate: the state must act as a divine disciplinary agent to regulate the erring, sinful ways of man after the Fall, until he will be freed by God's grace in the Kingdom of Heaven. In case philosophy succeeds in grasping reality's true reasonableness, Hegel's Preface seems however to promise, it will liberate its audience from submission to discriminatory state rule, for it is philosophy, which

does not halt before the prevailing, whether it be conditioned by external factors (the state, public opinion) or by internal motives (feeling, sympathy, spontaneity), but which is autonomous thought, claiming to know itself to be intimately bound up with veracity in the very act of knowing.

In the 'act of knowing' Hegel undertook to inaugurate an integral philosophy of the contemporary. His commitment was prompted by the determination to bear witness to a radical transformation of society. After the French Revolution, Hegel considered, life had lost its traditional values. Self-evident truths about communal bonds and devotional obeisance were crumbling under pressure from neutralizing forces. The world developed into the secular domain of private interests and state control.

In this process of disintegration and reorientation, Hegel yet regarded Christianity as the religion of Freedom, which can be articulated philosophically in terms of Spirit, as he indicated in his 1822-3 lectures on the Philosophy of World History. The emergence of Protestantism was of vital importance. Hegel saw Protestantism as the essential vehicle of freedom insofar as its religious truth is transformed into politicized, i.e. secularized format by philosophical insight. In an intense process of civilizing, Hegel contended, Prot-

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8 One of its advocates was Hengstenberg. The political implications of the Pietistic Awakening in Prussia are studied in Shanahan, German Protestants.
9 Grundlinien, 6.
11 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 61-3.
estantism was to be extended to the secular domain of civil society, resulting in the growth of a community not of docile believers but of free citizens under the Banner of Freedom:

The Banner of Freedom is the latest banner around which the peoples are gathering. It is the banner of True Spirit, the Spirit of our present which sees the inauguration of a new era. Up until now Time has been working on no other issue than the elaboration of this principle in reality, so as to give it the form of universal Freedom.  

The extension allowed him to trace an obvious relation between the Reformation and the French Revolution. The free person, Hegel contends, may now recognize that freedom has become the world’s essential by which all subsequent claims on the human being must be criticized. To illuminate this perspective, closer attention must be paid to Heine’s interest in Hegel’s analysis of freedom qua Idea, which is, more precisely, the historicization of the process of the Idea’s rational self-determination through man in terms of freedom.

In Hegel’s Berlin philosophy, the Idea does not consist of empty generalities, but of a general or universal, which in itself is the particular or the determined.  

The innermost reality of the Idea is its dynamism towards the closure of otherness, towards its own coming to be in its actuality and totality in absolute presence. This self-generation is the essence and the reality of the Idea. As conceptualizing thought, philosophy is but the Idea’s self-unfolding through history. The Idea leads the world. Since man actualizes freedom not merely morally but socially as well, the unity of the subjective and objective is to be sought in ethical life, which Hegel articulated as the logical structure of the Idea itself in terms of both analytical categories and institutional embodiments:

The Idea’s unification, i.e. the amalgamation of its objective Will with subjective wants, is the substantial, the rational, the ethical whole, and (insofar as it is bound up with Will and manifests itself as willing Idea) the State as such, the Idea of human freedom. Since world history is concerned with this Idea, the State as such is its inevitable corollary.

In the early 1820s, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the capacity of Reason to recognize itself in the actual world corroborates not only the historical development to absolute knowledge, but also toward absolute freedom, because the progress of Reason in philosophical expertise promises to overcome all alienating externality. Hegel thinks he had found in the modern state a topos where the fundamental relation between the universal and the particular may find its fulfilment. ‘Regarding the State’s nature,’ Hegel argues in his 1822-3 lectures on the Philosophy of World History,

12 Ibidem, 502.
13 For the processuality of the Idea, see the 1817 Enzyklopädie, 99-100.
14 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 14.
one must conceive it as being the objectivation of Freedom: in the State, Freedom is positively realized. The State is not a confederacy of people whose freedom is restricted, as if it were the negation of Freedom, leaving us to exercise our freedoms only in small reservations. On the contrary, the State is objectivated Freedom, and those patches of so-called freedoms are all arbitrariness and hence the opposite of Freedom. A philosophical understanding of the State learns us that it is the realization of Freedom.\(^{16}\)

The dialectical identity of the individual and the community takes the objective form of the mediated relationship between modern civil society and the state; a civil society is by definition already a legally structured society. Although its members may even act in a totally uncivil way, this very definition demands a state which recognizes society's right to exist as it is.\(^{17}\)

The state, however, is still far from completion. As dialectical actuality of the Idea, the state may be just the opposite of what ought to be. Obviously the state performs genuinely political functions because it represents, articulates, and executes the will of all, but in this conception it is not necessarily democratic or participatory in any modern sense. It is, instead, a complex institutional structure synthesizing hereditary monarchy, rationalistic bureaucracy, corporatist social representation, and an established church. This notion of the state seems to be the ambiguous and fragile product of Hegel's conflicting loyalties to the principle of the French Revolution on the one hand, and, on the other, to his conviction that only a reformed constitutional monarchy could realize those principles once the revolutionary search for freedom had ended in tyranny.

Since it is already implied that the focal point of history is not a state regime but the consciousness of freedom, however, it is thinking which amounts to bringing something into the form of universality, for the universal is that which is called the rational and which can be comprehended only in a speculative manner. In our understanding, Hegel stresses, we are already inspired by an element which is basically beyond the boundaries of social existence and statehood. Because freedom is the essence of the spirit, we remain within that essence and refer to its manifestations. To put it differently, we may say that freedom is the beginning of history as well as its end. History is the progress of the consciousness of freedom and of its realization. Therefore, the philosophy of history is a true and complete theodicy in spite of the politics of Restoration, as it is indicated in the conclusion of the 1822-3 lectures on the Philosophy of World History:

> It was my aim to show that all world history is a consequent course of Spirit, that it is nothing but the realization of Spirit, which finds its worldly way in the State. Truth is not only to be found as systematic

\(^{16}\) Ibidem, 72-3.

\(^{17}\) Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians*, 76.
objectivation in pure thought, but also in concrete reality. The con­
cretization, however, must not stay separated; the same subjective spirit
must be free for itself in its concreteness, and it must recognize the es­
sence of being, i.e. objective World Spirit, as its own. Thus, Spirit tes­
tifies to Spirit, and abiding with Spirit, Spirit is free. It is important to
see that Spirit can accomplish Freedom only in and through history, and
that all things past and present do not only come from God, but are His
very workings.\(^{18}\)

After the Reformation, the principle of freedom has entered into the modern
world in such a way as to make it the essential content of subsequent history
and the practical principle by which all subsequent claims on the human being
must be measured. Here, we have the lure of Hegel’s Berlin philosophy so at­
tractive to Heine.

Heine’s interest merged with those who rejected both the political
Restoration of the Prussian regime and the Romantic dream of a chauvinistic
community; to them, Hegel’s system articulated universal norms while
promising the reconciliation of individual freedom with integration into society.
Hegel’s notion of freedom played a decisive role in Heine’s adoption of Saint­
Simonistic thought.\(^{19}\) But there is one big reservation about the alluring scenario
of a homely and comfortable world.\(^{20}\) For it remains doubtful whether any
historization of the Idea is really a theme to be connected with the eman­
cipation of the Jews within the bounds of legality. As soon as the Idea is frozen
into status quo, Heine shows himself very reluctant to accept its actual au­
thority. Here we have the core of his lifelong distrust of the Idea’s real existing
power. Hegelianism is never approved of unconditionally; to Heine, Hegel’s
philosophical drive to upgrade the status of the concrete world still may end in a
justification of the present.

Once the hopes of the post-war years had passed into the conservatism
of the Restoration, the ranks of the politicized Hegelians fragmented. To them,
his philosophy now became subject to validation by actuality. Heine shares their
discontent. To him, Hegel’s Idea might be associated for the time being with
disenchantment and insecurity instead of freedom.\(^{21}\) What he criticizes is the
speculative metamorphosis of history into a philosophical vindication of
redemption. Against an accomodationist stance Heine insists on man’s right to
disagree with real existing conditions. In a letter to his Jewish friend and con­
fidant Moses Moser (23 May 1823) he made no secret of his resistance to an un­
timely identification with Hegelianism. In Prussia, the Idea is all but the modern
synthesis of Jewishness and civil society; its articulation reveals itself as an in­
extective ‘remedy’ to being different the moment Heine would find something
there that would justify all his forebodings and apprehensions:

\(^{18}\) Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 521.
\(^{19}\) See Chapter III, 131-6.
\(^{20}\) Heine was not one of those who would accept the label of ‘fellow traveller’ Breckman is put­
ing on him, Marx, the Young Hegelians, 9.
\(^{21}\) Cf. Hilderbrand, Emanzipation und Versöhnung, 121-2.
As you may notice, I have spent Wednesday night in Lupteen, where I was haunted by most fatal dreams. I saw a host of people laughing at me, even small children were jeering at me, and I rushed at you, my dear Moser, boiling with rage, and you took me in your arms compassionately, consoling me by saying ‘don’t take it to heart, for you are just an Idea’, and in order to show me that I was just an Idea, you seized Hegel’s Logics and pointed at one of its woolly passages, and there was Gans knocking at the window, – but I called out in my rage ‘I am no Idea’, leaping around the room, ‘I have not the vaguest notion of what an Idea is all about, never in all my born days I have had any Idea.’ It was a bad dream. I remember Gans was shouting even louder and on his shoulders there was little Marcus shrieking apt quotations in a dreadfully hoarse voice, sneering so ugly at me, that I awakened in terror. (HSA XX, 86)

Here, behind the scenes, and, significantly, in the dead of night, Moser, Gans, and Marcus, Heine’s co-members of the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies, are grotesquely pictured as philosophical counsellors who might entice him into merging completely with the Hegelian Idea. Against their recommendations Heine sticks to what was to become a staple in his writing: the Jews’ woes. In another letter to Moser, dated 18 June 1823, he clarifies the point in question:

I feel strongly moved to express the Jews’ woes (as Börne terms it) in an article for the Association’s periodical. It will be done the moment my mind can bear the strain. I blame our Lord and God for plaguing me so rudely with those woes these times. It is even impolitic of the Old Man to treat me like this, for He knows that I am determined to be of service to Him. Or did the High Commander of Sinai and Almighty Monarch of Judah also manage to progress to enlightenment? Did He give up His nationality, did He waive His titles, and did He dismiss His devotees in the cause of some vaguely cosmopolitan ideas? I am afraid the Old Man has lost His head. There is some reason for the Little Jew from Amsterdam to whisper in His ear: Between You and me, Monsieur, You don’t exist. And we, do we exist? For heaven’s sake, don’t tell me that I am only an Idea! That would drive me crazy. For aught I care you may all become Ideas, please allow me through unmolested. Since you, together with Friedländer and Gans, have turned into Ideas, you are resolved to work on me with the intention of making me an Idea as well. [...] Why should I bother about Little Markus’ alleging that I am an

22 Gans was an ardent Hegelian. His situation had worsened in 1822, when Friedrich Wilhelm III, with the active encouragement of Savigny, formidable opponent of Jewish emancipation and staunch anti-Hegelian, issued a cabinet order which removed an ambiguity in the 1812 Jewish Emancipation Edict so as to definitively exclude Jews from holding university teaching positions, cf. Norbert Waszek, Eduard Gans 1797-1839. Hegelianer, Jude, Europäer, 16-18. More on Gans below in this chapter, 126.
Idea? His maid knows better. Dr Zunz's wife told me (Judaism: tears on her cheeks) that her husband, too, was about to be changed into an Idea, which would cost her all his strength and vigour. That is why Jost broke up with the Association, while Auerbach got in distress. As for me, I refuse to tolerate personalities of the kind that you still don't know what sort of Idea I am. For this would mean that I am a peculiar one, which is a failure. (HSA XX, 97)

This dense and balanced argument deserves closer examination. Before Moser, ingredients are carefully arranged. The 'Old Man' (whom Heine wants to 'serve') is caricatured as an assimilating Jew, ready to 'give up His nationality', as he is driven crazy by radical philosophy, a theme we saw recurring in a late letter of Heine's to Campe. Further, Heine associates the 'Jews' woes' with Ludwig Börne, republican German-Jewish publicist and formidable rival for whom he yet always felt a close affinity. In Heine’s writings the name ‘Börne’ becomes indicative of his own insecurities. ‘Börne’ stands for revolutionary failure and republican myopia, for the experience of emancipatory drive and social restrictions so characteristic of intellectual Jewry in nineteenth-century Germany. Thirdly, the ‘Little Jew from Amsterdam’ clearly refers to Spinoza. The reference hints at the Pantheism Controversy, which brought to a climax a century of attacks on Spinoza’s teachings by the academic and ecclesiastical establishment in Germany.

Spinoza embodied rational consistency and freedom of conscience, values which made him the patron saint of progressive minds. His echo was a litmus test of one’s commitment to critical thinking. Spinoza became the epitome of pantheism. Hegel had been accused of pantheism since the publication of his Phenomenology of Spirit, which some readers interpreted as a continuation of Schelling’s philosophy of nature. Very likely Heine did not have direct knowledge of Spinoza’s writings. But in the intellectual climate of the early nineteenth century his very remembrance offers a clue as to how Heine’s Hegel-reading would develop. From the beginning, there is definitively something pantheistic about Heine’s Hegel. Heine’s pantheism appears to have influenced by an eclectic interest in the Spinoza-readings not only in Hegel, but also in Lessing, Goethe, and the young Schelling.

Yet another characteristic from the letter must be noted: to the ideal closure of Hegelian dialectics, which eventually seems to consist in the refusal to posit negativity other than the reiteration of an ideal unity in itself, Heine

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23 Chapter II, 88.
24 Börne’s shadow in Chapter IV, 143-8.
26 Contrary to Klaus Briegleb, who confuses the notice of Spinozistic echoes in a debate about pantheism with actual reading, cf. 'Naturlauten in der Matratzengruft, ein Traum', in Kruse, ed., "Ich Narr", 342-49.
27 Details in Michel Espagne, Federstriche.
responds by insisting on the irrevocable otherness he knew from personal experience beyond the ken of philosophy. His wordings are contradictory; they may be more of a hindrance than an asset to the total sublimation of rejection and suppression. This required the dismissal of a dialectical logic which absorbed finite being in ever-higher levels of abstract reflection in favour of a flexible mode of articulation which preserved finitude, particularity, contingency, and the discontinuities of crisis and decision. Because Heine’s writing is expressive of that articulation, we must shift our attention once more to the Jewish context which stamped his work as ‘different’ from the very beginning.

2. Jewish Difference

I suggest that Heine’s doubts about the actualization of the Idea in modern history proves itself justified in the light of what Hegel holds about Judaism. In the Introduction we already pointed at Hegel’s analysis of Judaism in terms of an ethnic religion lacking the universal character of Christianity. The ‘deficiency’ is of such consequence that it deserves closer examination. Here it must be stressed that Hegel discusses Judaism as the epitome of an unfree psyche which had to be redeemed by revolution – first by revolutionary Christianity, and now, in modern times, by revolutionary German philosophy. Though ‘we notice that among the Jews the spiritual became of prime importance’, Hegel lectures,

this religion failed to lend its principle – the spiritual – universal efficacy. It is not yet free thought, but it is confined to a particular place. It is purely abstract thought, not yet concrete thought. For outside its abstractness its principle is, moreover, only the God of the Jewish people alone.

To Hegel, Judaism is one of the specific ‘restricted’ religions, which are by one and the same token historical stages of religion and also ‘only’ conceptual preludes to it. Here the activity of God is not an expression of his inner essence but just a manifestation of his Power among obedient believers, as Nathan Rotenstreich rightly stipulates. The downgraded position of the lonely individual, Hegel observes with regard to Judaism, leads to the elevation of the family and indeed of the people as a collective entity. The Jewish conception of man as utterly different from God tends to emphasize and rigidify man’s finitude. There is but one step from this enclosure in the finite to the stubbornness of the Jews. Hegel himself indeed points to the fundamental link existing between fanaticism and stubbornness, saying that both are grounded in the abstraction of the one Lord. The relation between the Jewish people and

28 Introduction, 17.
29 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 267-8.
30 Ibidem, 429-30; Religionsphilosophie, 201.
31 The Recurring Pattern, 68.
32 Religionsphilosophie, 607 and 709.
their religion is summed up in the statement that Judaism is the religion of the most stubborn and most inert type of understanding.\textsuperscript{33} Judaism, Hegel claimed, had been superseded by the movement of the spirit from the ancient to the modern Christian world, and in the process the Jewish people had been left stranded outside the current of world history. The underlying point of this claim is the view that integration could be achieved only by abandoning those traits and practices which preserve the Jews as a separate people, that is, by their desertion of the Law and their foreswearing of legalism and ritualism. Only thus could the Jews be free. The peculiar survival of Judaism is criticized as the result of a refusal to become cosmopolitan, and to merge with the Christian peoples of modern Europe, to rejoin history, to share reconciliation, to love humanity.\textsuperscript{34}

Heine’s writing can be read as a permanent quest for an articulation of experiencing precisely the difference Hegel wants to eliminate.\textsuperscript{35} Hegel’s philosophy is an eye-opener; it can help to put in perspective the vast gulf which separates individual existence from basic civil and political rights, but it is not necessarily a compulsory guideline for emancipation. In its pretensions to universality, the Idea still manifests itself in the particular as a collision of private and public interests. To Heine, then, Hegel’s synthesis is basically a doubtful compromise; its intellectual splendour was dimmed by the vicissitudes of otherness.

Heine’s reservations about Hegel’s programme evolved in the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies he participated in by the early 1820s. The Association was set up with the aim of encouraging a new generation of Jewish intellectuals to manifest Jewishness as a phenomenon of civilization.\textsuperscript{36} Using the actual level of learning to study Jewish life and literature, its members attempted to rehabilitate and redefine Judaism for the sake of emancipation. For Judaism, they argued, as a fundamentally moral instance, promoted the cause of humanity and therefore qualified the Jews for modern civility.\textsuperscript{37} Whilst the most influential feature to this came to manifest itself in a critical study of Jewish history, and in a new philosophical understanding of the essence of Judaism, it also brought about an involvement of Jewish scholarship in a fresh approach to the Hebrew Bible as a literary document.

The interest and resources of the Association were current for a critical study of Biblical texts, and for a re-appraisal of the ongoing relationship between this scriptural literature and modern Jewry. Its members kept on living up to their expectations in search of an intellectual framework to fit in their ex-

\textsuperscript{33} Ibidem, 321, 405.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibidem, 329, 499, and 655. In Chapter I, 52-4, it was already indicated that Hegel did not link this concept of ‘egoistic Judaism’ to the caricatures of selfishness and parasitism; in the 1840s, however, radicalizing Hegelians turned out to be less scrupulous, in asserting blankly that the main manifestation of Judaism was to be found in the Jews’ involvement with money.
\textsuperscript{35} Briegleb, \textit{Opfer Heine?}, 199.
\textsuperscript{36} Introduction, 12, 15-6.
Leopold Zunz concentrated on the history of Jewish culture in order to further the cause of emancipation by pointing its significance to world history. His study made him disparage the Prussian restoration of 1815. Heine’s Berlin friend Moses Moser, the Association’s secretary, held that Jews should preserve the sacred values they cherish in their history through the troublesome vicissitudes of a nation in exile. This view brought with it the idealist and romantic notion that each people’s culture was both inviolable and developed according to an innate logic and dynamic. Each people was individual with its own integrity.38 The champions of Jewish acculturation thus faced the fundamental paradox of the relationship between universalism and particularism we already noticed when discussing Heine’s Germanizing.39

The Berlin Association tried to overcome the problem by means of Hegelian philosophy. It favoured an interpretation of traditional religion through the articulation of the essence of Judaism in terms of its characteristic features, which could be rendered through concepts and ideas. Contrary to rabbinic dogmatism as well as to unconditional embourgeoisement, the Berlin circle searched for a redefinition of Jewry, which might have value in answering specific doubts and questions about the Jews’ struggle with modernity. This agenda combined a critical liberal view of the state (emancipation as a question of ‘law’) with regeneration (emancipation as a question of ‘essence’), and historical sense (emancipation as a question of ‘logic’). It led to the conclusion that the modern state did not come up to the betterment modern Jewry expected from the French Revolution. And so the general problem of liberty in a politically reactionary, post-Napoleonic age became blurred with the gnawing uncertainty about the Jews’ rights. Great difficulties were experienced in Prussia, where the authoritarian political structure based on an alliance of autocrat, aristocrat and bureaucrat succeeded in withstanding liberal challenges.40 To answer these practices, private experiences were incorporated into a general search for political freedom.

