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"Humbled onto Death": Kenosis and Tsimtsum as the Two Models of Divine Self-Negation

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Abstract: This essay reflects on the concept of the death of God as part and parcel of modern philosophical theology: a genre of thinking that came into existence with Hegel's announcement of the "speculative Good Friday" as the most natural expression of *die Religion der neuen Zeiten*, "the religion of modern times". In my interpretation, the death of God not only does not spell the end of the era of atheism but, on the contrary, inaugurates a new era of characteristically modern theism that steers away from theological absolutism. The new theos is no longer conceived as the eternal omnipotent Absolute but as the Derridean diminished Infinite: contracted and self-negated—even "unto death". Such God, however, although coming to the foremost visibly in modernity, is not completely new to the monotheistic religions, which from the beginning are engaged in the heated debate concerning the status of the divine power: is it absolute and unlimited or rather self-restricted and conditioned? I will enter this debate by conducting a comparison between the two traditional models of divine self-restriction—Christian kenosis and Jewish-kabbalistic tsimtsum—and then present their modernised philosophical variants, most of all in the thought of Hegel.

Keywords: tsimtsum; kenosis; death of God; the world as other; Hegel; Isaac Luria; kabbalah; alienation

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1. Introduction

> Diminish the infinite, diminish *ad infinitum*, why not?
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, 24.

In this essay, I will ponder the concept of the death of God as part and parcel of modern philosophical theology: a genre of thinking that came into existence with Hegel's announcement of the "speculative Good Friday" as the most natural expression of *die Religion der neuen Zeiten*, "the religion of modern times" [1] (p. 134). In my interpretation, the death of God not only does not spell the end of the era of atheism but, on the contrary, inaugurates a new era of characteristically modern theism that steers away from theological absolutism. The new *theos* is no longer conceived as the eternal omnipotent Absolute but as the Derridean *diminished Infinite*: contracted and self-negated—even "unto death".

Such God, however, although coming to the foremost visibly in modernity, is not completely new to the monotheistic religions that, from the beginning, are engaged in the debate concerning the status of the divine power: is it absolute and unlimited or rather self-restricted and conditioned? I will enter this debate by conducting a comparison between the two traditional models of divine self-restriction—Christian *kenosis* and Jewish-kabbalistic *tsimtsum*—and then present their modernised philosophical variants, most of all in the thought of Hegel. In both theological models, the original form of Godhead undergoes self-limitation, which deprives it of absolute power: in *kenosis*, God becomes "cruciform", that is, subject to death on the cross, whereas in *tsimtsum*, the divine limitless *Ein Sof* "diminishes", by withdrawing from the infinite expanse in order to make room for the world as the other of God. I will also demonstrate that these two notions, *kenosis* and *tsimtsum*, did not evolve in complete isolation from one another, especially in modernity: the metaphysics of German Idealism offers a good example of their mutual contamination.

Following the kabbalistic logic of the primary divine contraction, Hegel introduces the concept of *kenosis* in creation, which attributes the kenotic self-humbling aspect already to the first person of the Trinity, God the Creator, thus limiting His omnipotence from the start. Pace the common perception of monotheism as the religion of the absolutist God; therefore, kenotic Christianity and kabbalistic Judaism complicate this picture by insisting on the unique nature of the divine self-restriction, which varies on the scale of "diminution" and, in the most extreme variant, takes the form of "humbling onto death".

According to the prevailing notion within the history of religions, the passage from polytheism to monotheism implied the concentration and intensification of the divine power: from the plethora of rivalling gods who hold one another in check, there emerged one God who rules the universe single-handedly and keeps all the power to himself. According to Hans Blumenberg—a 20th-century partisan of this view who, in his understanding of monotheistic theology, followed the nominalist school's defence of theological absolutism—the monotheistic God is granted *potentia absoluta*: an absolute power that comprises his infinite will, infinite potency, and total control over the created realm. In the correspondence between Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt on the issue of the Christian Trinity, the latter argues in favour of the Capadocian doctrine of the *stasis* (conflict), in which the three trinitarian powers remain in constant tension[1]—Blumenberg, however, rejects this concept as nonsensical and quotes the famous line of Goethe:

> *Nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse* [...] Goethe believes that "A god can only be balanced by another god. *That power should restrict itself is absurd*. It is only restricted, in turn, by another power" [2] (p. 42).

According to this view, the monotheistic one God, not matched by a rivalling divine instance, cannot but possess an absolute power. Blumenberg agrees thus with Franz Kafka, who summarised the monotheistic logic of power in one succinct aphorism: "The German word *sein* signifies both 'to be there' and 'to belong to Him'"[2]. God's *potentia absoluta* leaves no room for any other manifestation of will or agency; the creature is nothing when compared to its Creator. Hence, the only logical outcome of the monotheistic regime is an equally absolute quietism. His is all power and glory—but also being. As Simone Weil put it, following to the extreme the absolutist-quietistic logic of the monotheistic faith: "Only God has the right to say 'I am'. 'I am' is forever and only God's unique name" [4] (p. 72).

But does this logic, seemingly so self-evident, truly reflect the essence of monotheism? In this essay, I will attempt to show that it is not necessarily the case: that, from the very beginning—that is, from the first emergence of the Jewish concept of one and unique (*ehad*) God—the divine power manifests itself as *originally restricted*. The Hebrew name for this originary restriction is *tsimtsum*, meaning God's self-contraction, self-limitation, self-retreat, or—in the most extreme cases, as in the Lurianic kabbalah—even self-negation. When conceived under the aegis of *tsimtsum*, monotheism emerges not as a theological doctrine of absolute power—or, in the nominalistic terminology, *potentia absoluta et inordinata*—but a theology of a power that proves itself precisely in self-limitation. On this alternative view, the self-limitation—by William Ockham dismissed as a mere *potentia ordinata*, a secondary and inferior form of power—would, in fact, determine the specific difference of the monotheistic faith, starting with Judaism. This view constitutes the precise reverse of the Blumenbergian praise of the polytheistic "diffusion of power" as opposed to the monotheistic concentration of all *potestas*: while the so-called pagan gods may be worshipped as full of infinite vitality, the proper Mosaic distinction lies in the image of God, who restrains his wrath so that the world can evolve and eventually stand on its feet as an autonomous entity (as in Isaiah), contracts his presence to make it endurable for humans (as in the Arc of Covenant), or "diminishes his lights" in order not to overshadow the last sphere of emanation, which is our world (as in the kabbalistic thinkers)[3]. According to the paradigm of *tsimtsum*, therefore, the idea of the self-restricting power not only is *not* absurd but remains definitive for monotheism in its later developments—most of all Christianity, which sports its own variant of the divine self-limitation: *kenosis*.

2. *Kenosis*: Death of Christ Versus the Trinitarian Life

According to Gregory Nazianzus, the Trinity is in a state of *stasis*: "The One is always in rebellion against itself [*stasiazon pros heauto*]". The reason for this permanent conflict is *kenosis*: the self-humbling of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, who "empties" himself of the Father's absolutist attributes of eternity and immutability and, in Origen's depiction, "humbles himself in obedience onto death—the death of the Cross":

> One must dare to say that the goodness of Christ appears greater, more divine, and truly in the image of the Father, when he humbles himself in obedience onto death—the death of the Cross—than had he clung onto his equality with the Father as an inalienable gift, and had refused to become a slave for the world's salvation[4].

