

Hegel Contra God: replying to Gavin Hyman's 'New Hegel'

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Gavin Hyman's 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God,' in this Journal¹ raises the age old and yet still timely question about the knowability or otherwise of God. More particularly, it brings together some of the prominent thinkers from recent continental philosophy who are re-engaging with the work of Hegel in the wake of Gillian Rose's seminal book *Hegel Contra Sociology*, published in 1981.² Hyman argues powerfully that these 'new interpretations' of Hegel's conception of God and the absolute move us in important ways beyond the traditional 'left' and 'right' divide in Hegelian scholarship, whilst, at the same time, also reproducing it. His claim is not that these thinkers have failed in their attempts to avoid conventional readings of Hegel, but rather that the tension between them is the route to a more 'genuine' conception of Hegel's God. This more genuine conception, says Hyman, is a (new) Hegelian thinking of God found in what he calls 'the necessity of the logic of the *both ... and*.'³ In what follows, I will suggest that having correctly identified the necessity of *both ... and* in avoiding one-sided dogmatic resolutions of aporetic oppositions, it is to a different conception of the logic of such a necessity that we might look in order to find in Hegel, and in Rose, the way in which the absolute, or God, is knowable and can be thought.

The problem identified by Hyman has its roots in the 2500-year Western philosophical tradition regarding the identity of God. Since Aristotle, God has been fixed as the unchangeable, something carried over into the religions of the Book. In comparison to the unchangeable, human thought and material existence were relegated to the merely changeable at best and to error and sin at worst. One could argue that this dispute has always been as political as it has been religious given the authority and power of legitimization that the latter has assumed over the former. It is in Hegel that this relation

¹ Gavin Hyman, 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God,' *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 19, 2, (2020), pp. 379-397.

² Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: The Athlone Press, 1981).

³ Hyman, 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God,' p. 5.

between religion and politics becomes philosophical science, and the fate of this scientific treatment of state and religion is the now familiar divide between 'left- and right-wing' Hegelianism. The former emphasises a radical political interpretation of the absolute dialectical movement of the *Phenomenology*, while the latter asserts an almost ahistorical theology of Hegel's *Science of Logic* with its culmination in the absolute idea. Thomas A. Lewis has recently shown that despite the two centuries since, there is still wide disagreement amongst interpreters as to this question of how to understand God in Hegel.⁴

The publication of Rose's book was a significant intervention into these debates. In it, she argues that the left/right divide is an abstraction determined by a non-speculative reading of Hegel's philosophy. Rose found a different way of understanding the significance of contradictions within the experience of contingency that both Kant and Hegel had exposed regarding the thinking of truth. In particular, she found that Hegel, far from being the dogmatic thinker that was widely assumed, had not resolved the difficulty of such contradictions, but rather allowed them their own unresolved truth as the Concept, Spirit, and the Absolute.

What I want to add to Hyman's incisive analysis, is the way in which Rose's thinking, and that of one her former students, Nigel Tubbs, not only retrieves the question of the identity of God politically, and the identity of freedom religiously, but also offers a re-education of their relation, a re-education that carries Rose's boldest thesis, that Hegel's philosophy is otiose if the Absolute cannot be known. Hyman's examination of some of the more recent Rose and Hegel scholarship is my starting point. I will summarize his reading of Rowan Williams and Slavoj Žižek and his argument for a conception of God that does justice to both readings. I will then return briefly to Rose as a springboard to Tubbs, who has recently argued that God needs to be understood as the *education* that resides in the logic of Rose's and Hegel's self-perficient negative experiences. Tubbs offers this theory, described below, by way of a new/old logic, a 'logic of education', that argues for a conception of *God as education*. His thinking is a contribution largely unrecognised in Rose scholarship. But in a

⁴ Thomas A Lewis, 'Overcoming a Stumbling Block: A Nontraditional Hegel for Religious Studies,' *The Journal of Religion*, 95, 2, (2015), pp. 198-212.

body of work spanning 30 years, he retrieves the central role that education has always had in Hegel's philosophy and system, and more recently in Rose's own retrieval of Hegelian speculative experience. Tubbs often comments that education is seen to be a poor relation in much philosophical work. Despite this, he opens up the challenging idea, in relation to Hyman, that it is only as education that God and freedom, transcendence and immanence, have truth absolutely.