To members like the young Heine and his fellows Moser and Zunz, the disillusionment with the Jews’ emancipation in the backwash of the French Revolution seemed to match the discontents to the reactionary state the liberal intelligentsia transmitted in the early 1820s. Jews and non-Jews, they felt, share their disenchantment in common, and they both present the same case with reasoned argument. However promising Hegel’s philosophy appeared to be, doubts remained. Had Hegel really succeeded in articulating universal rational-

39 Introduction, 3-4.
legal norms while promoting the reconciliation of individual freedom with communal integration? Once the hopes of the post-1815 years had passed into Restoration, the ranks of Hegel’s politicized students crumbled. Even some of his earliest disciples became quite aware that Hegel had made his philosophy subject to validation by historical events when he claimed to discover the rational Idea in (Prussian) actuality.

Thus is the climate of opinion in which the young Heine’s writing evolves. Shared disenchantment sets the tone. On the one hand we have his preoccupation with an emancipatory upgrading of Jewishness. On the other hand we have his commitment to liberal views. Heine’s early poetry fathoms the intellectual generalizing of the Jews’ experience with literary sensitivity, as it reflects a sense of disappointment which permeated the times. His Germanizing tends to exceed the bounds of Jewish subculture: he now addresses the issue of the wrong done to him and to what he considered his general reading public in lyric, so as to lend a poetical tone to wider misgivings:

Wenn ich an deinem Hause
Des Morgens vorübergeh,
So freut’s mich, du liebe Kleine,
Wenn ich dich am Fenster seh.

Mit deinem schwarzbraunen Augen
Siehst du mich forschend an:
Wer bist du, und was fehlt dir,
Du fremder, kranker Mann?

“Ich bin ein deutscher Dichter,
Bekannt im deutschen Land;
Nennt man die besten Namen,
So wird auch der meine genannt.

“Und was mir fehlt, du Kleine,
Fehlt Manchem im deutschen Land;
Nennt man die schlimmsten Schmerzen,
So wird auch der meine genannt.”

(DHA 1/1, 223)

This early poem from Heine’s 1823-4 cycle ‘Homeward Bound’ is indicative of Heine’s wish ‘to enter’ the literary establishment, the order of ‘geniuses’ among whom Goethe ranks highest. In order to catch the public’s imagination, Heine has to try for the literary bravura of a newcomer. He seeks an answer to neglect in hyperbole. For the contemporary reader, of all those ‘great names’ Goethe is obviously the finest. Consequently, this poem is also expressive of Heine’s attempts to establish his literary sensitivity relative to the authority of the poet

41 Following Briegleb, Opfer Heine?, 59.
laureate from Weimar.\textsuperscript{42} We will return to Heine’s position on ‘Goethean writing’ in the section below. Here it is necessary to point at the ‘searing pains’ in the just cited poem. In spite of Heine’s striving for ‘sharing’, the ‘pains’ are notably indicative of the fact that his misery has its own particular place on the social spectrum. The ‘pains’ signal Jewishness, and they form a basic thread running through Heine’s writing. In his middle period they are fully exhibited in his 1843 poem ‘The New Israelite Hospital in Hamburg’, where Heine combine poverty, illness and Jewishness in an ominous triad of faults:

\begin{verbatim}
Ein Hospita! für arme, kranke Juden,
Für Menschenkinder, welche dreifach elend,
Behaftet mit den bösen drey Gebrechen,
Mit Armuth, Körperschmerz und Judenthume!

Das schlimmste von den dreyen ist das letzte,
Das tausendjährige Familienübem,
Die aus dem Nylthal mitgeschleppte Plage,
Der altegyptisch ungesundene Glauben.

Unheilbar tiefes Leid! Dagegen helfen
Nicht Dampfbad, Dusche, nicht die Apparate
Der Chirurgie, noch all die Arzeneyen,
Die dieses Haus den siechen Gästen bietet.

Wird einst die Zeit, die ew'ge Göttin, tilgen
Das dunkle Weh, das sich verebt vom Vater
Herunter auf dem Sohn, – wird einst der Enkel
Genesen und vernünftig seyn und glücklich?

Ich weiß es nicht! Doch mittlerweile wollen
Wir preisen jenes Herz, das klug und liebreich
Zu lindern suchte, was der Lindrung fähig,
Zeitlichen Balsam träufelnd in die Wunden.

Der theure Mann! Er baute hier ein Obdach
Für Leiden, welche heilbar durch die Künste
Des Arztes, (oder auch des Todes!) sorgte
Für Polster, Labetrank, Wartung und Pflege –

Ein Mann der That, that er was eben thünstlich;
Für gute Werke gab er hin den Taglohn
Am Abend seines Lebens, menschenfreundlich,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{42} Heine’s lifelong interest in Goethe is beyond the scope of this study. For a general analysis see George F. Peters, ‘Sehr große Heide Nr. 2’: Heinrich Heine and the Levels of His Goethe Reception, New York, 1989. Heine’s final view of Goethe is lucidly sketched in Cook, ‘Citroonia’ 81-112.
Durch Wohlthun sich erholend von der Arbeit.

Er gab mit reicher Hand – doch reich’re Spende
Entrollte manchmal seinem Aug’, die Thräne,
Die kostbar schöne Thräne, die er weinte
Ob der unheilbar großen Brüderkrankheit.
(DHA II, 117-8)

Characteristically, this timeless poem is written in Lessing-like verse; its iambic pentameter is markedly reminiscent of Lessing’s *Nathan*, written in order to promote better understanding between the three great monotheistic religions. In Heine’s hands, those emancipatory tones are gone; Jewishness everywhere in modern society is again the stigma which it was in history. In this respect, we can detect a straight line from the pains in Heine’s early ‘Homeward Bound’ poem, via his middle ‘Israelite Hospital’, up to his the late poem ‘Morphine’ we discussed in our second chapter. They all point at an ‘unhealthiness’ we must view presently, by contrasting the literary bravura of the young Heine’s to Goethean standards.

3. Jewish Comedy

In the 1820s, his formative years, Heine choose a literary stance which could be acknowledged by the public as modern in comparison with Goethe’s classical aesthetics which perceives the world as holistic and sound. To the young Heine, art is no longer the Goethean realization of an indubitable ego, subsuming the text, the writer, and civilization itself within a wider concept of a comprehensible cosmos structured according to rational and moral harmony. His art is all but ‘healthy’; from the very beginning, his texts present a searching, discontented and fragmented persona which was to recur in the *schlemihl* we noticed in his later writings. According to Heine, the difference between Goethe and him results from the breakdown of art’s august status. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, art has become involved in the political and social issues of the day. In contrast to the tranquility of Goethe, Heine did not vow to disengage from the political struggles of the post-Napoleonic present. His writing is perturbed. From this reorientation a novel style emerges, which is ‘artificial’, if art is to be measured against aesthetic standardization (of which Goethean writing is exemplar). This is reflected in the prose following the first poetry, masquerading as a dimming half-trust in man as a civilizer and keeper of civilizations.

The fate of this writing denominates an aesthetic alienation. As we saw earlier in our second chapter, it refers to an experience of art as being robbed of self-evident truths. Instead, it extols the splendours of the fantastic in gushes

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43 Cook, ‘Citronia’, 96.
45 66-70.
of pleasure. Its exhibition defies pragmatism, its vocabulary disarms authenticity, and its urge seems pathological. It is its very raving which blocks any arrangement with Goethean standards. The young Heine clarifies the point in a letter to Rudolf Christiani (26 May 1825):

In many respects I faced the high esteem Goethe felt for the preservation of the splendour and beauty of life yet without ignoring its practicalities. It made me realize how sharply his nature contrasted with mine. For me, practicality is a nuisance. I have a poor opinion of life, and I would rather sacrifice it defiantly for the idea. What makes me a conflicting nature, is a permanent strife between reason and an inborn penchant for raving. I came to realize too why Goethe’s writings are so repellent to my inward feelings, though I must admit that I revere his gift for poetry. Besides, his way of thinking has many parallels with the conventional side of my world picture. In sum, I am at war with Goethe and his writings as truly as my world view is at odds with my inborn abilities and secret feelings. – But fear not, my dear Christiany, for these battles will never become public, I will always volunteer for the Goethean Corps, and all I write will be monitored by artistic prudence and will never result from unbridled enthusiasm. (HSA XX, 199-200)

This is an important passage, not only because it reflects Heine’s profound disappointment about the visit he had paid Goethe seven months earlier in Weimar, but also because it gives some valuable information about his manoeuvring into authorship in the 1820s. The rift between Goethe’s writings and Heine’s ‘secret feelings’ cannot be healed by ‘artistic prudence’. The enlistment in the ‘Goethean Corps’ is no more than a cosmetic effort at Germanizing. The young Heine might try to masquerade as Goethe’s acolyte, but his ‘inborn feelings’ cannot be silenced. 46 They render his writing novel in comparison with Goethean standards. This need to simulate constitutes one of the three basic ingredients of a literary career, which will never mix into ‘proper’ writing. The other two: a secret history, a Hegelian Idea. For though there is a good case for Goethean imperturbability, to Heine, art may take another, non-conventional course in raving about an emancipatory Idea which, in turn, is yet an insufficient remedy against primeval stirrings of Jewish wisdom, as we saw above, in discussing Heine’s 1823 letter to Moses Moser. These incongruities make writing stressful working. It is basically inopportune, presenting an ‘dissenting variant’ of cultural consciousness, voicing the differences and imperfections conventional society is anaesthetising. Heine’s proverbial irony may be seen as a deliberate articulation of this experience in simulated pleasure for public amusement.