Yet, how can this death be reconciled with the eternal life of the hypostatic union? How much *reality* should one attribute to the tragedy of the Cross if the tri-une God, a perfect plurality in unity, is nonetheless to remain God: an eternal infinite being to which no harm can be done? Or, putting these questions in terms of the *restrictionist paradigm* which interests us here: how much of the self-restriction is to be introduced into the very essence of Christian divinity?

The notion of *kenosis* derives from Paul's Letter to Philippians 2: 5–11. The first lines of Paul's Philippi hymn famously describe Christ as simultaneously *deiform* and *cruciform*:

> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
>
> who, *though* he was in the form of God,
>
> did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
>
> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

The NRSV translation renders *hyparchōn* as *although*, which explains the insistence of the Capadocian fathers on the element of *stasis*—tension, apposition, perhaps even conflict—within the Tri-Une God. According to Michael J. Gorman, however, *hyparchōn* can also be interpreted causatively, which then would lead to a completely different meaning of "*because* he was in the form of God", that lies deeper than the former one [8] (pp. 16–29). While the *although* translation presents kenosis as indeed a *skandalon*: a shocking negation of the divine nature as infinite and immune to death—the translation presents it as agreeing with God's essence, which then appears as *cruciform*, always already taking the form of Christ dying on the Cross:

> One implies that Christ's condescension was a contravention of his true identity, while the other implies that it was the embodiment of his true identity [. . .] God, we must now say, is *essentially kenotic*, and indeed *essentially cruciform*. Kenosis, therefore, does not mean Christ's emptying himself of his divinity (or of anything else), but rather Christ's *exercising* his divinity, his equality with God [8] (p. 26, p. 28).

One way of reconciling the *stasis*, therefore, would be to follow the second person of the Trinity in his downward movement of *kenosis* and see it as the defining self-restricting moment of God the Father, who, instead of maintaining the prerogatives of absolute power and potency, would humbly take the cruciform shape of vulnerability.

Christian tradition, however, is deeply divided on this point. Another way of reconciliation, chosen by the absolutist camp determined to preserve God in his undiminished glory, depicts *kenosis* not so much in terms of the divine finite humbling as rather in terms of the divine infinite grace. Rowan Williams, the contemporary partisan of this view, insists on God keeping the absolutist deiform not in contrast (*although*), but in a "unique unity" of the infinite and the finite. In *Christ the Heart of Creation*, Williams defines *kenosis* not as an act of divine descent into the lower regions but rather as an act of lifting the finitude of the created world to a possibility of relation with the infinite. Without Christ's *kenosis*, the creaturely realm, immersed in its finitude, would indeed be *nothing* in the face of the

eternal God, precisely as in Simone Weil's formulation, which denied the finite creatures an autonomous right to exist:

> God makes the world to be itself, to have integrity and completeness and goodness that is—by God's gift—its own. At the same time, *God makes the world open to a relation with God's own infinite life that can enlarge and transfigure the created order without destroying it* [. . .] And all this is summed up in our belief in a *Christ who is uninterruptedly living a creaturely, finite life on earth and at the same time living out of the depths of divine life* and uninterruptedly enjoying the relation that eternally subsists between the divine Source or Father and the divine Word or Son. It is in this sense that we can rightly speak of Jesus as the heart of creation, the one on whom all the patterns of finite existence converge to find their meaning. While the relation between Jesus and the eternal divine Word—the 'hypostatic union', which is an *uninterrupted continuity of distinct, self-identifying, active life between the Word and Jesus*—is unique, it can only be understood in connection to a general conception, a metaphysical model, of how the finite and the infinite relate to one another [9] (xiii).

The *stasis*, therefore, is merely an appearance that results from the application of human logic, unable to contemplate the paradox of "a Christ who is uninterruptedly living a creaturely, finite life on earth and at the same time living out of the depths of divine life". When committing *kenosis*, the second person of the hypostatic union, who "humbles himself unto death—the death of the Cross", does not contradict the Trinitarian Life, which goes on eternally beyond any harm:

> . . . the significance of what is (following Phil. 2.7) regularly called the kenōsis, the self-emptying, of Christ is not that it involves a sort of collision between divine action and human action, such that one or the other element must be denied, qualified or diminished, but that a certain mode of finite life (self-sacrifice, other-directed love) is so attuned to the eternal mode of divine action that it becomes the occasion and vehicle of that infinite agency within the finite world [9] (p. 56).

In William's rendering of *kenosis*, the main reason behind the Capadocian *stasis*—the real death of Christ on the Cross—is visibly downplayed: *kenosis* is rather an occasion to raise the finite life to the plane of an encounter with the infinite, which then informs finitude with "the eternal mode of divine action". Here, instead of God becoming cruciform, the World gets a chance to become, at least partly, deiform. But can *kenosis*, this extreme variant of the divine self-restriction resulting in the tragedy of the Cross, be so easily glossed over? In the next section, I will reflect on this issue in reference to Hegel, for whom the death of Christ constituted *the most real* event in the history of the world. At the same time, however, Hegel proposes his own version of the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of the *stasis*, which—only prima facie, surprisingly—puts him in close vicinity to the heritage of *tsimtsum*. An ardent reader of early modern esoteric theosophy—from Jacob Böhme and Angelus Silesius to the Rosicrucian Kabbalah—Hegel will emerge here as a pivotal thinker in whom Christian *kenosis* and kabbalistic *tsimtsum* meet and clash simultaneously.

3. Hegel's Speculative Good Friday

In his attempt to make *kenosis* truly and painfully "eventful", Hegel faithfully follows Martin Luther. The latter's famous meditation on the Paschal hymn, which contains the ominous phrase—*Gott selbst ist tot*, "God *himself* is dead"—focuses on the realness of the divine death that happened *in itself* and not just as an appearance, and because of that, leaves the benighted creation in a state of *grosse Not*, great pain, grief, and need, but also danger, that cannot be alleviated by any appeasing rhetoric. The *Anfechtung Gottes*—the *stasis* in the Trinity—leads to a terrible crisis, a real *Notzustand* from which only grace can redeem us[5].

Luther's emphasis on the realness of *selbst/himself* in Richter's verse explicitly touches on the very nature of God: no longer a deiform Absolute, he is now fully and originally

cruciform, defined by the painfully real moment of his death on the Cross. While contemplating the dizzying abysses of Luther's *Not*, Hegel writes:

> *God has died, God is dead*—this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that everything eternal and true *is not*, that *negation itself is found in God*. The deepest anguish, the feeling of complete irretrievability, and the annulling of everything that is elevated, are bound up with this thought [11] (p. 465).