Hyman's new Hegel

The most significant thinkers, for Hyman, of the 'return to Hegel' in continental philosophy and religious thought are Rowan Williams, Slavoj Žižek, Catherine Malabou and Beatrice Longuenesse. Despite their many differences, he writes, these readings have certain arguments and themes in common. First, they constitute a reaction against the largely French reception of Hegel by figures such as Derrida, Levinas, Deleuze and Bataille who bequeathed the 'textbook' or caricatured Hegel of the Absolute. This Hegel is seen to represent some of the worst excesses of Western modernity. Second, they reject the work of the secular Hegelians such as Robert Pippin, Robert Brandom and Terry Pinkard, who 'deflate' the metaphysical task and significance of Hegel's absolute to the extent that it loses its import in and for social and political thought. Third, they distinguish themselves from the 'left' political and 'right' theological interpretations of Hegel that have dominated traditional studies by showing that Hegel anticipated such a divide and found "a way beyond"⁵ it. The subtleties of Hegel's thought insist on the difficulty of knowing God in the equivocal relation of the 'metaphysical and non-metaphysical, the transcendent and the immanent, the necessary and the contingent.'⁶

But, in the same way that the question of God divided traditional Hegelian scholarship, so, Hyman argues, do these new interpretations re-establish a similar divide; Žižek and Malabou through an atheistic 'ontology of immanence' and Williams through a 'theistic ontology.'⁷ This time, however, the divide does not give rise to mutually exclusive interpretations but

⁵ Hyman, 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God,' p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

ones which acknowledge and work with the necessity of transcendence and immanence as implicated identities. It is the nature of this Hegelian divide that Hyman is interested in pursuing as the route to a more 'genuine' account of Hegel's God.

Williams, writes Hyman, sees the convergence of theology and philosophy in what, for Hegel, it means to think about thinking. The 'grammar' of God is 'the grammar of thought.'⁸ In other words, 'we can't think God apart from thinking ourselves; to think it as separate is to fail in thinking-as-such.'⁹ Williams is faithful to Hegel, says Hyman, because he resists 'both an undue *separation* between God and the world and also an unwarranted *identification* of God with the world.'¹⁰ God's self-sufficiency is not 'a life lived "beyond" us that we can yet talk about' because such an "exceeding" of thought cannot itself be thought or spoken.'¹¹ Williams, says Hyman, is walking a fine line here regarding the theological integrity of transcendence but his aim is to bring Hegel's insights to bear on the thinking of God in theology so as to trouble 'any straightforward opposition between transcendence and immanence.'¹²

Žižek's atheistic Hegelian God, writes Hyman, is close to Williams in that it also refuses the trap of dualistic thinking. The transcendent is an 'inescapable feature of the immanent itself'¹³ and whilst this might look like 'a world history determined by the purposive guiding hand of the Absolute or Geist',¹⁴ its teleological necessity is rather the result of a retroactive contingency undermining necessity with its own logic of becoming. This logic, which makes transcendence 'the result of its own [alienating] activity',¹⁵ is also the logic of Hegel's absolute and his conception of God, 'posited through our activity as its presupposition.'¹⁶ Hyman calls this an 'atheistic ontology' because God is the 'thought and activity of human

⁸ Rowan Williams, 'Logic and Spirit in Hegel' in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), 37-38. Quoted in Hyman, 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God', p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹² Hyman, 'The 'New Hegel' and the Question of God,' p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12. My insertion.

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, 'A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity' in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 60-61. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 12.

subjects' without being merely a 'subjective 'projection.'"¹⁷ God and human thought are mutually implicated such that as humanity becomes self-conscious through its idea of God in religion, so God becomes self-conscious in humanity. The finite and subjective element is Christ as a 'transubjective "it"'¹⁸ exceeding or transcending humanity but only 'in-through us.'¹⁹ Subjectivity carries the transcendent as an excess which it cannot control except in the organisation of itself as a religious community. Žižek does not, then, simply reject the theological resonances of Hegel's philosophy in favour of a 'secular humanism' for 'there must be a moment of thinking that it is not we who are acting, but a higher force that is acting through us. This element has to be maintained.'²⁰ This means that God is no 'big Other,' nor is God absolutely immanent. God is a "transcendent 'force' or 'power'" but only as an 'effect of immanence itself.'²¹