Heine’s irony makes one reflective about art’s artful appearance in present society. Such knowledge can only flourish in between what are considered

to be the traditional canons of literary and artistic judgement. In such ‘interstices’ Heine is working on a ‘different’ idiom, and thus he spurns the notion that art is indicative of soundness or wholeness. Against Goethe’s ‘conventionalism’ he now opts for a radical reconsideration of traditional genres in the light of revolutionary change, and thus he dispels the belief that art is a mimetic evocation of extra- or meta-historical data. All this leads to a basic disenchantment so characteristic of all of Heine’s writings. Hence the ceasura, the torso, the ruin, the single, literary monuments of lost perspectives, as we saw above, in discussing the physicality of Heine’s late poetry.⁴⁷

Heine’s art, then, appears to be pursued at the expense of alienation, deformation, and displacement. Quick wit and chirpy humour, larded with pangs of love and dreamlike airs, are all Heine’s literary transcriptions of this basically non-pacific experience.⁴⁸ However stubbornly it is worded, literature yet remains a poor argument against the order of things. It makes Heine’s writing intrinsically vulnerable. In his texts there is no speech which is not broken speech, no voice which does not crack in breaking through the fissures of another. Fiction emerges from a search for a safeguard against being branded as identical with the world. The young Heine is at pains to laugh off the poor conditions of conventional society. In the act of laughing, simultaneously, a glint of difference is made visible to a wider readership. Hence its theatrical ambience.

From the 1820s on, writing becomes Heine’s quest for a conspicuous stage to perform on.⁴⁹ It thrives on human drama full of splendid casts and wonderful acting. To the general reading public, it has all the appearances of a vaudeville: Heine’s Jewish Comedy, as S.S. Prawer characterized it so remarkably well.⁵⁰ This Jewish theatrum mundi is populated by characters to be trapped in Heine’s irony like insects in amber. Its numerous protagonists preserve Heine’s own incognito. Theatre is an indispensable tool for reappraising the reverse side of reasonable history. Irony is Heine’s responsive reaction to the sign that there is something wrong between inner feelings and social order, a reaction which is to be sought in disorder and disorientation rather than regularity. To Heine, irony is a mode of seeing things differently, and therefore it is a witting instrument of truth. It chides, refines, deflates, and scorns. It is centred on the tragicomic figure of the fool, the very embodiment of disguised nonconformity.

Heine’s dissembling techniques keep the average reader wondering about his exact motives. At the same time, however, the reader is meticulously

⁴⁷ Chapter II, 63.
⁴⁹ Birwirth, Heines Dichterbilder, 22.
⁵⁰ Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 770.
informed about this very manoeuvring, as it is set out lucidly in Heine’s *Romantic School*:

Writers languishing in all kinds of censorship and constraint yet without renouncing their hearts’ deepest feelings are particularly thrown upon humorous and ironic modes of expression. These are the only refuges left for honesty; here honesty reveals itself most touchingly indeed. This reminds me again of the marvellous Prince of Denmark. Hamlet is the epitome of honesty. His dissembling only serves as a substitute for outward appearance. He is marvellous because marvels are less offensive to court etiquette than blunt speech. In all his humorous ironic jests he makes no secret of his design just to dissemble. In all his actions and all his speech he makes himself perfectly clear to the practised spectator, especially to the King, whom he does not want to deny the truth, though he cannot tell him the truth straight out, for the King is too weak to hear it being said plainly. Hamlet is honest through and through; only the noblest man could say ‘We are all errant knaves’, and while he simulates madness, he certainly does not mean to fools us; inwardly he is very much aware that he is truly mad. (DHA VIII/1, 184)

Writing thus becomes a means to register the enigmatic imprints of ‘the heart’s deepest feelings’ beyond the manifest façade of things. The façade or covering need not feign. Nevertheless, the dictate of convention is that the façade works to hide. It covers. The façade is linked to the mask, and both are involved in the opposition of inside and outside. What takes place behind the mask? The author knows the meaning of its vestigial hieroglyphs. Hamlet’s ‘practised spectator’ is referring those well acquainted with Heine’s idiosyncrasies through close reading. Among them is Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, née Levin. ‘Our history,’ she writes him in a letter dated 21 September 1830, ‘is our very private pathography’, hinting at a hidden text under the paint of convention. Though not all her hintings at actual incidents and daily occurrences are still clear to us, the Hop! Hop! in the first line of our citation obviously refers to anti-Jewish disturbances, when the streets were full of Hop! Hop! To the hell with Jews!

To me, the Hop! Hop! came as unexpectedly as all other fiascos. No sumptuous pier glass, no Maiden’s Circle, no Elephant Show, no charities, no vivas, no condescendings, no socializings, no almanacs, no glamourizings, nothing, no nothing could ever soothe me. The rash and

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52 Cf. Altenhoefer, Die verlorene Augensprache, 58-76.
53 See Elke Frederiksen, ‘Heinrich Heine und Rahel Varnhagen. Zur Beziehung und Differenz zweier Autoren im frühen 19. Jahrhundert’, HJB 1990, 9-38, justly states that whereas for Rahel Varnhagen private correspondence was the only access to the world of literature, Heine’s writing was a public affair. For biographical data see Carola Stern, Der Text meines Herzens. Das Leben der Rahel Varnhagen, Reinbeck 1994.
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cabs must be exposed; greasepaint will never do, even if it were plastered with wide flat brushes! Only despots can help us, judicious despots – or else... Period! These are my greetings to you; the whole thing just slipped out inadvertently, it is all I can say about life for now. It is up to you to put it your way in the near future. Your wordings may be glorious, elegiac, fantastic, or trenchant, they may be extremely funny or ever mellifluous, they may be tempting or even ravishing, but whatever you write, the text from this old and insulted heart of mine shall genuinely remain yours. To sum up: The Lord considers the trouble we suffer, and yet, in His infinite wisdom, He does not command His imperious despot to act right now. The reason for His decision is history. Even the slightest notion what I am talking about suffices to make my case. Our history is our very private pathography. We all have certainly had our share. Out with it now, please!\(^{54}\)

In a letter of condolence to Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, Rahel's husband, on her death, Heine worships Rahel's memory with reference to a close-knit readership which will soon fade away (5 February 1840):

I have known the deceased very well. She always expressed her deepest sympathy with me. We resembled each other in prudence and indulgence, and though we did not meet often, I reckoned her among my intimate friends, she belonged to the inner circle where bonds of tacit understanding are particularly strong. Good Heavens, how steadily this peaceful community has dwindled for the last ten years! One after the other has gone. We are shedding bitter tears over them, till we make our own exit. When we are mourned thereupon, tears will be less bitter, as the subsequent generations are ignorant about what we lived and suffered for. After all, how could they have known us? We never divulged our secret history, and since we have no plans ever to do so, we shall carry it into our grave, our lips sealed. She and I, we understood each other the instant our eyes met, we recognized at a glance what we had in common. We can expect the eyes' language of ours to become extinct in the near future. Finally, the testimonies we bequeath to a later readership, Rahel's letters, for instance, will turn out to be downright hieroglyphics – every funeral is yet another confirmation of my suspicions. (HSA XXI, 345-6)

Beneath the veneer of modern civilization lay something very 'crude' indeed, as Rahel reminds him: a 'pariah people' closed out from social life with respect-

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able people because it was deemed wanting in respectability in the first place. Unfortunately, they know each other only too well, to cite from Heine's 1841 poem 'Meeting' from his New Poems, in which the experience of the pariah is pictured in terms of Germanic folklore:

Wohl unter der Linde erklingt die Musik,
Da tanzen die Burschen und Mädle,
Da tanzen zwei, die niemand kennt,
Sie schau'n so schlank und edel.

Sie schweben auf, sie schweben ab,
In seltsam fremder Weise,
Sie lachen sich an, sie schütteln das Haupt,
Das Fräulein flüstert leise:

"Mein schöner Junker, auf Eurem Hut
Schwankt eine Neckenlilje,
Die wächst nur tief in Meeresgrund —
Ihr stammt nicht aus Adams Familie.

Ihr seyd der Wassermann, Ihr wollt
Verlocken des Dorfes Schönen.
Ich hab' Euch erkannt, beim ersten Blick,
An Euren fischgrätigen Zähnen."

Sie schweben auf, sie schweben ab,
In seltsam fremder Weise,
Sie lachen sich an, sie schütteln das Haupt,
Der Junker flüstert leise:

"Mein schönes Fräulein, sagt mir warum
So eiskalt Eure Hand ist?
Sagt mir warum so naß der Saum
An Eurem weißen Gewand ist?

Ich hab' Euch erkannt, beim ersten Blick,
An Eurem spöttischen Knixe —
Du bist kein irdisches Menschenkind,
Du bist mein Mühmchen, die Nixe."

Die Geigen verstummen, der Tanz ist aus,
Es trennen sich höflich die beiden.
Sie kennen sich leider viel zu gut,

Suchen sich jetzt zu vermeiden.
(DHA II, 94-5)

In folklore, the Nixes are treacherous water nymphs acting as fair maidens in search of smart boys; they are only recognizable by the wet hems of their dress. The cruel Waterman, with his fish-bone teeth, takes young girls away by force to his house at the bottom of the lake. They both are fond of music and like to mix with dancing people. Heine knew all about the tale, since he had been working on Germanic folklore in his *Elementary Spirits* (1834-7). Rather than folkloristic characters, this poem pictures Nixe and Waterman as forthright outsiders. They are unmasked ‘under the lindens’, the *locus classicus* of Germaneness. We are invited to see them as Jews striving vainly for acceptance, as they notice that the stigma cannot be done away with. Folklore turns into an ironical miniature document of Heine’s time.

We can generalize its meaning with reference to the ‘Jews’ woes’ the young Heine alluded to in his aforementioned letter to Moses Moser. It is evident that the discrepancy between civil society and Jewish emancipation in post-Napoleonic Europe led up to separateness and exile. If we place this experience in the Hegelian context we discussed so far, we can say that history is stigmatizing him as an outsider whose peculiarity is yet a precondition for transition to freedom: as long as there are outsiders, freedom is still waiting to become manifest. In Heine’s formative years, then, Hegelian philosophy is a sophisticated means to theorize about reality’s discrepancy, telling him to what synthesis his potential might allow him to grow. But this theorizing cannot do away with exile; it just asks for an accurate reflection upon the wretched conditions of an exiled life to which we turn now.