For Hegel, this deep sense of mourning will determine the shape of the modern Christian faith: "The feeling that God himself is dead is the sentiment on which the religion of modern times rests" [1] (p. 134). According to the partisans of *analogia entis*, to which Williams belongs, such deipassionistic emphasis inevitably leads to heresy because it challenges the perfect eternal arrangement of the Trinitarian Life, where God the Father is *ever-living*, God the Son is *ever-dying*, and God the Spirit is *ever-resurrecting*. For the Nicean Christians, this is the Supreme Paradox that can only be mystically contemplated, but never understood by the finite mind: the *parachresis*, the constant dance of God living-dying-resurrecting, always dead and alive simultaneously, constitutes the ultimate mystery of the eternity of which our world is merely a Platonic temporal copy. Within the flawed temporal imitation of the Trinity, life, death, and resurrection can occur solely in a sequence, but this forms merely a distorted image of the truly eternal Trinitarian Life. For the modern nominalist Christians, however—such as Luther and Hegel[6]—the temporality of the material world is no longer a distorted image of the Trinitarian eternity. The Incarnation itself announces a break in the Trinitarian continuous "dance", by adding matter and time—"the Son who will become the world"—now to be taken fully seriously in the metaphysical picture[7]. From the perspective of the Trinitarian orthodoxy, they are thus in danger of succumbing to the "Joachimite heresy", which Karl Löwith located at the beginning of the modern process of secularisation: the vision of the Trinity based not on a timeless "dance", but on historical succession spurned by the subsequent Events of the Death of God, where God the Sovereign Creator *himself* dies, so the Son can step to the fore with the Word of Love—but he *himself* must die too, so the Spirit could resurrect *within the world* and thus complete the work of creation [14]. Indeed, for Jacob Taubes, the Joachimite historicisation of the Trinity, allowing a true death in its midst, spells the end of Neoplatonic hegemony and the beginning of modern dialectics:

> The Platonic relationship of image and archetype, which Origen and Augustine set up between earthly history and heavenly guidance, is transformed for Joachim into a *powerful chain of events within history*: the Kingdom of Haven becomes the final realm of the spirit [. . .] Joachim depicts the displacement of the papal Church by the *ecclesia spiritualis* as a *withering away*. He often describes this displacement by the church of the spirit as a passing over [Übergehen], a *transire*. Joachim's *transire* coincides with Hegel's sublation [Aufhebung]. Both *transire* and sublation are ambiguos, depending on whether they mean entering into a new form of historical existence or passing into death [15] (p. 89, p. 93).

When conceived as a temporal sequence, Trinity proceeds *ad extra*: instead of remaining an eternal Platonic paradigm for merely "analogical" worldly existence, it enters the creaturely realm to transform it from within. The infinite wanders into the finite; the sacred migrates into the profane[8]. But the price of this migration into the world is the permanent *Notzustand*, the state of uncertainty, ambiguity, and anxiety. The *transire*—the dynamic shape of the world in which spirit is now invested—can always spell both: "either a new form of historical existence or passing into death".

For Hegel, the human subject constitutes a *tselem* or *imago Dei* not because it is a finite mirror for eternity, but because it is a "living contradiction" which reflects the *stasis* of the Trinitarian Life. As such it is a dynamic overlap of the finite and the infinite, the profane and the sacred, the spiritual and the material, which clash with one another and produce the permanent state of Lutheran *Not* that is experienced as *pain*. For Hegel, the "living contradiction" cannot be endured: life, deeply aporetic in itself, inaugurates the dialectical

process the goal of which is to solve the original aporia in the reconciliation of the infinite and the finite, which—and this is a heterodox moment in Hegel's theology—was *not* yet achieved by Christ himself and can only become the *historical* task of the Holy Spirit (*Geist*). Until this task is realised, life continues to be an abiding, not yet reconciled contradiction whose dominant manifestation is *pain* as the immanent echo of Christ's Passion:

> Pain is the prerogative of living natures; because they are the existent Notion, they are an *actuality of infinite power*, such that they are within themselves the negativity of themselves [as finite—A. B.-R.] [. . .] It is said that contradiction is unthinkable; but in fact, in the pain of a living being it is even an actual existence [17] (p. 770).

The Hegelian life-in-pain constitutes the *punctum crucis*, but also—theologically speaking—a Cross on which life's infinite power incarnates into the finite matter and, in the manner suggested by Gregory Nazianzus, takes on its limitations "unto death". Paradigmatically *cruciform*, life triggers the dialectical process which inaugurates History: a process that, in Hegel's version, works towards a state in which the finite will have truly proved that it is worthy of carrying the infinite—again, faithful to the Lutheran formula: *finitum capax infiniti*. Unlike in Rowan Williams, the finite in Hegel is not naturally *attuned* to infinity: in order to become capable of carrying the infinite, it has to pass through the ordeal of contradiction—a Chrystological Passion of each living being.

For Hegel, therefore, the whole world is the arena of the divine *kenosis* as incarnation, conceived as a metaphysical *experimentum crucis* or the "Golgotha of the Absolute Spirit" [18]. The pain of every "living contradiction" reflects the self-sacrificial Passion that Spirit truly suffered while entering the realm of the finite: first plunging into the alien sphere of a "free contingent happening", then externalising itself as Nature or the substantial Being in Space, and only in the last movement beginning to re-gather itself in its "self-emptying out into Time" or History as a process of self-recollection. For Hegel, however, *kenosis* is not just reserved to the second person of the Trinity: the Son merely reflects the original kenotic-cruciform essence of the Notion—the noetic realm of "the self-knowing Spirit"—which, in order to be self-knowing, must know its opposite: the Other. But to know one's opposite and recognise the limit "is to know how to sacrifice oneself": how to relinquish the playful "game of self-love"[9], where the One remains intact in the affective immediacy and enters the path of the serious "self-knowledge", necessarily paid by the loss of the original unity:

> The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: *to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself*. This sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its Being as Space. This last becoming of Spirit, Nature, is its living immediate Becoming; Nature, the externalized Spirit, is in its existence nothing but this eternal externalization of its continuing existence and the movement which reinstates the Subject [. . .] But the other side of its Becoming, History, is a conscious, self-mediating process—*Spirit emptied out into Time*; but this externalization, *this kenosis*, is equally an externalization of itself; the negative is the negative of itself. This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because *the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance*. As its fulfilment consists in perfectly knowing what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its withdrawal into itself in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection. Thus absorbed in itself, it is sunk in the night of its self-consciousness; but in that night *its vanished outer existence is preserved*, and this transformed existence—the former one, but now reborn of the Spirit's knowledge—is *the new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit* [18] (p. 492).

In Hegel's heterodox variant of *kenosis* in creation, God-becoming-man transforms into God-becoming-world. The creation is the process of the divine embodiment, in which the two idioms painfully clash but also "patiently" labour towards their future reconciliation or *communicatio idiomatum*: the transformative ending in which the Spirit will finally recognise itself in the world, fully "preserved" in all its material appearance. At the same time, this ending will be the beginning of "the new existence, a new world, and a new shape of Spirit"—with a strong emphasis on the *new*. In Hegel's vision, it is precisely the Incarnation that symbolises the strongest possible spiritual investment in the world: the insoluble bond between the divine and the worldly, realising the most "serious" (*ernst*) procosmic engagement with the finite reality and its ultimate metaphysical endorsement, as opposed to the "playful" (*spielerisch*) attitude of Gnostic docetism, the traces of which Hegel suspects to be lingering in the dogmatic construction of the "dancing" Trinity [18] (p. 11). Whether in Neoplatonism or theological absolutism, this commitment remains weak: in Plotinus, emanation is almost mechanical and does not even require the One's knowledge of the lower regions—while voluntarist creationism refuses to bind God's freedom with any "ordination", including the restraint imposed by the already existing world. Contrary to this, a full *communicatio idiomatum*, which takes place in *kenosis* understood univocally, signals *absolute commitment*: one God becomes one World and the latter cannot be dismissed as a "playful" addendum to the metaphysical picture. Embodiment—or self-emptying and exteriorisation (*Entäußerung*) into matter—is not just a passing episode in the Trinitarian life but the fundamental rapturous *event* that determines the relationship between the divine Word (the Son) and its actualisation in the form of the World: Logos becoming Flesh[10]. Following the deipassionistic tradition of Tertullian and Luther, which stresses the cruciform nature of the self-humbling God, Hegel understands this actualisation as necessarily leading to crucifixion: the painful tragic clash of the infinite and the finite, which, initially constituting nothing but contradiction, calls for a dialectical reconciliation in the process of history.