This is the point at which Žižek and Williams diverge, writes Hyman. Žižek reads this idea and experience of God through the lens of 'a materialist or atheistic ontology of immanence' whilst Williams reads it through 'a theistic ontology of transcendence.'²² Where they converge is in the refusal to accept a simple demarcation between transcendence and immanence. Both blur the distinctions to such an extent that, as Žižek points out, we can instead read the difference between transcendence and immanence not as an opposition but as a 'parallax,' a 'change of perspective.'²³ It is the nature of this change that Hyman is most interested in for it takes us 'beyond' the impasse of 'either-or options' towards the route by which Williams' and Žižek's readings of Hegel can be unified without "abolishing or 'overcoming'"²⁴ their difference. To think God '*beyond* the difference between transcendence and immanence'²⁵ whilst, at the same time, preserving that difference is a key Hegelian insight, he writes, and one he goes on to pursue as a more 'genuinely Hegelian

¹⁷ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 'A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity' in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 75-76. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, 'A meditation on Michelangelo's Christ on the Cross' in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek & Creston Davis (eds), *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), pp.179-180. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' pp.13-14.

²¹ Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 14.

²² Ibid., 15.

²³ Ibid., 16.

²⁴ Ibid., Author's emphasis.

²⁵ Ibid., Author's emphasis

conceiving of God'²⁶ in his reflections on Williams, Žižek, Malabou and Longuenesse, which I will now summarise.

Hyman begins by showing that Williams' account of the dialectic emphasises not an all-encompassing universality of identity and difference but a thinking which struggles to transcend its abstract mode of thought in order to 'conceive a structured wholeness nuanced enough to contain what appeared to be contradictories'²⁷; positive and negative, presence and absence, transcendence and immanence, finite and infinite. Like Williams, Malabou pursues the implications of this in Hegel's understanding of God. His exposition of the death of God in theological and philosophical terms is an original and speculative demonstration of the 'structural solidarity' between the divine and the human for what is represented in religion as 'one moment within the absolute Idea' is realised in modern Enlightenment philosophy as the 'truth of human subjectivity.'²⁸ In other words, divine and human subjectivity in Hegel are 'mutually informing and constructing'²⁹ subjectivities. According to Malabou, it is the 'possibility of self-solicitation' as it constitutes the moment of self-identity that guarantees both 'the unity of the relation of the same to the other'³⁰ and its dissolution into separation from the other. This mutual motility in Hegel is a 'strange synthesis of synthesis and non-synthesis'³¹ and is a more 'originary' unity than that of simple self-identity.

For Longuenesse, writes Hyman, such a synthesis occupies a similar role to that of the transcendental unity of apperception in Kant, except that the externality of the object which is presupposed in Kant is, in Hegel, a presupposition 'immanent to thought itself.'³²

Phenomenological consciousness teaches us that knowledge of the object is the knowledge that we have of ourselves and our own rational shapes, which are not that of an individual

²⁶ Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 5.

²⁷ Rowan Williams, 'Hegel and the Gods of postmodernity' in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), pp.29-30. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 17.

²⁸ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, tr. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005), p.103. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 18.

²⁹ Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 18.

³⁰ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.103. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 20 .

³¹ Ibid.

³² Beatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, tr. Nicole J Simek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 28. Quoted in Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 21.

consciousness, but the 'Spirit [God], a 'We' [God]'³³ which 'makes possible particular knowing subjects.'³⁴ God is the name for the immanent and transcendent subjectivity at work in the I that is a We and the We that is an I. The point, Hyman emphasises, is that Hegel insists on the necessity of the co-belonging of the unconditioned Absolute and the dimension of its 'constitutive subjectivity.'³⁵ Longuenesse goes on to show how this Hegelian unconditioned is the structure within which Kant's fourth antinomy regarding the existence of a necessary being appears. The argument has implications for our understanding of God because God becomes both the condition of the possibility of the antinomy and that 'about which both sides of the antinomy are true.'³⁶ What is important, for Hyman, is that 'the Absolute or God is not *set apart* and *independent* of the thought that thinks it, but is rather *implicated* in and, in a certain sense, *constituted* by such thought.'³⁷ The 'absolutely unconditioned' is thus the *result* of the movement of thought and the *movement* of thought itself in the subject. Insofar as this doubleness is the case, Hyman echoes Rose by suggesting that the Hegelian absolute is present not simply as something known or achieved but that which is implied and 'revealed in the process of thought itself.'³⁸