4. By the Rivers of Babylon

In his letter to Moses Moser, dated 23 April 1826, Heine gives a clear index to the experience of exile:

> I remember that the psalm ‘By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down’ was your forte; you would recite it so lovely, so touchingly indeed, that the recollection still brings me close to tears, that is, not only over the psalmist’s wordings. In that period you harboured intriguing thoughts about Jewry, about the Christian perfidy of proselytizing, about the perfidy of Jews wanting to gain from baptism instead of accepting it with the best of intentions, and suchlike thoughts, which you must really write down some day, for meanwhile you have become independent enough to measure your strength with Gans. And as far as I am concerned, you need not feel embarrassed about me.

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56 Höhn, 362-8.
58 This chapter, first section.
Following Solon's dictum that 'nobody is to be judged happy before his death', we may say also that nobody is to be judged brave before his death.

I am glad old Friedländer and Ben-David are well stricken in age: soon they will sleep with their fathers in security. The least we cannot reproach ourselves with presently is that we are not able to indicate any righteous man.

Forgive my annoyance, but it is directed against myself. I often wake up in the night; I go to the mirror and scold myself. Maybe your soul is that mirror now, though it looks less clear than it would otherwise be.

Don't be moody because I am. I am prepared to agree on whatever you put up. Call me a rascal and I will approve of it. Nay, what is more, I am even subjective. And in all my subjectivity I am heaping scorn on the beautiful weather, on Gans -- [...]

Give our 'extraordinary' Gans my best regards; tell him that in all honesty he is still dear to my heart. I will hold him in reverence, though not as a saint or an idol or a prodigy. I often think of him, because I don’t want to think of myself. This very night I was picturing Gans before מִשְׁמַרְהָיוֹן. I wondered what he would advance when all of a sudden Moses reappeared on earth, for Moses is indeed by far the greatest legislator the world has ever seen, since his commandments last unto this day. (HSA XX, 240)

Though the letter is written almost one year later, it still bears the fresh scars of the humiliating experience of baptism, which Heine underwent on 28 June 1825, the year after his Dr. jur. graduation in Göttingen on 20 July 1824. We have already suggested that the Hamburg Heine-clan saw his baptism as an essential prerequisite for a successful social climb. Heine’s uncle Salomon, banker in Hamburg, had financed his studies. Now the time had come to reap the fruits of the labour. Heine was supposed to become a respectable solicitor. In the just cited lines, characteristically, Heine projects his own anxieties and insecurities upon Eduard Gans. Like Heine, Gans refused to consider a business career, and he was denied an academic post, which intensified his sense of Jewishness. He was yet given a government stipend, which allowed him to spend much of 1825 in Paris, where he converted to Protestantism, which was the only path, left open to Prussian academies. Upon his return to Berlin, he was finally able to begin teaching at the university. Gans became an ‘extraordinary professor’ in the juristic faculty. The picture of Gans, too, is a veiled self-portrait of Heine.

Against all Hamburg expectations, however, the young Heine is sticking to writing. The use of the Hebrew for ‘Our Tutor Moses’ (Mosche Rabenu) is a strong reminder that baptism cannot wash away his Jewishness. Significantly, it

59 Further details in Höhn, 32-7.
60 Prawer, Jewish Comedy, 10-18.
is this confronting image of Moses to which the late Heine returns, as we will see in our fifth chapter.\footnote{189-92.} But even Moses cannot do away with present miseries: in citing the 137th Psalm about the rivers of Babylon, Heine pinpoints the ineluctable context of his writing: exiled Jewry. This 'great song of Babylonian exile,' as Prawer typifies it, is becoming a leitmotiv of Heine's work.\footnote{Prawer, \textit{Jewish Comedy}, 448.} It is retentive power, \textit{cathexis}, rooted in Heine's sense of Jewishness. Traditionally, one citation suffices to bring the whole psalm to mind:

\begin{quote}
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.
\end{quote}

The psalm's lines are a precious memento to Heine: this lament is rooted in private experiences. Up to the age of ten Heine had been visiting the traditional Israelite boys' school, the \textit{Heder}, but the following years brought him away from this rather insular environment. It was the Berlin \textit{Association} which turned his attention to the values of 'otherness' to be cherished in the Jews' cultural memory.

Heine conceives this 'otherness', in its philosophical reaches, as embodied in a contradiction which cannot be resolved if only the conditions of Hegel's system are fulfilled. To Heine, world history is the very revelation of that contradiction, once its processuality becomes reality, as it is indicated in Heine's view of the battlefield of Marengo:

\begin{quote}
Alas! Every tribute to Progress has cost mankind streams of blood. Isn't that a bit too expensive? Isn't the bare life of an individual as precious as the survival of all? For every man is a world on his own, which comes into existence and passes away with him. Under every tomb a world history is resting. Enough! the dead would say, those who fell on this battlefield. And we? We live, we are marching on the righteous war of liberation for mankind. (DHA VII/1, 71)
\end{quote}
The problem which vexes Heine here, in his 1828 *Travel from Munich to Genoa*, is that between the nightmare of empirical history (streams of blood) and freedom (war of liberation) the subject seems to crumble (tomb). As indicated above, Heine disagrees with Hegel in stressing the importance of radical subjectivity before the Absolute, whose intellectual worship in Hegel’s philosophy, by systematic thinking, appropriates and comprehends what is otherwise only the content of subjective sentiment or representation. In its philosophical concretization, the Absolute constitutes a system of total mediation.

The identity of philosophy and history is the very core and axis of this system of mediation. Whereas Hegelian philosophy aims at understanding what is unchangeable, eternal, in and for itself, to Heine, Jewishness is not known under the form of the unity within which all determinations are effected (so that they are determinations and not othernesses) and under the form of the unity which those determinations constitute, on the basis of the total mediation of their othernesses by thought.

Against all odds, Heine affirms that ‘every man is a world on his own’, which means, to him, that the praxis of memorizing is indispensable to survive. At the same time, Heine is fully aware that in Hegel’s philosophy of world history the individual is reduced to a moment of transition in a historical process, as with the tragic hero in his grave, and that the reconciliation of man with history has as its condition the dissolution of all self-posited existence. Jewish wisdom is a category in opposition to that ‘expiatory’ history; it is synonymous with a ‘non-philosophical’ experience and differs from the ideological function of ‘religion’ in culture. Jewish wisdom offers political lucidity. Here, the redemption of the potential of the past is in no way a palliative. ‘Archaic’ themes are reactualized, so that they can refer to real existing misery, and become thereby capable of charging even the most depressing phenomena with ‘liberation’. Only thus, historical progress could be judged against a critical standard. Even when inspired by Napoleonic sentiments, the just cited passage suggests, it is nevertheless a thoughtless and rash enthusiasm which dismisses the claims of individual men, ignoring all their misfortune. Things become symptomatic of disindividualization in an intense caring for something to hold. Such care itself is neither revolutionary nor compensatory, but still it may result in a refusal to take the given world for granted. For all its analytical meticulousness, then, Hegel’s philosophy cannot silence the poet’s provocative lament:

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Brich aus in lauten klagen,
Du düstres Martyrerlied,
Das ich so lang getragen
Im flammenstillen Gemüth.

Es dringt in alle Ohren,
Und durch die Ohren ins Herz;
Ich habe gewaltig beschworen
Den tausendjährigen Schmerz.
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Es weinen die Grossen und Kleinen,
Sogar die kalten Herr'n,
Die Frauen und Blumen weinen,
Es weinen am Himmel die Stern'.

Und all die Thränen fließen
Nach Süden, im stillen Verein,
Sie fließen und ergießen
Sich all' in den Jordan hinein.

(DHA I/1, 526-7)

These words are the preliminaries to Heine's 1824 *Rabbi of Bacharach*, written as a testimony to his Berlin experiences. Heine dedicated the work to his friend Moses Moser.

The *Rabbi* is an intricately patterned casting of German-Jewish encounters, enabling Heine to test the metaphoric strength of memorizing for the present. What was initially conceived as a literary synthesis of German-Jewishness, was eventually carried out as a failure. For the *Rabbi* is an incomplete account of medieval ghetto life under the everlasting threat of persecution. There are too many conflicting interests to realize the synthesis. Again, in the 'weeping', we hear of the martyr's song referring to those carried away captive. The *Rabbi of Bacharach* grew into an effort to compress the history of *gohles* (as Heine rendered 'exile') into literature. *Gohles* refers to the post-biblical era of the Diaspora, when exile had lowered the quality of life to the ghetto.

With reference to his Berlin studies, Heine's *Rabbi* is a response to the *Association* 's failure to emancipate without assimilating unconditionally to modern life. In 1821 the *Association* had even flirted shortly with plans to settle in the USA, in order to further the cause of modern Jewry in a hoped-for homeland. After the search for an intellectual framework to fit in their entree to modern society had proven really fruitless, however, prominent members like Gans and Heine opted for further accommodating to the surrounding culture, rather than subscribing to the chimera of transplanting European Jews to Grand Island. The *Association* gradually dissolved, leaving its former members with blurred reminiscences of never achieved objectives. They broke off, only to discover that the Jewish Question was as acute as ever.

Heine too is reminiscent of the grandiose plans to emigrate from Germany to the USA. His aforementioned letter to Moses Moser dated 23 May 1823 is a humorous comment on what the *Association* had led some of its members to envisage:

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64 In his letter to Wohlwill, dated 7 April 1823, HSA XX, 72.

65 Edith Lutz, *Der 'Verein'*, 155-68.
One day, when Ganstown is founded and a happier generation will bless lulèf by the Mississippi, munching their matzos, and a new-born Jewish literature is flourishing, then our current stock-market jargon will count as poetry, and a poetic great-grandson of our little Marcus, dressed in talles and tefillim, will sing unto all the kille of Ganstown: By the rivers of the Spree, there they sat down, yea, they assessed their holdings. Then their enemies came, saying: arrange for your London drafts to be paid to us – prices have risen. (HSA XX, 87)

Ganstown (the English is Heine’s), of course, reminds of the distance both Gans and Heine kept, as members of the Association, from the venturesome project for settling Jews in the State of New York. Nevertheless, there is a touch of compassion in Heine’s allusions to traditional practices of blessing the palm branches (lulèf benschen) for the feast of tabernacles, eating unleavened bread (matzos), wearing prayer-garments (talles and tefillim), and addressing the congregation (kille). The most striking thing about this letter is the satirical inversion of Psalm 137. The Lord’s song the persecutors required of their captives by the rivers of Babylon is turned into mercantile prose from Berlin, which is a clear indication of fuzzy perspectives. The would-be homeland overseas dwindled away to European philistinism. For all that, however, the clever use of Babylonian imagery is a strong reminder that life means exile, captivity, and martyrdom, as we will see in the following section.