Hegel's view of history as essentially cruciform is best expressed by his esoteric Rosicrucian formula: *die Rose auf dem Kreuz der Gegenwart*[11]. God/Spirit/Word is the rose of potentiality on the cross of the actual, which constitutes the test-ordeal-vindication of the former: the pain of becoming real. The whole mystery of the Hegelian *Heilsgeschichte* is thus condensed in the emblem of the Rosicrucian Enlightenment, where Spirit resurrects from the bones and a new life rises from the hell of the truly "serious" death of God, which constitutes the kenotic archetype of the painful Real:

> Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is *not yet complete within itself*, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the immediacy of the *in itself*, which is the form in which substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to *realize and reveal what is at first only inward* (the *in itself* being taken as what is inward), i.e., *to vindicate it for Spirit's certainty of itself* [18] (p. 487).

The whole of Hegel's speculative Good Friday is staked on the process of *realisation*: the becoming-real-of-the-word as the revealment of "what is at first only inward". In classical metaphysics, becoming real is envisaged as a continual passage from the potential to the actual: a process of actualisation that proceeds either as an act of copying the ideal paradigm (Plato) or as an organic growth from the seed of *potentia* to the full image of *entelechia* (Aristotle). But in Hegel—and, as we shall see in a moment, also in Isaac Luria—a different intuition of the real begins to hatch. Here, the act of realisation is a dramatic transition from the Notion—Concept, Idea, Word, Logos—to the Actuality, which involves a break of continuity: a radical inversion, a sudden switch that requires nothing short of the *death* of the original divine inwardness. What was One becomes not so much Many as *Other*; what was intensive (pure thought) becomes extensive (the Being-Space of Nature); what was infinite becomes finite; what was free and unconstrained becomes limited and surrendered to necessities; what was inward becomes outward and what was a timeless *nunc stans* becomes a temporal flow. In Hegel, it is called alienation, or

Entfremdung: a dramatic process of othering that breaks the "analogical" chain linking God with the world and preserves unity in the plurality of becoming. But, unlike in the original Gnostic theosophy, which Hegel sublates in his philosophical theology (most of all of Jacob Böhme), this violent event of inversion, which disturbs the inward calm of the original pleroma, Hegel's alienation is not an evil *turba* and a mark of Fall[12]—it simply follows the rules of his "science of logic". In Hegel's philosophical sublation of the theosophic myth, alienation emerges as a process to be affirmed within the new logic of becoming real: it is an externalisation of the internal or the "moving-outward" of the original "inwardness" which simply *must* involve a form of negation, even in the most extreme variant of "humbling onto death". The inward cannot externalise itself *as such*: while it may recollect (*Erinnern*) itself later in the future results of its externalisation, it must first be negated as precisely the inward. The expression of *der Begriff* must thus involve a moment of negation, a violent transition into *Anderssein* or the other-being of the World as Nature. Paraphrasing Benjamin, therefore, the Hegelian Real is always "the death of intention": a production of the series of events as "unintended consequences", which are inherent to the process of *othering*, i.e., the emergence of something else than the original Notion[13]. Without the death of intention—the death of the Word on the Cross—the Notion would be alone and without life: *das leblose Einsame*. Hence, writes Hegel, "the two together, the Golgotha of the absolute Spirit (*die Shädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*) and the Recollection (*Erinnerung*), form alike the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which He would be lifeless and alone" [18] (p. 493)[14].

The role of memory is here as crucial as the eventful first exteriorisation because it is only through the subjective medium of recollection that the Spirit can become resurrected in the rich living "organization of the realm of finite spirits", retaining a grateful remembrance of Absolute Spirit's self-sacrifice. For, as Hegel states travesting Schiller: "Only from the chalice of this realm of spirits foams forth for Him his own infinitude" [18] (p. 494). The passage of realization, therefore, is irreversible: this is—Benjamin again—a "one-way street" from the infinite to the finite, from play to seriousness, and from *Schein/dokos* to the Real, in which the Absolute loses itself in order to find itself again in the life of the commemorating community (*das Geisterreich*). The self-sacrificial event of the death of God is not undone magically: it is kept by the living memory which faithfully clings to the traces of the kenotic deity and, as if in a puzzle, puts them back together. God has died for real and if He resurrects, then only in the ensemble of believers, in the constant effort of their memory and gratitude for His *Autoopferung*. Once the passage is made, it cannot be reversed: the only possible restoration of "His throne" is in the foaming chalice of the multitude of finite beings.

4. *Tsimtsum* in Kabbalah

The significance of Hegel for my comparative study lies in the hybrid nature of his thought: poised between theology and philosophy, Hegel is also a borderline case for the Lutheran orthodoxy, which, despite his self-identification as a loyal Protestant, tends to perceive the Hegelian interpretation of *kenosis* as heterodox, if not simply heretical. But the reason for this mistrust is not only the Joachimite heresy that found its way into Hegel's vision of Trinity as *Heilsgeschichte*: it is also his heavy (although never fully avowed) indebtedness to the kabbalistic tradition and, most of all, to the concept of tsimtsum which, in Hegel's Christianising translation, takes the form of the *kenosis* in creation. While the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine still grants absolute power to the Father-Creator and reserves the self-humbling only for the Son, Hegel pushes the kenotic self-sacrifice back to the first movement of creation, which, as we shall see in a moment, is the most characteristic feature of the Lurianic *tsimtsum*[15].

Hegel's borrowing from kabbalistic lore did not go unnoticed by Protestant theology, both in negative and positive context[16]. In his widely discussed essay, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World", Jürgen Moltmann praises Hegel for creating an innovative "account of Christian and Jewish kenotic theology", which consists in a fusion

of *kenosis* with *tsimtsum* [31] (p. 137). In consequence of this fusion, God the Father is no longer imagined as the Creator making being out of nothing by his absolute infinite power, but rather as the First Notion/Word which undergoes a self-limitation in order to create the world as its Other (*Anderssein*). Creation, therefore, is not an expression of the divine omnipotence; it is a self-limiting kenotic activity of "the self-knowing Spirit [who] knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself" [18] (p. 492). The self-restraint is no longer reserved for the second person of the Trinity; it is now elevated to the main principle of the whole Trinitarian life, which is *die Autoopferung*: a willing self-sacrifice. Before Moltmann, however, it was Gershom Scholem who spotted the affinity between the Lurianic doctrine and the Hegelian heterodox notion of *kenosis* in creation. In one of his numerous works devoted to the kabbalistic tradition, Scholem postulates a strong connection between the 16th-century theosophic kabbalah of Isaac Luria and German Idealism, Hegel especially. He immediately adds that he cannot prove a direct influence (a rather improbable hypothesis), but suspects that Hegel was exposed to the so-called Christian Kabbalah which fused the kabbalistic divine manifestations, later called by Isaac Luria *partsufim*, into the Christian trinitarian context of The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit[17].