But what is always at stake in these arguments, writes Hyman, is the question of the contamination of the Absolute or God. Can we still speak of God as God if God is conditioned by what is other to God? This limitation is what Hyman, and the new interpretations, are interested in. What they find in Hegel is 'a genuine [or originary] divine transcendence'³⁹ which makes possible the distinction between transcendence and immanence as something posited. This 'truly transcendent and unconditioned'⁴⁰ God or Absolute is not distinct from the finite or immanent world because immanence is 'the process of the self-manifestation of this divine Absolute.'⁴¹ In other words, its manifestation is the posited distinction between transcendence and immanence through which it appears in, and as, both. For Hyman, the doctrine of the trinity in Hegel expresses the triune nature

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁷ Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of Go,' p. 25. Author's emphasis.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.30.

of this unconditioned unity; God as Father (transcendent), as Son (immanence) and as Spirit (the mutually mediating relation of both). Hyman equates Williams Hegelian God to the transcendent element of the trinity and Žižek's to the element of immanence in order to assert the 'necessity of their co-belonging' in a structure within which negativity (Spirit) is 'the condition and dimension'⁴² of their unity and difference.

In sum, Hyman argues that the new attempts to break out of the 'left' and 'right' readings of Hegel, whilst giving rise to opposing theistic and atheistic readings, nevertheless, open a path to the triune nature of Hegel's God expressed in and by their differences. It is because Hegel's philosophy reveals and insists on 'the necessity of the logic of *both ... and*' that they are not 'alternatives between which we must choose.'⁴³ Rather, each 'prioritises' the aspect of transcendence (Williams) or immanence (Žižek) not to the exclusion of the other but as the condition of the possibility in which both sides are necessary and true. Hyman holds in tension their atheistic and theistic interpretations in order to do justice, first of all, to the fact that each resist capture by religious or political readings of Hegel. And second, because he suggests that both sets of readings are 'exemplifications and manifestations...of the same 'thing', albeit viewed from different 'parallax' perspectives.'⁴⁴ However, in what follows, and in employing Rose and Tubbs, I want to argue that the logic of the 'both ... and' in Hyman's analysis misses the comprehensive significance of the Hegelian logic that they, and Rose, draw our attention to, and therefore of the understanding of God that it carries.

In 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams,'⁴⁵ Hyman acknowledges that the absolute in Rose's Hegel, whether a conception of God or of absolute ethical life, is a different kind of identity than one which is 'pre-judged' or 'stated' in the language of ordinary propositions. Hegel's and Rose's speculative absolute is implied in and by our experiences of the contradictions between absolute and relative ethical life, or religious and political consciousness and its social and historical bases. It

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴ Hyman, 'The New Hegel and the Question of God,' p. 31.

⁴⁵ Gavin Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams' in *Misrecognitions, Gillian Rose and the Task of a Political Theology*, ed. Joshua B. Davis (Oregon: CASCADE Books, 2018), pp. 126-142.

cannot be 'formulated as an abstract ideal' but 'is by no means strictly unknowable.'⁴⁶ The implications of such an absolute for political critique and action are explored by Hyman in relation to Peter Osborne's early criticisms of absolute ethical life in Rose. If philosophy 'cannot specify *concretely* what this new mode of transformation is'⁴⁷ then it is impotent and unable to bring about transformation. Against this, Hyman argues that far from being 'a renunciation of the political task' the absolute in Rose can be read as 'its radicalisation.'⁴⁸ The 'ambiguous status of the absolute'⁴⁹; that it cannot be stated abstractly yet remains knowable, has the only truthful claim on political transformation because it acknowledges positing as the 'law of the formation of the ego and its cognition and miscognition.'⁵⁰ In other words, actuality 'is posited or reflected in the ego'⁵¹ which presupposes independence from an external world upon which it can impose an absolute.

Hyman writes little about actuality directly here, so it is worth saying a little more. Rose invites us to recognise actuality 'as *determinans* of our acting by recognising it in our acts.'⁵² If political activity does not recognise the *relation* to actuality which determines it, the relation which, 'by definition, excludes part of it, is negative,' it will not give rise to the experience of 're-cognition which sees what the act did not immediately see. To see the determination of the act is to see beyond the dichotomy between act and non-act.'⁵³ Thinking the absolute is seeing 'particular forms of relative ethical life as distortions, and which therefore opens up the possibility of our deliverance from them.'⁵⁴ The absolute and actuality in Hegel are 'the foundation of the critique of law and of property relations.'⁵⁵ This is why Hegel does not overcome the ego in some illusory or impossible ideal, says Hyman,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁷ Peter Osborne, 'Hegelian phenomenology and the critique of reason and society,' *Radical Philosophy* 32 (1982), pp. 8-15. Author's emphasis. Quoted in Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams,' pp.129.