5. Egypt

Martyrdom is an inexhaustible source of a subversive yet necessary function of writing. It is not that the Germanizing poet breaks with the observed world, the world of fashionable salons, steam locomotives, crowded panoramas and class struggle. But there is a different, estranging and fearful element which sets him in his solitude apart from human attachment, Christian values and civilities. Psalm 137 reveals a pattern which was to recur again and again. Writing is mnemonic; it points back down towards the Jewish roots of the poet’s martyrdom in the present: actual life bears a striking resemblance to the ancient House of Bondage.

Heine gives a clear indication of these conditions in his Town of Lucca (1831), when he drew the attention of his fictional companion, Mathilde, to the figure of the Wandering Jew, the doomed embodiment of Jewry, which

was cursed long ago, and it has been dragging its burden along the centuries ever since.

‘Oh, that Egypt! Her products resist the ravages of time, her pyramids still stand sturdily, her mummies are as indestructible as ever, and just as durable is that mummy of a people which wanders the earth, wrapped up in its immemorial swathes of texts, a petrified item of world history, a spectre which subsists as moneychanger and pedlar. Do you see, my
lady, that old man over there, with the white beard whose tip seems to be growing black again, the man with those eerie eyes —

‘Isn’t that the site of the ruins of ancient Roman tombs?’

‘Yes indeed, that is where the old man is sitting, and perhaps, Mathilde, he is just saying his prayers, uncanny prayers in which he laments his sorrows and curses nations which have long vanished from the earth and only live on in old wives’ tales — but he, deeply afflicted, hardly notices that he is sitting on the graves of the very enemies for whose destruction he is beseeching Heaven.’ (DHA VII/1, 193)

The unassimilated Ahasverian force, as we will see in Chapter V, is a nuisance for those who demand reality be idealized. Though Heine, in his evasive zeal of the late 1820s, aptly suggests that the old story of ‘scriptural revenge’ be anachronistic, the tragic figure of the Wandering Jew is introduced here to convey something of the ghetto sense of history we hinted at above. Even in this sophisticated portrait a layer of sympathetic irony is present.66 We must pay attention to the dregs of world history, Heine insists, in order to trace vestiges of mankind. Jewish wisdom is not bound up with an anaemic past shrunk into a mere tribal memory or with an unreal future dissolved into an empty utopia. It can resist both these temptations, stay with civilization, and endure.67 Jews need not stick to the ‘backwardness’ of the Eastern European shtetl.68 But in the consciousness of Jews leading their separate existence in the midst of Western society, the real presence of ‘Egyptian’, i.e. conservative, anti-revolutionary conditions cannot be done away with through the self-humorous retouches and incrowd puns which characterize the ‘modern’ way in which religion is discussed throughout *The Town of Lucca*. The ancien régime, in every ‘Egyptian’ sense of the term, is still in power.

In contrast to Hegelian philosophy, Heine seeks to articulate this painful experience in terms of a ‘self-conscious quixotry’ in which the poetic fiction stipulated above is operating to the full:

Curious is the martyrdom present-day victors permit to suffer. It is not done away with in those hardy confessions of yore, when martyrs faced a prompt scaffold or the roaring stake. In essence martyrdom still is the sacrificing of all earthly things for celestial diversion, but it has lost much of its inner zeal, it is more of a resigned persevering, a stubborn patience, a lifelong dying. In this drab monotony of ours it may happen that even the most holy saints are seized by doubt. There is nothing more terrible than the moment Markus Brutus began to doubt the very virtue for which he had sacrificed all he had! Yet he was a Roman citizen living in the heyday of the Stoa. We moderns, however, we are made of weaker stuff. Besides, we are witnessing the thriving of a phil-

68 As we saw in our Introduction, 19.
osophy which is only willing to ascribe little significance to passion, so that it dies out or lets itself be neutralized in self-conscious quixotry! Those temperate and sensible philosophers! How pitifully they deign to smirk at the self-tortures and stupidities of a poor Don Quixote, and yet, for all their scholarship, they fail to notice that quixotry is precisely life's most laudable thing, nay, that it is the essence of life, that it fires the whole wide world with boundless imagination, and all the host of philosophers, musicians, drudgers and idlers thereupon! For the crowd, philosophers included, is quite unconscious of the fact that they themselves are but a tremendous Sancho Pansa, who is apt to follow the mad knight on all his dangerous adventures, despite his reasonable fears for cudgels and his prosy prudence. He is tempted by the prospect of reward, which he gives credence to because he is craving for it. What is more, he is driven by that mystic force by which the big masses may still be enthused. Its workings are evident in every political and religious revolution. [...] One may smirk indeed at my concerns, taking them for the fancies of a Don Quixote. Still, to me, fancied tortures are not less hurtful just for being imagined. [...] I imagine I have been kept scrawny by all means. When I was hungry, they gave me serpents, and when I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar; they poured infernal liquids into my heart, so that I shed poisoned tears and let out flaming groans. They even crept into my nocturnal dream world and lo, there they are, these ghastly grubs: the gentle men of snarling toadies, bankers with threatening noses, deadly eyes standing out from cowls, and pale hands with cold steel sticking out from white cuffs. (DHA, VII/1, 197-203)

Here Heine distances himself to a vantage point, a quasi god-like eminence. In contrast to those self-assured philosophers, the ironical writer becomes a kind of demigod viewing creation with a wry smile. Thus human condition is regarded as potentially absurd. The detachment allows Heine to enhance the critical value of his writing: the imagery of quixotry is indicative of his inclination to contrast abstract philosophy about history with the concrete reminders of history.

The French Revolution is a case in point: Robespierre makes his appearance in the guise of Markus Brutus, while the Stoa stands for Robespierre's interpretation of the Revolution as a training course in which knowledge would always be augmented by morality. This programme depended ominously on discipline. Terror and Virtue were part of the same exercise in self-improvement. Virtue without Terror is idle, Terror without Virtue is blind. Thus it would be possible to implement this huge programme of enrolling an entire nation in the revolutionary School of Virtue. The passion for moral improvement, which fired Robespierre in the last months of the Terror, flowed into all his policies and speeches until, in the end, politics itself seemed a squalid pastime compared with the transcendent calling of the Missionary of Virtue. All of these educational techniques came together in the Festival of the Supreme
The Banner of Freedom

Being, held on 20 Prairial II (8 June 1794), the day of Pentecost on the old Gregorian calendar. To weigh the critical tenor of the just cited passage, we must keep in mind that in the assemblage of Brutus and Robespierre the two tendencies merge which we detected in Heine’s Berlin readings of Hegel. Hegel argued that Reason has a concrete, historical meaning, and that in the process of human history the difference and friction between reason as ideal and reason as imperfect historical reality, between reason as theoretical ideal and reason as actual practice, will have a final resolution in terms of freedom. Heine was averse to identifying that resolution untimely. Like Hegel, one must criticize the French Revolution for positing the moral subject as the immediate executive of universal willpower; hence its terrorist appearance, as in Robespierre’s heyday. But Heine does not share the Hegelian conception that the actualization of freedom is the dialectical result of alienation. Jewish wisdom is resistant to the philosophical vindication of Progress at all costs, even if those very costs show that ‘there is Reason in world history’, as is argued in Hegel’s Berlin lectures. On man’s odyssey towards freedom, Hegel holds, the universal must be actualized through the particular. The Reason in world history is for Hegel that actualization of the universal through its opposite. Hence its Christian-teleological character. In Heine’s writing, however, we not only noticed the actual (‘Egyptian’) experience of that actualization, but we also recognized the oath of revenge on those who are liable to it. For all its ‘Stoic’ deficiencies, to Heine, Jacobinism still is somehow echoing a faint attempt at such ‘scriptural’ revenge, be it powered by brutality, like the French Revolution was.

In Hegel’s philosophy, the difference and friction between reason as ideal and reason as imperfect historical reality is to be solved through ‘Reason’s cunning’. Though Hegel was not explicit about Reason’s cunning in his 1822-3 lectures on the Philosophy of world History, it was implicit in his attitude that he thought that individuals could only collectively contribute to progress in history. Since man is pursuing his own interests rather than the philosophical ideal, Reason actualizes itself insofar as the universal rational community is realized in the concrete world of human history. Only thus human civilization is imaginable, in spite of the compelling historical evidence against it: although

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69 Robespierre had announced the creed a month earlier, before the National Convention, in a speech edited under the title *Rapport fait au nom du Comité de Salut Public, par Maximilien Robespierre, Sur les Rapports des idées religieuses & morales avec les principes républicains, & sur les fêtes nationales*, Paris, Séance du 18 floréal, l’an second de la République française une & indivisible (i.e. 1794). Robespierre’s views on religion are concisely studied in Georges Labica, *Robespierre. Une politique de la philosophie*, Paris 1990, 87-110.

70 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 21.

71 We can even draw a parallel between Heine’s writing and the ‘geological’ strategy of the revolutionary protagonists, who were apt at gouging open deep holes in the crust of polite discourse and then feeding underground revolutionary lava through the pipes of their literary skills out into the open, cf. Simon Schama, *Citizens. A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, New York 1990, 851-61.


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man's passions satiate themselves, they yet give to understand the Idea's teleological rules. If we look at man's private passions, Hegel contends, then we will see that they allow the individual to come to terms only with the finality of death; in world history, there are goals which exceed the private sphere:

When people harmonize their deepest impulses by becoming satisfied with themselves, they can be called happy, for happy is the man who enjoys a life in harmony with himself. Here happiness is at home. In history, people do strive for happiness as well, though it is necessary to add that world history digs away the ground from under it, for an era of happiness is just an unknown quantity in history, since history is dealing at least of all with change. In world history, satisfaction cannot be called happiness, because here satisfaction has to do with general purposes, goals which exceed the sphere where people can satisfy their daily interests. World history is all about goals which are meaningful in its course, and they are implemented through vigour, that is, an abstract will which may even operate against individual happiness. World historical individuals did not strive for happiness, and yet they were satisfied.73

Hegel suggests that in world history an invisible hand is governing for the benefit of all. Here we have the problematic core of Hegel's philosophy of world history.74 To him, in other words, human passions are postulated as alienated forms of the Idea; out of their struggle a system of right is developing as the objective existence of freedom, since modern man was able to manifest it under given cultural and material conditions which imperfectly concretise it as a universal right.