According to Scholem, tsimtsum is a truly novel concept, which has the potential to revolutionise Western metaphysics, by breaking with the predominant Neoplatonic pattern of the "everlasting circle" that privileges continuity over difference and participation over separation. Nonetheless, he also admits that all kabbalistic writings are marked by a certain appropriation of the Neoplatonic idea of emanation. God is imagined here as *yitron* (the Hebrew equivalent of *superessentia*), as *Ein Sof*, the Infinite or "without limits", as well as *'Ayin*, "nothingness". This divine source, which is hidden from any knowledge and can only be approached through strictly negative theology, emanates with the subsequent circles of reality which form a metaphysical hierarchy, based on the ten pillars of creation called sephirot. They emerge in two columns, left and right, from the highest (*'Ayin*) to the lowest (*Malkut* or Kingdom). The divine light, overflowing from the hidden source of being (*Ein Sof*), flows through the channels formed by sephirot and thus differentiates, eventually creating a variety of beings in the material realm of the Kingdom. But the lower it flows, the less perfect it becomes; the principle of emanation sees the matter and the privation that pertains to the material form of being as the result of the distance from the origin. Unhappy with this Neoplatonic scheme, Scholem complains that *creatio ex nihilo* becomes a meaningless cover for the mystical theory of emanation: "In this way, the theory of identity is given a pantheistic spin: the creation out of nothingness becomes only an encrypted code for the essential oneness of all things with God" [34] (p. 268). In another place, even more critical of the kabbalistic Neoplatonism, Scholem adds: "We cannot find here an authentic nothingness which would break the continuity of the chain" [35] (p. 99). There is no genuine separation which would lead to the creation of a true Other; rather, as it was put by one of the Spanish Kabbalists from around 1500, Joseph Taitatzak, in a poetic formulation: "Everything lives in the palace of Nothingness" [35] (p. 102).

In Scholem's view, the Neoplatonic account of the chain of emanation ends with Isaac Luria's invention of *tsimtsum*. Scholem would always insist that, in Jewish theology, the act of creation is primarily a separation: that is, a creation of something truly other than God himself, which becomes an explicit theme only in the late kabbalah of Isaac Luria. Luria did not invent the term tsimtsum: the word had already existed in rabbinic commentaries and then also in the kabbalistic context. The first to introduce the midrashic concept of *tsimtsum* into the arcana of the Kabbalist Neoplatonism was Isaac Luria's older contemporary: Moses Cordovero. For Cordovero, *tsimtsum* is an act of God's hiding, in which God withdraws into his secret and unknowable nature, choosing to show only his attributes of creative agency, which form the Tree of Sephirot as the emanative back-bone of the worldly reality. God, therefore, reveals himself in concealment: these two agencies are strictly parallel and cannot be dissociated from one another. We could thus call it an aspectual theory of *tsimtsum*, where God changes aspects between his secret in-dwelling

and his revelatory/creative action. But is it enough to give us, "an authentic nothingness which would break the continuity of the chain"? Or, is creation only a different aspect of the Godhead which constantly oscillates between *'Ain* and *Ein Sof*, nothing and everything, as if leaping from one to the other side of the Möbius strip? It is precisely in the attempt to secure the "authentic nothingness" that Luria takes over the notion of *tsimtsum* with an intention to make it more real and turn into a true event: not so much a change of the aspect (or a *Gestaltswitch*), which still keeps the divine Infinity intact within the folds of its self-concealment, as the change within the Infinite itself, resulting in a real beginning of time and history, now also involving the no longer untouchable Godhead.

In Luria's elaboration, tsimtsum becomes a real contraction conceived as a radical transformation of God's ontological status. The purpose of the new concept is to square the circle of the creaturely nature of being as simultaneously other from God and yet linked to him by the very fact of creation. *Tsimtsum*, God's self-reduction, is to account for this paradox and present nothingness (*'Ayin*) not as a divine attribute of self-concealment, but as God's first creative act: the first Event in the series of singular happenings creating the world as an essentially historical entity. In the beginning, therefore, God created nothing: "In the reduction of the divine essence which, instead of acting outwards (as in the Thomistic formula of processio dei ad extra), acts towards its inside, there emerges nothingness" [35] (p. 104). Only when God withdraws from himself "for real", there emerges a place of possible separation, a room for something else:

> Creation out of nothing, from the void, could be nothing other than the creation of the void, that is, of the possibility of thinking of anything that was not God. Without such an act of self-limitation, after all, there would be only God—and obviously nothing else. A being that is not God could only become possible and originate by virtue of such a contraction, such a paradoxical retreat of God into himself. By positing a negative factor in Himself, God liberates creation [36] (p. 283).

Scholem's description of Luria's *tsimtsum* accentuates the moment of God's self-effacement, which suggests affinities with Christian *kenosis*, especially in Hegel's treatment: the divine sacrifice of self-emptying and self-exteriorising that conditions the emergence of the world as most of all *the Other*[18]. This analogy becomes even stronger when Scholem defines Luria's *tsimtsum* through the reversal of its original Talmudic meaning, where it is occasionally used in reference to *kodesh kodashim*, the Holiest of Holies, in which God concentrates his presence (*Shekhinah*) into a single point:

> Here we have the origin of the term *tsimtsum*, while the thing itself is the precise opposite of this idea: to the Kabbalist of Luria's school *tsimtsum* does not mean the concentration of God *at* a point, but his retreat *away* from a point [. . .] One is tempted to interpret this withdrawal of God into his own Being in terms of Exile, of banishing Himself from His totality into profound seclusion [. . .] *The first act of all is not an act of revelation but one of limitation* [38] (pp. 260–261).

The significance of this reversal cannot be overemphasized. God's autoreduction is not to be thought in terms of concentration which could suggest an even greater power of self-intensification. It is to be thought of strictly in terms of withdrawal. *Tsimtsum* is not a condensation of the divine presence but the disappearance, deactivation, and weakening of God's power to be and to reveal himself directly in the world.

Many commentators objected, saying that Scholem's understanding of Luria's *tsimtsum* is, to say the least, tendentious[19]. According to this critique, Scholem selects only one possible meaning of God's compression as retreat and withdrawal: *away from the point*, so that God can make a room—*nothingness*—for the world to emerge as God's other. Although the world receives all its substance from *Ein Sof*, which contains everything in its potential state, it is now separated from the original Godhead by the film of nothingness. The world is thus a wholly new reorganisation of the substance: what in *Ein Sof* existed merely potentially in the undifferentiated oneness now will realise itself as actual, finite, and

differentiated—forever "exiled" from the infinite pleroma. The reason behind Scholem's alleged bias is not arbitrary. Just as Luther contested the immediate presence of the living God in the world, assumed by the Neoplatonic scheme of *participatio*, because of his conviction that *Gott sebst ist tott*, so does Scholem contest the traditional rabbinic doctrine of "God's dwelling on earth" (*Shekhinah*) in "the concentration *at* a point" within the Arc of Covenant, because of his conviction that God himself is in exile. Just as for Luther, therefore, the event of the Death of God was enough to break the timeless peace of the analogical "everlasting circle", so for Scholem's Luria, such interruption occurred with the event of *galut*, the cataclysmic expulsion of the Iberian Jews, which sent Luria's family away from their home Andalousia and once again scattered over the world. Luria eventually settled in Safed, where he established his kabbalistic school, centred around the experience of universal *galut*: the diasporic dispersion of all things in the exiled world, desperately trying to find a way home—back to the House of the Father, lost in the irretrievable past. In Scholem's interpretation, *galut* indeed becomes a cosmic universal condition of all things subsisting in the dispersed broken whole of exile, God included[20]. Already in the 40's Scholem begins to think of the Lurianic *tsimtsum* as the emblem of the exilic condition of all beings:

> One is tempted to interpret this withdrawal of God into his own Being in terms of Exile, of banishing Himself from His totality into profound seclusion. Regarded this way, the idea of *tsimtsum* is the deepest symbol of Exile that could be thought of [38] (p. 261).