⁴⁸ Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams.' pp. 130.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵⁰ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 212. Quoted in Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams,' p. 130.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 204.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 204-205.

⁵⁴ Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams,' p. 128.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 206.

but 'dissolves and maintains' it as 'a certain *dispossession*,'⁵⁶ within which we continue to 'make decisions, act, and interact,' but in ways 'not *fully* determined'⁵⁷ by prevailing property relations. 'If actuality is not thought, then thinking has no social import.'⁵⁸

Despite the re-conception of political critique and activity in Rose's notion of absolute ethical life, Hyman, with Osborne, remains uneasy about its capacity to offer a substantial vision of absolute ethical life. He goes on to invoke Williams' theological reading of Rose, and Wittgenstein's 'language games,' as supplements to Rose's thinking, seeing in them both 'a more positive "substantive" [affirmative] direction' than one which leads seemingly to an infinity of dead ends. This move by Hyman, I suggest, shows that he remains hostage to a certain sort of logic or identity thinking regarding God or absolute ethical life. He still posits the ambiguous status of the absolute in Rose as a negative dialectic in need of a more positive, and by implication non-contradictory affirmation. Critics of Rose, like Osborne, rarely push further into the logic that is not of ordinary propositions or indeed that of ordinary logic itself. Rarely do they seek to educate the abstraction of their own critique 'by expounding the process of its determination,'⁵⁹ as she commends. But, too often, even Rose's supporters, like Hyman, shy away from naming God or the absolute as the difficulty of this different logic and do so because they remain in thrall to logic's continuing domination of the criteria by which truth, or the absolute, or God must be judged. At the heart of this domination is its control over the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable, a challenge that Rose meets head on in her work. This deserves a little of our attention now.

Rose and the Kantian unknowable.

In *Hegel Contra Sociology* Rose argues that modern reason, shaped in and by a Kantian and neo-Kantian diremption of law (objective ethical life/ the state) and ethics (subjective

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein, Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams.' p. 130.

⁵⁸ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 214.

⁵⁹ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 185.

ethical life/religion) is abstract, caught up in the contradictions of its own attempts to think about the social and political conditions which shape it. The dualism of law and ethics, or legality and morality, took shape as a number of conceptual oppositions, most notably, universal and particular, freedom and necessity, autonomy and heteronomy. Freedom is the autonomous moral will whilst necessity is the condition of the heteronomous legal will. Freedom is thus conceived 'in a negative sense, as freedom from necessity.'⁶⁰ But law in general is also conceived by Kant as universality *and* necessity for law describes the universal and necessary conditions of our experience of objects and of freedom. As grounds for law then, the conjunction collapses because it is contradictory. It makes law in Kant necessarily transcendental but unknowable in-itself. This diremption at the heart of Kant's definition of law is based, she argues, on the division between theoretical and practical reason which he takes to be unconditioned when, in fact, it presupposes the contradictions between universality and necessity in bourgeois social relations. Consequently, Kant does not see how those relations mask the domination of the object inherent in reason's conceptualizations and justifications. It leads to a number of 'unknowables'; God, things-in-themselves, the source of the causality of the will, the transcendental unity of apperception. In other words, 'the finite only is knowable, while the infinite transcends the realm of thought.'⁶¹ But, if the concept that we have of the infinite is the concept that we have of ourselves and our freedom then, according to Rose, the unknowability of one is correspondingly the unknowability of the other. An unknowable infinite leaves us powerless to recognize, critique and change the social and political relations which determine us.

What Rose is drawing our attention to here is the political and historical contingency of unknowability, or what is to say the same thing, the contingency of the logic of identity or non-contradiction, which, Tubbs writes, is at work whenever truth is presupposed either as dogma, or within an accompanying skepticism.⁶² I will return to this idea in Tubbs below. The point, for now, is that the division between the knowable and unknowable which is presupposed came to determine the abstractions of ethical thinking in philosophy and social theory after Kant. Rose shows that pure reason in both theoretical and practical philosophy,

⁶⁰ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁶² Nigel Tubbs, *Socrates on Trial* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

or the *unity* in consciousness of the relation between concepts and objects, ‘does not unify’⁶³ because it presupposes that reason is external to the object. Social theory, in turn, repeats the diremption of law and ethics in its conception of freedom, the very separation that it seeks to overcome. Hyman’s own approach is not immune to this repetition, nor I think would he wish it to be, but as is often the case with interpretations of Rose and Hegel, he does not pursue the educational significance, or for Tubbs the absolute significance, of this repetition. He does not allow it to have its own necessity, or its own logic.