It was Hegel's speculative judgement that history reveals the progressive actualization of this ideal. For Heine, however, history reveals the opposite. What is for Hegel the negative force which propels human civilization forward to a homely and comfortable world, is Heine's ordeal. To catch its innuendos, we must keep in mind that Hegel finds the quintessence of that idealized world expressed in Christian religion as the final reunion of man with God:

As regards religion, it is of necessity associated with the principle of the State, because it represents the State's principle in its absolute trueness, where real Spirit has shed all outward appearance. Conscious Freedom thrives only when individuality knows of itself in terms of the Divine, that is, when it is examined in God's being.75

This is a point which is crucial for our understanding of Heine's later Hegel-critique. In questioning Hegel's God in the 1850s, the late Heine divulges a de-idealized reality, where absolute subjectivity (God) and finite subjectivity (man)

73 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 64-5.
74 Seemann, Weltgeschichte, 221.
75 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, 87.
no longer coincide, as was the case in Hegel’s mature philosophy, which had been sublating religion into speculation. In order to put his detachment in perspective, we must return to Hegel’s Berlin philosophy once more. In the rest of the present chapter, I therefore concentrate briefly on Hegel’s philosophy of religion inasmuch it articulates for Heine what ‘a philosopher’s God’ is guaranteeing in the long run of history.

6. A Philosopher’s God

To Hegel, the possibility of knowing and understanding God is of prime importance in philosophy. The power of speculative reason in demonstrating the necessary relatedness of finite and infinite is crucial to Hegel’s system, as he made a strenuous effort to develop a philosophy of Christian religion which might be compatible with the sovereign course of the absolute spirit in the world and at the same time a vehicle for it. This claim had a profound effect upon the understanding of religion. Religion is no longer understood as an attempt of finite man to orient himself to a divine Being beyond his grasp. It is a self-transformation of finite into infinite. Rational certainty is possible in human knowledge of God, since God’s own process of self-development had reached its climax in human self-consciousness. According to Hegel, the rational appropriation of religion’s truth requires philosophical comprehension of the role of historical religion in the development of human consciousness of the Absolute.

A philosophical understanding of the history of religion is of vital importance, since all historical religions prior to Christianity are legitimized as the different moments of the gradual yet determinate self-revelation and self-realization of absolute spirit. Religion is the process whereby the absolute spirit becomes self-conscious through the finite mind, where God’s self-externalization is overcome by the negation of the finitude of the human mind and its elevation as a vessel of the spirit. Religious experience and God are identical in philosophy, if philosophy is truth’s full development, including the conceptual understanding of religion as a complete modality of human existence. To Hegel, then, in his Preface to the 1821 lectures on the philosophy of religion, philosophically speaking the object of religion is the highest, for it is the region in which all the world’s riddles, all the contradictions of thought, are resolved, and all sorrow is soothed, it is the region of eternal truth and everlasting peace, of absolute gratification, of truth itself. What makes man differ from animals is consciousness, thought; and therefore the faculty to discriminate between science and arts, as well as between the infinite complexities of culture, of habits and customs, crafts and skills, and the sweets of life – that faculty is ultimately pivoting on the one and only notion of God. God is

the Beginning and the End of all things; all things come forth from God, and go to God 77

The last sentences reflect a predilection for New Testament terminology, which sets the tone for an interpretation of the history of religion which is eventually consummated in Christianity, because it alone, Hegel contends, attributes freedom to human beings as such for 'the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever' (2 John: 2). The divine authority vested in man by philosophy accrues to the ungodliness Heine came to blame Hegel for in the 1850s. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that Hegel does not conceive of man as an autonomous instance of absolute spirit; man's will is a moment of the absolute process itself. God's being is to posit the finite mind and to reach self-consciousness within this mind. The self-knowledge of the absolute spirit is achieved through the act of revelation, of which the history of Christian culture is an integral consequence. Hegel's notion of the Absolute presupposes that both religion and philosophy are nothing but the explication of God, although religion apprehends Him only naïvely and in an unfree way, whereas philosophy succeeds in transforming and superseding religious representation.

Hegel's philosophy, one may say, comes to the rescue of a Christian content which cannot defend itself against the barbs of Enlightenment criticism according to which the scholastic-rationalistic conception of God and the inherent conceptual interest of questions about the divine attributes and the relation of the world to an eternal, extramundane creator are converted into a theoretical agnosticism about the existence of such being, by developing a critical version of moral faith instead. A profound critic, of course, was Kant, whose attack on traditional theology should have been experienced by his contemporaries and even a half century later by Heine, as something profoundly provoking.

Whereas Kant had rejected the classical claims for God's existence while turning a sceptical eye on philosophical assertions to speculative knowledge of the divine, to Hegel, philosophy should conceive of religion as reconciled with reason through philosophy. 78 Hegel gives a clear impression of the devastating effects of the Kantian campaign:

In our days people no longer complain that God is wholly unknowable, they rather judge it the peak of intelligence to declare that such is indeed the case. What Christian religion (as all religions) professes to be the highest directive, the unconditional rule to know God, is presently passed for foolishness. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' Christ says, but nowadays this lofty demand is deemed downright phraseology; we have turned God into an infinite chimera, a total stranger to all of us. Hence human knowledge is

77 Religionsphilosophie, 3.
78 I cannot go into more detail about the aspect of Kantian thought. See Alan W. Wood, Kant's Rational Theology, Ithaca and London 1978.
degenerated into a phantasmagoria of dream-like finitude. How can we abide by Christ’s dictum? How to realize its value? We must be perfect like our Father in heaven, but we know nothing of Him, nothing of His perfection. What does this commandment mean to us? Our knowledge and our will are limited; they are restricted to appearances, so that Truth itself remains an inaccessible beyond to us. Yet God is Truth.\footnote{Religionsphilosophie, 11.}

Hegel offered his 1821 lectures as a guide to that truth. In doing so, he followed up his identification of God as the common object of all thinking. Christianity, that is, in its Protestant manifestation, is for Hegel the fulfilment of religion as truth. Here, he goes on in his Introduction to the lectures,

the conception of religion has returned to itself, here the absolute Idea resides, here God is qua Spirit the object of consciousness according to His Truth and His Revelation. Older religions are determinated, inasmuch as they display a more limited, abstract, and deficient conception of religion. They are the gateways through which the conception of religion grows into perfection. Because it is the Christian religion which will show itself to us as the absolute religion, we will concentrate further on the contents of Christianity.\footnote{Religionsphilosophie, 63.}

In overcoming Enlightenment critique, Hegel came to envisage philosophy as a sanctuary for religion, so as to broaden and enrich Christianity in conformity with the needs of the present. This revaluation of Christianity through philosophy implied the revalidation of its innermost truth in modernity, because philosophy was nothing more or less than the comprehensive concept of actuality.

With reference to Heine’s development it must be stressed that, in clarifying his religious position, Hegel claimed to be neither an atheist nor a pantheist, and he disavowed the intention of divinizing man or elevating his philosophy above theology.\footnote{Hegel’s vulnerability to the charge of pantheism in the Introduction, 8-9.} In his public and private writings he ventured both his faith in the activist cause of the Idea and his respect for traditional religion. In the late 1820s, however, Hegel became more and more equivocal on the critical potential of his philosophy of religion, displaying a timidity which was also evident in his last political pronouncements, as is shown in his quarrel with his liberal follower Gans over his progressivist-Hegelian interpretation of the 1830 Revolution in his Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, as we will see in the following section.
7. Hegelians

Both the statement of equivalence between philosophy and theology in the opening phrase and the declaration of philosophy as the service of God in history have given rise to much debate among Hegelian authors. At no time was the controversy more heated than in the division of Hegelians into Left and Right schools in the decade following Hegel’s death. This left-right factionalism exhibits how diverse interpretations of Hegel could be, with the atheistic, radicalizing Left announcing that Hegel had brought religion to an end and the theistic, conservative Right proclaiming the preservation and vindication of the doctrines of Christianity. Indeed, this division parallels the weight a Hegelian can give to either side of the statement ‘philosophy is theology’. Thus, radicalizing Hegelians, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, D.F. Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and the young Marx, emphasized the subject side, ‘philosophy’, to the detriment of revealed theology by desacralizing and demythologizing all things religious; whereas conservative Hegelians, such as Philipp Marheineke, stress the predicate by maintaining that the content of revealed religion was ‘revitalized’ by Hegel’s philosophy.

What was as stake in the conflict between Hegel’s interpreters, was the analysis of the dynamics of modern civil society, not only its economic interactions and its formal and informal institutions but also its religious character. The radicalizing Hegelians we met in our Introduction campaigned against the predominance of Christian values. The discussion of civil society in the 1830s and 1840s could not be disengaged from theological-philosophical controversies, while that was the domain in which the most basic political question about civil identity was posed. Hegel himself had explicitly linked his description of civil society to his account of the rise of Christian, i.e. Protestant personality (or ‘selfhood’). But was God essential for present man? Conservatist Hegelians reaffirmed the links between God, monarch, and property owner, while radicalizing Hegelians came gradually to embrace the full consequences of the dissolution of the Christian idea of personality; and yet Feuerbach, Eduard Gans, August Cieszkowski, and Moses Hess, too, were centrally concerned with the problem of the person, and this preoccupation clearly implied theological inquiries as well. It must be noted that their notions of the interrelationship of political, social, and theological critique eventually established the ideological, philosophical, and rhetorical conditions for the emerg-

82 It should be pointed out that Hegel makes a polemical usages of the term theology to refer as the science of God, excluding the discipline of theological reflection as such, and opposing to contemporary theologies of Schleiermacher, Tholock, and others. Hegel moves beyond the conceptual limitations of the Enlightenment framework in which religion was treated within the bounds of pure reason. At the same time, he acknowledged that the conflict remained present, as in philosophy the resolution can be only partial on grounds of the Enlightenment understanding of religion and metaphysics, and of the manner in which post-Reformation theology came to understand itself vis-à-vis philosophy. Cf. Philip Merklinger, Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel’s Berlin Philosophy of Religion 1821-1827, Albany 1993.

ence of even more explicitly political and social critiques of the 1840s. As Carl Ludwig Michelet noted in 1841, the discussion of the personality of God had dominated the philosophical discourse in the preceding decade. 84

In this heterogeneous spectrum, Heine takes a distinguishable position. 85 His experience of ‘otherness’ had made him suspicious of the idea that the actual governing of history was done by a divine sovereign representing the principles of the status quo. As we will see below in the following chapter, Heine’s concept of pantheism had been relating to a more explicitly revolutionary manifestation of God than Hegel’s philosophy had seemed to offer to him.