The exilic condition of all beings, where God constitutes no exception, rules out the idea of the preestablished order. When presenting the series of disturbances that befall creation, starting from the foundational act of *tsimtsum*, Scholem describes the "breaking of the vessels"—*sh'virat ha-kelim*—as the moment of disintegration of the Neoplatonic chain of emanations, due to which the exilic predicament afflicts the created world, now forever cut off from the Great Chain of Being:

> This "breaking" introduces a dramatic aspect into the process of Creation, and it can explain the *Galut* [...] In other words, all being is in *Galut* [...] Here we have a cosmic picture of *Galut*, not the *Galut* of the people of Israel alone, but the *Galut* of the *Shekhinah* at the very inception of its being. All that befalls in the world is only an expression of this primal and fundamental *Galut*. All existence, including "as it were", God, subsists in *Galut*. Such is the state of creation after the breaking of the vessels [...] In all the expanse of creation, there is imperfection, flaw, *Galut* [35] (p. 45).

In Scholem, the concept of metaphysical *galut* as resulting from the original *tsimtsum* will forever remain inherently ambivalent, lending itself simultaneously to negative-anticosmic and positive-procosmic interpretations: Scholem describes the event of *tsimtsum* as "catastrophic" and "liberating" and the same time. This ambivalence parallels almost exactly the confusion created by the Lutheran emphasis on the realness of the "death of the Cross", which paved the way to Jacob Böhme's Gnostic theosophy (still dominant in Schelling) [41], where the kenotic desire of God to plunge into the matter and acquire being constituted the root of all evil, on the one hand—and to Hegel's affirmative take on *kenosis in creation* as the necessary condition of all existence, the Spirit's and the World's alike, on the other. Within the Lurianic legacy, the Hegelian position *avant la lettre* is represented by Hayyim Vital, the founder of the "Eastern School". In *Ets Haim* (*The Tree of Life*), Vital explains the Event of *tsimtsum* as the voluntary act of the Infinite One who first gathers in himself and only then vacates himself, by evacuating to the circumference and thus creating a vacuum in his midst:

> And when it arose in the Simple Will to create worlds [...] then the Infinite *tsimtsem* [contracted] itself at the central point within itself, at the exact centre of its light, and *tsimtsem* that light, and withdrew to extremities surrounding the

> central point, and then a vacant place and environment, and an empty space remained [42] (p. 3).

For Vital, this is a positive development: the "simple will create worlds" is laudable, unlike the dark desire in Böhme or blind impulse in Schelling's *Ages of the World*[21]. It just wants to *create the other* and thus fulfil the destiny of God the Creator, who also emerges for the first time out of the non-differentiated *Ein Sof*, born out of the "simple will". The rest—the complex operation of contracting and then evacuating to the "environment", which leaves an empty space (*halal*) within as the place of the future world—is just a commentary on the original intention to create something truly *other*: simple, with no ulterior motives. If God wished to be God and create, implies Vital, it could not have been executed in any other way. Similarly to Hegel, who believes in the iron science of logic, in which creation must necessarily start with the divine self-sacrifice, Vital too follows the logical sequence of events, starting from the divine self-exile, that precondition the emergence of the world as God's alterity: an altogether different form of existence, which actualises the one infinite as the multitude of finite beings.

The modern fusion of *kenosis* and *tsimtsum*, mostly operative in Hegel, leads to a new understanding of the act of creation, or, less theologically, the emergence of the Real as the result of radical *othering*. If this process is to be conceived as a true making of the Other, it has to proceed on the basis of the divine self-restriction; otherwise, as in the traditional Neoplatonic narrative, it will only produce Many—the Plurality within Unity—which is still held by the One on the tight leash of analogy[22]. My purpose here was to prove that the specific place of the concept of divine self-restraint within monotheistic theologies determines their respective conceptions of God's creative power. Where it is central—as in the case of kenotic Christianity or Lurianic kabbalah—the divine power is never absolute; it is precisely in its self-limitation that God's ability to create can realise itself and make room for the real Other. Where it is more marginal—as in the case of Christianity, which embraced Neoplatonism, or in those Neoplatonic variants of kabbalah, which insist on interpreting *tsimtsum* aspectually—God is imagined as an absolutist hyper-being that retains all the traditional attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence: the world is never the other, just the plural aspect of the divine mode of being, retaining the "analogical" connection with the One. This instability is inscribed into the very nature of monotheistic faith which from the moment of its inception has been pondering on the enigma of creation and the creative power. For the absolutist camp, the idea "that power should restrict itself is absurd" and inevitably leads to atheism—for those, however, who see the specific difference of monotheism in either *kenosis* or *tsimtsum*, the self-restriction constitutes the primary manifestation of the divine. Whether "humbled onto death", as in Origen, or permanent self-exile, as in Isaac Luria, the self-limited deity is still a God. The manoeuvre of deabsolutization occurs within the theistic paradigm itself and paves the way to what Hegel termed *die Religion der neuen Zeiten*: a new religious intuition that includes the death of God as the eternal and unscathed Absolute in its foundational narrative.

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Notes

1 Schmitt comments here on Gregory Nazianzus' famous thesis that the Trinity is in the state of *stasis*, 'civil war': "The One is always in rebellion against itself [*stasiazon pros heauto*]" [2] (p. 41).

2 "Das Wort sein bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Dasein und Ihmgehören" [3] (p.46).

3 The paradigmatic *tsimtsum*, in which God "takes in his breath" and restricts his glory for the sake of something else to emerge, derives already from Iasaiah, as described by Elliot Wolfson in his interpretation of one of the bahiric texts: "The notion of withdrawal, itself withdrawn and thus not stated overtly, is a secret exegetically derived from the verse *lema'an shemi a'arikh*

appi u-tehillati ehetam lakh le-vilti hakhritekha, 'For the sake of my name I will postpone my wrath and my glory I will hold in for you so that I will not destroy you' (Isa 48:9). The plain sense of the prophetic dictum relates to divine mercy expressed as God's long-suffering, the capacity to restrain his rage. The expression *tehillati ehetam*, literally "my glory I will hold in", is parallel to *a'arikh appi*, 'I will postpone my wrath.' One may surmise that at some point in ancient Israel, the notion of a vengeful god yielded its opposite, the compassionate god who holds in his fury" [5] (pp. 132–133).

4 Quot. in [6] (p. 15). One of the most outspoken advocates of kenotic Christianity today is John D. Caputo who emphasizes the 'folly' of *kenosis* as going against the monotheistic logic of absolute power: "The internal logic of the kingdom is the alogic—the folly—of the cross. Its dynamics are the movements of a kenotic abdication of supreme power of a Supreme Being for the powerless power of mercy and compassion" [7] (p. 105).