Rose, however, saw that Hegel’s thought anticipates the aporia of the repetition of such diremption, which is why he attempted instead to ‘embrace the impossibility of Kantian justification,’⁶⁴ or the assumption of truth as unknowable, through his speculative propositions. She writes that Hegel knew that if his thought were read as a series of ordinary propositions, it would be misunderstood because in presupposing the externality of the object it would assume that there is a stable identity between subject and predicate which is merely immediate or one-sided knowledge. To read Hegel speculatively is to experience the abstractions of natural consciousness as a contradiction so that ‘the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity.’⁶⁵ In this experience, subject and predicate can, instead, ‘acquire their meaning in a series of relations to each other.’⁶⁶ Hegel’s speculative thought is not just the experience of contradiction or non-identity, nor is it merely Hyman’s retention of such relation against any dogmatic closure. It is, instead, insight into the illusions of the natural *per se*. What is often overlooked is that philosophical consciousness repeats the abstractions of natural consciousness in its identifying mode. It too loses itself to the experience that its relation to the object is part of a much wider landscape of relations and mediations not immediately intelligible. Hence, ‘even though the oppositions of consciousness have been surmounted, we still cannot have an abstract statement of the absolute’ for it is the ‘path which must be continually traversed, re-collecting the forms of consciousness and the forms of science. This idea of a whole which cannot be grasped in one moment or in one statement for it

⁶³ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

must be experienced is the idea of the system.⁶⁷ It is precisely 'the system' here that Hyman does not follow through on, by not acknowledging the truth of his own aporetic thinking.

Kant saw something of the way in which responses to the infinite repetition of such antinomies repeat themselves either as the assertion of a dogma that simply states their resolution, or as the scepticism that any non-dogmatic resolution is achievable and concluding therein that all such responses are otiose, and that judgement can be suspended. Hyman's approach to the new relation of the new readers of Hegel does read dogma and scepticism together. But I suggest that his continued positing of God and truth as unknowable shows how he refuses aporetic relation a truth of its own.

As Tubbs has recently observed, Kant makes clear that 'dogmatic and sceptical objections alike lay claim to such insight into object as is required to assert or deny something in regard to it.'⁶⁸ The objects that are presupposed in Hyman's case are, for example, Zizek's ontology of immanence and Williams' theistic ontology. This already shapes how the argument will present itself and inevitably reproduces the logic of infinite regression, or of interminable antinomy, or, put differently, what Horkheimer and Adorno saw as the dialectic of enlightenment. An example of this comes from the conclusion of Hyman's piece on Rose, echoed in his 'New Hegel'. Having raised antinomical questions about the competing priorities of philosophy and theology, or state and religion, Hyman says that his analysis 'has done little to settle this question either way.'⁶⁹ He then asks, 'what if that turns out to be the very point? What if the question is ultimately unanswerable? ...What if there is a necessary and unavoidable circularity here?'⁷⁰ This would not be the end of Tubbs' investigation, but rather another beginning of it. For him, the Hegelian, Rosean and educational vocation here is to explore what that unavoidable necessity is, and how its necessity is a different kind of logic to that which Hyman employs in his reaction to the necessity, that perhaps we should 'rest content with this circularity, this equivocation.'⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 2007), A389, p. 357. But Kant did distinguish skepticism as a principle of ignorance from the skeptical method which exposes the deceptive appearance of an object, A424/B451.

⁶⁹ Hyman, 'Between Hegel and Wittgenstein,' p. 141.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In one sense, this takes us back to Rose, and indeed to her earliest thinking. She was a sociologist, reading critical theory, and expressing this same antinomy, this same infinite regression, this same dialectic of enlightenment, in the overtly expressed concern that ‘no critical consciousness or theory is possible’⁷² if consciousness, as an object, is always already reified. ‘Any philosophy which systematically denies one pole of the dialectic, the subject or the object, or which, conversely, is grounded in one to the debasement of the other, will fall into antinomies, will reify its concepts.’⁷³ For Rose, the key issue was how meaningful critique was within the totality of illusion. The logic of this question was preserved in her whole project thereafter. It is preserved in Hyman’s thinking regarding the unavoidable necessity that engulfs the relation of theology and philosophy, or of immanence and transcendence. But, unlike Rose, he leaves unexamined the life and logic of precisely this necessity.