In the promising climate of the 1830s, the first decade of Heine’s years in Paris, Hegel was supposed to provide the theoretical framework for a revolutionary pantheism which Heine claims to be fully exhibited by the Saint-Simonists. 86 The social thought of these French critics could combine with Hegelianism to form a ‘socio-theology’, a millenarian prophecy of religious and social conversion. In short-living journals like Le Producteur (1825-6), L’Organisateur (1829-31) and Le Globe (1831-2), as well in crowded public lectures held Paris from 1828 to 1830, the Saint-Simonians fashioned a compelling social and ethical doctrine. Saint-Simon and his disciples believed they had discovered the science of social physiology, but their science was actually a form of speculative social psychology, because they thought that beliefs and values fundamentally shape human history. Heine had the example of Saint-Simonian speculation to inspire him, as he opted for an actualization of what he considered to be the esoteric package of Hegel’s philosophy: the hidden, i.e. pantheistic treasures of dialectical contemplation had to be revealed to all the world, now that the ancient order was about to yield to revolutionism. The revelation could be described in terms of a sudden enlightenment. In Heine’s Introduction to Kahlendorf (1831), characteristically, the sun’s revolutionary rays drive away ‘metaphysical chimeras’:

The Gallic Cock has crowed again; in Germany, too, the day dawns. Far away, in cloisters, castles, Hanseatic towns and suchlike Gothic hide-outs, a weird host of shades and spectres takes to flight, the sunbeams are flashing, we rub our eyes, sweet light flows into our hearts, we are brought to life, we look at each other with astonishment, wondering what we were doing in night behind us. Well, we were dreaming in our German fashion, that is, we were philosophizing, though not on relevant matter or major events. No, we philosophized on things-in-and-for-themselves, on the ultimate reason for everything, and on similar metaphysical and transcendental chimeras, and that is why we got really annoyed with the bloody spectacle our western neighbours made of

86 As I will elaborate in Chapter IV.
themselves, especially when these French shotgun pellets hit our philosophical systems and tore it to shreds. (DHA XI, 134)

In Heine’s view, then, Saint-Simonism produced an explosive effect upon impact: pantheism was seen as a catalyst to set off new trains of emancipation. Since the Pantheism Controversy in the late eighteenth century, pantheism was a shibboleth for philosophical criticism. It became the heading under which the effort was subsumed to revolutionize Hegelianism in terms of Saint-Simonism.

Some of the sociological insights of Saint-Simonism were crucial to the reorientation of Hegelian political philosophy carried out by Eduard Gans, former member of the Berlin Association for the Advancement of Jewish Studies. As Gans had shown in his 1833 Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, the problem of human freedom permeates the system of right as the realm in which it made actual:

When we speak about Freedom not as a basic element among others but as the one and only subject-matter of this book, then it goes without saying that it has nothing to do with the ephemeral nature of fads and fashions, but with a process of saturation and stabilization. People often think that Freedom is non-existent when it is nowhere to be found. In the spirit of Hegel’s philosophy, however, we are seeing everywhere change and the immediate conversion of all that is subjective into essentials so that even casual remarks become at once pithy sayings. If this book does not frighten you off but make you scrutinizing, then there can be no mistaking its meaning. To me, whom this book encouraged to lay down a new view of Law, to me, who has always hailed Freedom as Learning’s sweet consort, the present revision of this study brought with it ever greater delight and ever stronger confirmation of older insights.87

In Heine’s ‘Saint-Simonization’ of Hegel’s philosophy we recognize Gans’s progressivist insistence on the ‘saturation and stabilization’ of freedom.88 Far from apologizing for the ‘actual actuality’ of the post-Napoleonic status quo in Prussia, this view reveals the tension between the present and a rationale which divulges that existing conditions are contrary to the core content of history. The institutional structure of post-war Prussia did not conform as smoothly to the

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87 Hegel, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse, ed., Hermann Klenner (after Gans’s edition), Berlin 1981, 6-7. The passage suggests that the very meaning of Hegel’s much debated statement that what is real is rational, vz., what is rational is real (Grundlinien, ed. Hoffmeister, Preface, 14) is freedom. Although Gans regarded Hegel as the essential philosopher of modernity, he came to believe that Hegel neglected crucial dynamics in actuality. Hegelian philosophy, he viewed, must develop into a new interpretation of a changed present. His acute awareness of the revolutionary forces of the age made it difficult for him to accept Hegel’s efforts to reconcile tradition and change. The July Days of 1830 persuaded him that the democratic revolution had not yet come to an end. A strong contribution to that conviction offered Saint-Simonism, a view which he had in common with Heine.

The theoretical structure elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right* as his conservative followers would claim. In the 1830s, then, Heine came to judge Hegel to be the expression of a Christian culture which was itself the source of the troubling dualisms of modernity. Whereas Hegel had claimed that ‘reconciliation’ takes place in a present fulfilment or secularization of Christianity, Heine, in the first decade of his Paris years, stressed God’s immediate self-determination in man, as it is mankind in which God is expressing his self-consciousness through freedom.  

In the 1840s this revolutionism was refined. There was an important stream of French social theorists who had for some time sought to resolve the problems posed by the rise of the new industrial society in France and England. There was, of course, Charles Fourier, the trenchant critic of commercial society and the inventor of elaborate schemes for the reformation of society through love and communal solidarity. But most important, to Heine, became the emergence of the radicalizing Hegelians we hinted at in the Introduction: Ruge, Marx, Feuerbach, Daumer, and Bruno Bauer. In view of the political consequences of the Hegelian philosophy of religion, Heine now opts for their way of thought. In the 1843 ‘Critique of De Staël’, the tone is firmly set. Hegel, Heine explains,

...wished his philosophy to thrive safely in the shade of state power. Philosophy must not conflict with the credos of the church, until it would have matured and felt invigorated – but for all his brilliance and liberalism, this man philosophized in such scholastic, roundabout terms, that not only the religious but also the anti-revolutionary faction thought him to be one of them. (DHA XIV/1, 101)

In his 1844 *Letters from Germany*, he pretends to have talked things over with Hegel:

At times I observed him glancing around uneasily for fear of being fully understood. He was very fond of me, since he was sure I would never betray him. As a matter of fact, I then considered him servile. One day, as I showed annoyance at the dictum that ‘all that is, is reasonable’, he smiled strangely and remarked that it might be tantamount to ‘all that is reasonable must be’. Immediately he looked around him nervously, but he calmed down swiftly because only Heinrich Beer had heard his words. It was not till later that I understood these phrases. And so it was not till later too that I began to catch what he meant when he declared in his *Philosophy of History* that Christianity represents progress if only because it teaches the doctrine of a God who died, while heathen gods knew nothing of death. What a progress it would have been if God had not existed at all! One lovely, starry evening we both were standing at

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89 See Chapter IV, 131-6.
the open window after a lavish meal, and over coffee, I, at the age of twenty-two, I started to rave about the twinkling lights in the sky, calling them the Abode of the Blessed. But the master muttered: 'Those stars? Oh, come, come! No, stars are only glimmering patches at the firmament.' – 'For Heaven’s sake,' I cried, 'so there is no such thing as a merry lounge on high where virtue is rewarded for in the afterlife?' Then he shot a cold glare at me. 'Are you suggesting,' was the quick retort, 'that you should be tipped for doing your duty to tend your ailing mother, to save your brother from starvation, and to abstain from poisoning your enemies?' (DHA XV, 170)

Hegel is credited with an extremely deft reply which turns the naive young posseur on his theological ear. The central Christian principle of other-worldliness is condensed into a concept of a reward in the afterlife. Radicalizing Hegelians – and with them Heine – saw otherworldliness as a cop-out, a way to demean the value of earthly behaviour and earthly happiness.

Against conservatist readings, the Heine of 1844 suggests, conspirational revolutionism is what Hegel’s esoteric philosophy is truly about, whereas the post-48 Heine is stressing Hegel’s interest in the awakening of God in human reason for its atheistic consequences. The reprise is typical of his final period. Now his self-image of an atheist, radicalizing Hegelian author is revised. In a textual variant of a passage in his Confessions, Hegelian philosophy is seen as a release of pantheistic self-conceit:

I was infallible, immaculate for ever and ever. I was the Alpha and Omega for all. I was world consciousness of every single thing. I was the Knepf of Egypt, the Om of India, the Logos of Greece, I was a complete fool. (DHA XV, 435)

As pantheism is to him the ultimate in contemporary atheism, self-godliness must be unmasked. Heine now comes to condemn ‘Hegelian Godlessness’ in his letter to Heinrich Laube, dated 25 January 1850 (HSA XXIII, 24). Elsewhere it is ascribed to the ‘bashful pantheism of the pantheists’ (DHA III, 180).

In this chapter, I have explored Heine’s Hegel-reading in order to gain insight into his problematic commitment to the ‘banner of freedom’. Encouraged by the investigations of the Berlin Association, Heine opted for an emancipatory interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy which could be of benefit to a German-Jewish intellectual in the early 1820s. We have seen, however, that his Jewishness made him increasingly chary of devoting himself totally to the cause of Hegelian progress: the ‘philosopher’s God’ is no guarantee of freedom in history. Unassimilated ‘otherness’ resists demands for idealizing reality. Heine’s writing, accordingly, is expressive of provocative disappointment, and his later work can be seen as an intensification of that crisis, expressed in terms of bodily

91 This letter will be viewed in more detail in Chapter, 171-2.
conscience. That intensification is due to revolutionary experiences during Heine’s first decades in Paris, when pantheism was supposed to provide the rationale for revolutionary progress in the 1830s and 1840s. It is necessary to pay more detailed attention to Heine’s ‘Parisian’ revolutionism, so as to weigh up his final reassessment of his ambiguous stance on Hegel’s sanguine view of history as the realization of freedom. In Chapter IV, then, I will concentrate on the pantheistic framework within which Heine seeks to deal with Hegelian issues in his Paris years.