5 In *Von Konzilis und Kirchen*, Luther refers to the hymn of Johann Richter: "O Traurigkeit,/O Herzeleid!/Ist das nicht zu beklagen?/Gott des Vaters einig Kind/Wird ins Grab getragen./O grosse Not!/Gott selbst ist tot,/Am Kreuz ist er gestorben,/Hat dadurch das Himmelreich/Uns aus Lieb' erworben". Luther's teaching, however, was not fully accepted by the Lutheran orthodoxy who soon decided to neutralise the revolutionary potential of the phrase "Gott selbs ist tot" and replaced it with a more acceptably Trinitarian one: "Gotts Sohn liegt tot" [10] (p. 152).

6 On the influence of nominalism and anti-analogical Scotist concept of univocity of being on Martin Luther's hyperrealist take on the death of God, see [12].

7 Compare Schelling's comment on the Hegelian interpretation of the Trinitarian *stasis*, which strongly emphasizes the material actualisation of the world as the finite other of God: "According to all philosophical concepts, *it is here that the son is explicitly made into the matter of the world; for through this, that he is not merely a different being, but that he is also posited as a different being, will he become the world*. Consequently, as long as he is still the son, as in the stated distinction, the son comports himself as *the possibility*, as the matter of the world to come [13] (p. 175).

8 Theodor Adorno sums up the defining moment of modern dialectics in a succinct epigram: "No theological content will last untransformed; every single one will have to face the test and enter the sphere of the profane" [16] (p. 108). Adorno's remark refers both to the Hegelian legacy and the historical effects of the kabbalistic notion of *tsimtsum*.

9 See Hegel's critique of the Trinitarian *parachresis* as *ein eitles Spiel*, an "idle game" which lacks seriousness necessary to conceive the breaking point of *kenosis*: "Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative. In itself, that life is indeed one untroubled equality and unity with itself, for which otherness and alienation, and the overcoming of alienation, are not serious matters" [17] (p. 11). In *Heterodox Hegel*, Cyril O'Regan leans towards the Gnostic-Neoplatonic reading of Hegel's "Immanent Trinity", which attempts to reconcile Proclus with Boehme: the Neoplatonic *continuum* as always based on the unbroken "everlasting circle" with the Gnostic intuition of the cosmic catastrophe or the Event proper. Within the "Immanent Trinity", the "infinite differentiation", although still a play, nonetheless proleptically prepares the proper "finite differentiation" and the fully serious encounter of the Notion with the other of the world: the Godhead in its original *aseitas* is not a synclastic, hermetically sealed *pleroma*, but is anaclastic, open to future narrative developments and in that sense the opposite of self-enclosed fullness, even "ontologically deficient": "Hegel considers the immanent divine to be infected with what we can call, following Milan Kundera, *the unbearable lightness of being* [. . .] [Hegel] suggests that the process of overcoming the lightness of being does not commence with the order of finitude that plays the role of being the contradictory of the divine; it already begins or has begun, in the formal sphere of being. The general upshot of this is that need and/or eros characterizes the divine even on the level of the "Immanent Trinity", despite Hegel's fairly consistent recall of the classical aseity tradition. Interestingly, Boehme not only erotically characterizes the immanent divine, as Hegel does; there is an overlap even on the level of metaphor. From an ontotheological point of view, the immanent divine is 'thin' (*dün*). To be thin has the technical sense of being ineffable and spiritual. Yet it is unmistakably the case that Boehme goes with the metaphorical drift of thin, for the thin divine seeks or hunger for substance, for fulfilment" [19] (p. 187). While Ciril O'Regan finds Böhmian-Valentinian themes in Hegel's concept of holy history, Gilles Quispel makes a comparison with another important Alexandrian Gnostic of the 2nd century, Basilides, who created a highly innovative system of Christocentric Gnosticism, elaborated in the tractate called *Elenchos*. The Basilidian cosmic evolution begins with the "original confusion", which marks the state of the primordial nothingness as—in O'Regan's formulation—ontologically deficient. It is out of this confusion that the creation of the "original germ" of the world proceeds, then gradually developing in the three consecutive historical epochs: of the pagan Satan as the lord of nature, of the Judaic God as the first law-giver, and finally of Christ as the Gnostic messiah. The third epoch constitutes the pinnacle leading towards the final clarification and separation of the mixed elements of spirit and matter: "This germ is a potential world, comparable to a mustard seed which contains a whole plant, a world in which everything was present in an undifferentiated state [20] (p. 119). Yet, unlike in Origenes, who also imagined the emergence of the world via the seed metaphor, the Basilidian origin lacks the pleromatic calm: "In the beginning, then, there was confusion" [20] (p. 119). Just as in Hegel, therefore, the origin is imperfact, but the obvious difference is that while for Hegel, the "Immanent Trinity" will have brought the seed of the world out of love, the Basilidian "non-existent God" produces the germ out of a blind impulse (thus more in harmony with Böhme and then Schelling's *Weltalter*.

10 On the importance of Luther's translation of *kenosis* as *Entäußerung* for Hegel, see [21] (p. 82): "This injury [of the divine self-emptying] is made clear in the Hegelian concept of a divine alienation, central to the dialectical conception of *kenosis* and its

principle. 'Kenosis' means the lowering or humbling of God in his Incarnation and the Passion [...] Luther translates κενωσις as *Entäußerung*, literally 'the separation from the self through an externalisation.' Now from this *Entäußerung* or 'alienation', Hegel forges a logical movement which becomes constitutive of the development of the divine essence. God necessarily departs from himself in His self-determination". On the crucial significance of *kenosis* for Hegel's thought, see also Thomas Altizer, the theologian of the "death of God": "A decisive clue to a uniquely Hegelian negativity is the word *kenosis* itself, a word appearing not only at many of the most decisive points of the *Phenomenology*, but a word unveiling as no other word does the whole movement of Hegel's thinking, a movement that is nothing less than an absolute self-negation, and a self-negation that the *Science of Logic* can know as an absolute self-emptying [...]: a dawning that [...] Hegel understands as the *self-negation of a heavenly transcendence*, one absolutely transfiguring that transcendence, so that transcendence itself is now only here and now" [22] (p. 45).

11 Hegel resorts to this esoteric metaphor—*die Rose auf dem Kreuz der Gegenwart*—few times: "To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present, and to find delight in it, is a rational insight which implies reconciliation with reality" [23] (p. 19); and later on, in 1824: "in order to pluck reason, the rose in the cross of the present, one must take up the cross itself" [10] (p. 248). On the hermetic meaning of this Hegelian phrase see [24] (p. 248).

12 In the words of Böhme's English translator and commentator, W. Scott Palmer: "the *turba* is the essence of hell" [25]. The *turba* is what disturbs the divine inward calm (*Ruhe*) and inaugurates the "hellish" series of events that lead towards the curse of the Real.

13 "Die Wahrheit ist der Tod der Intention" [26] (p. 18).