In *Hegel contra Sociology* Rose argued that the negation of critical consciousness was preserved not just as the interminable repetition of antinomy, but as the consciousness that was changed in and by its self-perficient scepticism. She did not rest with Adorno’s dialectics at a standstill, and would not, I think, rest with Hyman’s version of equivocation. Her aim was to find the logic in which the relation of illusion and critique is its own truth, its own form and content. She never ceded this logic of experience in her later work. It underpins all that came after, including the concept of experience as a broken middle. Her Adorno book spoke of ‘a changed concept of dialectic’⁷⁴ in Adorno. He had to turn to art and aesthetics to fill in the gap, the broken middle, of philosophy and social critique. Rose, however, found the problem to be explicable in terms of social theory *per se*, and its neo-Kantian prejudices regarding the unknowability of truth.

There has been much discussion about the ‘success’ or otherwise of Rose’s work in dealing with issues in social and political philosophy. But to debate success or failure in this way is to miss entirely the sociological conundrum of antinomical critical consciousness that she never sought to avoid or to transcend or to overcome. In such criticism she is read (as Hegel was) as a commentator and thinker abstracted from the ‘objects’ that she is thinking about.

⁷² Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 48.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Hence her work is represented and judged in terms of its ability to heal (or not) antinomies that, instead, she sees as inexorable in bourgeois property-based social relations. Hyman has clearly outlined how Rose's commentators reproduce the same kind of divide between state and religion that Rose's Hegelianism calls into question. And he is clear that she is not trying to avoid or to overcome the divide. But she is not just showing the difficulty of thinking the divide. She is thinking the divide in the form in which the divide thinks her, and she is expressing this as the thinking of the absolute. This level of contingency, or complicity, is deeply uncomfortable for a class of commentators and thinkers who demand the analytic rigour and detachment that they assume belongs to 'criticism.' They assume for themselves, and demand from her the very kind of critical consciousness that Rose is already knowingly and truly failing to achieve.

So, how is it possible to read Rose, or any Hegelian work, where thinking is not just a 'sociology of illusion'⁷⁵ but a logic of illusion that is self-sustaining as reproduction *and* critical? This is the same as to ask, what is the logic of the *Aufheben* in Hegel? Recently, Tubbs has offered an answer to this question that moves Hegelian scholarship, and the reception of Rose, into as yet uncharted territory. In what at first glance strikes the current philosophical Zeitgeist as unusual to say the least, but which has credentials stretching back to the origins of philosophy, Tubbs argues that in Rose's Hegelianism lies the redefinition of God as education.⁷⁶ Tubbs' work has not yet been taken up yet by Rose scholars, therefore a brief introduction to his overall project is appropriate.⁷⁷

Tubbs and educational logic

⁷⁵ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, p. 146.

⁷⁶ The body of work that has explored this argument recently led Rowan Williams to describe Tubbs as 'the UK's best educational philosopher.' See 'Books of the Year,' *The New Statesman*, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2021/11/best-books-year-2021>.

⁷⁷ Nigel Tubbs is Professor of Philosophical and Educational Thought at the University of Winchester. His theory of philosophical education is developed in the following books: *Contradiction of Enlightenment* (1997); *Philosophy's Higher Education* (2004); *Philosophy of the Teacher* (2005) *Education in Hegel* (2008); *History of Western Philosophy* (2009); *Philosophy and Modern Liberal Arts Education* (2015); *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics, The Logic of "Know Thyself"* (2017) and *Socrates on Trial* (2022). It is also to be found in the theory and practice of two undergraduate programmes in Education Studies and Liberal Arts at the University of Winchester.

In broad terms Tubbs argues that the experience of negativity in Hegel and Rose is a ‘logic’ or ‘culture’ of educational experience. Its template is the philosophical experience of positing and necessity. In *Philosophy’s Higher Education* he populated this template with Hegel’s relation of master and slave, and more recently he has done so by Hegel’s relation of life and death. Overall, his work argues that this culture is suppressed in and by what he calls the logic of mastery as it has defined the course of western intellectual history. That is, it is suppressed ‘when relations between dualities, such as thought and being, theory and practice, subject and object etc., are stated without the accompanying difficulty that is determinative of their relation.’⁷⁸ In this regard his approach is very close to that of Hyman’s.