14 Hegel's concept of *Anderssein* or otherness is highly dialectical: on the one hand, it signifies the moment of the spirit's ordeal in the process of self-realization through the tarrying with the negative—on the other, however, it is also meant as the future vessel for the fully incarnate spirit in the redemptive moment of their reconciliation. In order to combine both moments, Hegel must reach for a new narrative that would allow him to develop his procosmic intention: the Goethean concept of *Bildung* as a model of maturation in which the beautiful soul is forced to venture out in the world and learn about itself through the encounters with otherness in order to achieve a self-recognition and peace with the world, even if at the cost of *Entsagung*, the resignation from the highest ideals cherished by the soul in its youth. Cyril O'Regan strongly emphasizes "the correspondence between Hegelian thought and narrative, especially between Hegelian thought and that genre of narrative called the *Bildungsroman* that has the story of the genesis of personhood as its subject. Hegel may have broadened its expanse and projected the model of individual becoming onto the historical network as a whole, yet the model remains determina tive throughout all of its applications" [19] (pp. 8–9). It is, therefore, *Bildung* that forms the model for reconciliation between the rose and the cross: the adversarial negativity of matter as the Luciferian "first-born" Real is necessary for the *realization* of the Idea, the Concept or the Notion, which the rose represents in its purely inward noetic sense of a "seed". Without this inertia (*Trägheit*) and hindrance, for which the cross stands, the rosy Idea, initially self-contended in the "game of love with itself", would have never blossomed and brought fruits: it would have remained a beautiful soul. The radical otherness of the world, therefore, which the "Immanent Trinity" must include and take into account, has an autonomous value of its own. It is not merely a test-ordeal, as in Böhme, where it serves the purpose of the "clarification" of the spirit. It is a test, but of a different kind: it teaches the inner "game of love" the value of existence—that is is better to be than to not be.

15 A similar metaphysical intuition combining the two terms, *tsimtsum* (concentration) and *kenosis* (descent), emerges also in Schelling. In the notes to his lectures in 1810, he also draws on Goethe's authority, but this time using his quote against Blumenberg's later defence of unlimited power: "A passive limitation is indeed a mere insufficiency or a relative lack of power; however, to limit oneself, to concentrate oneself in one point, yet also to hold on to the latter with all one's might and not to let go until it has been expanded into a world, such constitutes the greatest power and perfection. As Goethe says: 'Whoever wills greatness must concentrate himself/Only in self-restriction is the artist revealed' [...] *Concentration, then, marks the beginning of all reality.* For this reason, it is the concentrating rather than the expanding nature that possesses a primordial and grounding force. Thus the beginning of creation amounts indeed to a *descent of God*; He properly descends into the Real, and contracts Himself entirely into the Real. Yet such an act does not imply anything unworthy of God but it is this descent that marks the greatest act for God and, indeed, for Christianity as well" [27] (p. 75). This conflation does not come as a surprise, considering Schelling's long acquaintance with one of the most prominent Christian kabbalists, Franz Molitor, the author of *Die Philosophie der Geschichte*. In the second volume, Molitor claims to have found the doctrine of incarnation in the "ancient teaching of the kabbalah": "Daß die Gottheit es nicht verschmähe, aus Liebe zu der Creatur in die irdische Form und Schranken einzugehen, ist eine wesentliche Grundidee, die dem Juden- und Christenthume gemeinschaftlich unterliegt (That the Godhead did not despise to take the earthly form and undergo limitation: this is the fundamental notion that underlies both Judaism and Christianity)" [28] (p. 136).

16 Already in the 19th century, Hegel was accused by Christian Baur of developing a "Christian Gnosis" due to the influence of the Jewish kabbalah. Cyril O'Regan describes it very efficiently in terms of the "divine vicissitudes" and the "dramatic narrative ontology" whose drama consists precisely in the mystical dwelling into God's inner vulnerability, cruciformity and *stasis*: "Thus Gnostic return has to do with the repetition in modern Christian discourses of a narrative focused on the vicissitudes of (divine) reality's fall from perfection, its agonic middle and its recollection into perfection. In identifying Gnostic return in this way, Baur offers one of the two major paradigms of Gnostic genealogical assessment not only for the 19th but also for the 20th century" [29] (p. 29). Indeed, Baur is right: the most dramatic account of the divine vicissitudes derives from the Lurianic kabbalah which reached Hegel via its Christian—mostly Rosicrucian—appropriations. On the kabbalistic background of German Idealism, see also [30] (pp. 30–52).

[17] In *Kabbalah*, in the section on Isaac Luria, Scholem writes: "At the same time, side by side with the Gnostic outlook, we find a most astonishing tendency to a mode of contemplative thought that can be called 'dialectic' in the strictest sense of the term as used by Hegel. This tendency is especially prominent in attempts to present formal explanations of such doctrines as that of *tsimtsum*, the breaking of the vessels, or the formation of the *partsufim*" [32] (p. 143). Derrida too spots the affinity in *Dissemination*, where he notices that the idea of *tsimtsum* is "linked to the mythology of 'Louria,' but it can also arise by way of 'Hegel,' 'Boehme,' etc." [33] (p. 344).

[18] On the affinities, but also differences, between *tsimtsum* and *kenosis*, especially in the context of Moltmann's theology, see [37] (pp. 311–338).

[19] For the critique of Scholem, see [39] (pp. 39–60).

[20] According to David Biale, the event of the expulsion, the consequences of which Scholem saw for the first time in the "risk theology" of Abraham Miguel de Cardozo, influenced his thinking about the whole Lurianic legacy: "The Lurianic Kabbalah taught that the cosmos started with the self-expulsion of God; the world could only be created in the empty space from which God was absent. Luria's myth of creation thus involved a catastrophe of divine exile. God not only reveals himself; he also hides himself. This paradoxical theology could not have arisen, in Scholem's view, without the catastrophe of 1492" [40] (p. 114).

[21] For Böhme, the First Desire has no power to properly create out of nothing. As the Gnostic demiurge who makes his world based merely on pretence, the Böhmian *Begierde* is equally powerless: "For the Nothing hungers after the Something and the Hunger is a Desire, viz. the first *Verbum Fiat*, or creating Power. For the Desire has nothing that it is able to make or conceive; it conceives itself, and impresses itself; it coagulates itself; it draws itself into itself, and comprehends itself, and brings itself from Abyss into Byss, and overshadows itself with its Magnetical Attraction; so that the Nothing is filled, and yet remains as a Nothing" [24] (3:5).

[22] The idea that creation is mostly concerned with the letting be of radical alterity also suggests a new vision of redemption, which differs from the notion of Great Return, Homecoming, or the Kabbalistic *tikkun*, all deriving from the Neoplatonic tradition. While the latter envisages the redemptive finale as the grand closing of the "everlasting circle", however, delayed by the historical detour, the former sees the moment of reconciliation (if it ever comes) as the affirmation of the worldly finitude as no longer privative about the divine Infinite. This view comes very strongly to the fore in Derrida's critique of Hegel, whose concept of *Versöhnung* is still tinged with the Neoplatonic notion of return: instead, Derrida proposes a "non-closure" which will defer the parousiastic return to the origin and allow the world to disseminate and realize the ultimate differentiation within the realm of finitude. In "The Pit and the Pyramide", Derrida modifies thus Hegel's conception of the sign as the *time of referral* in transition between the original and the final presence and transforms it into a *time of deferral* which suspends and "subverts every kingdom": "In determining Being as presence (presence in the form of the object, or self-presence under the rubric of consciousness), metaphysics could treat the sign only as a *transition* [. . .] As the site of the transition, the bridge between two moments of full presence, the sign can function only as a provisional reference of one presence to another. The bridge can be lifted [*relevé*]. The process of the sign has a history, and signification is even history comprehended: between an original presence and its circular reappropriation in a final presence. The self-presence of absolute knowledge and the consciousness of Being-near-to-itself in logos, in the absolute concept, will have been distracted from themselves only for the time of a detour and for the time of a sign. The time of the sign, then, is *the time of referral*. It signifies self-presence, refers to presence to itself, and organizes the circulation of its provisionality. *Always, from the outset, the movement of lost presence already will have set in motion the process of its reappropriation*" [43] (pp. 71–72).

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