The most recent iteration of the logic of education in *Socrates On Trial* argues that the necessity of positing and the positing that is necessity are the components of the logic of education and are the formative parts of what constitutes ‘culture’. He sees culture as the work that is the relation of life and death. Life, in becoming an object to itself in thought, posits itself as not death. In doing so it takes its essential nature to be over and against death and the fear and vulnerability that accompanies it. The illusion that there is a life which is independent of its relation to death is the template of thought’s relation to the object, that is, that there is a mind which is independent of its relation to objects. It takes political form as a relation of master and slave because the master is ‘the life which is certain of itself’ over and against ‘the life that must carry the death that the master has eschewed for himself, which is the slave.’⁷⁹

The misrecognition of life and death takes further shape in Aristotelian logic in the definition of truth as *in-itself*; independent substance, non-contradictory, unified within itself and lacking any and all contingencies. In contrast, that which is *for-another* is mediated in being contingent or dependent upon another, and so is defined as error in relation to truth in-itself.⁸⁰ The relation is formalized in the Roman world through the law of property, through the ownership of those who lack truth in-themselves; women, children, and slaves. In

⁷⁸ Nigel Tubbs, *Philosophy’s Higher Education* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 26.

⁷⁹ Nigel Tubbs, *Education in Hegel* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 25.

⁸⁰ The idea is carried in Aristotle’s notion of the Prime Mover which is its own condition of possibility. Necessity—that it must be itself—is the principle of non-contradiction and the absurdity of infinite regression.

demonstrating the reciprocity between the logic of positing and the idea of independence, that the thought which thinks itself - *noesis noeseos* - is its own object and not for another, Tubbs retrieves the social relations of master (in-itself) and slave (for-another) 'that serve as the conditions of the possibility for the thinking of objects.'⁸¹ The salient point is that the logic of truth in-itself, like freedom in-itself, is always already a 'propertied logic'⁸² posited in the form of a general logic.

This propertied logic impacts Hyman's piece because it is this logic that determines the criteria that judge the knowable and the unknowable, and therefore the identity of the idea of God. The radical import of Hegel's absolute, says Tubbs, lies in its call to reconceptualize the idea of truth within the tradition, and this according to a reworked notion of educational logic which stands within but suppressed by ordinary or propertied logic. His work challenges the logic of mastery with its own vulnerabilities and negations such that it is capable of knowing truth in these negations *as learning*. By drawing our attention to the education that lies within the aporias of modern freedom, Tubbs lets God or the absolute emerge as the truth which 'forms and re-forms itself in what is learned in such difficulties.'⁸³ It is to say not only that the difficulty of the relation between God and freedom, state and religion, transcendence and immanence, should be retained, as Hyman does, but that it might also commend its own necessity as a reconceptualization of what truth is. It is not just the elements that are negated and preserved in the new relations of Hegel's new readers. Relation itself is also negated and preserved in its being formed and reformed. How is this to be thought? How is the necessity of this positing of itself to be knowable? Only as that which posits its own necessity, and for Tubbs, that is only knowable and thinkable as its own formation and reformation, its own culture, its own education. In this logic of positing, rather than of non-contradiction, education can 'be truth... [can] *be* the absolute.'⁸⁴

The two works that perhaps best develop this argument are *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics* and *Socrates On Trial*. Together they describe how the experience of subject and object carry a necessity of presupposition. The presupposition is the condition of their

⁸¹ Tubbs, *Education in Hegel*, p. 49.

⁸² Nigel Tubbs, 'Gillian Rose and Education,' in *Telos* 173 (2015), p.126.

⁸³ Tubbs, *Education in Hegel*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Tubbs, *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics, The Logic of "Know Thyself"* (New York/London: Routledge, 2017), p. 102.

own possibility; and the necessity is that it presupposes itself. This is not another claim for essence over existence, or for presence over excess, or indeed for anthropocentric metaphysics over posthuman openness. They are exactly the kinds of divisions that Tubbs argues carry but fail to acknowledge or to do justice to the necessity of presupposition within them. What makes his contribution distinctive is that he finds that this necessity of presupposition, and the presupposition within of it of its own necessity, belongs to a different logic, or what he calls an educational logic. It is in this educational logic that his new conception of God is to be found, and, he has argued, the logic of the *Aufheben* that makes sense of Rose's sociological and philosophical project. It is this logic, I argue, that Hyman and others need to look to in order to see how Hegel and Rose are treating the division of knowable and unknowable as a necessity of its own positing. This is how Hegel and Rose are able to think oppositions together in a way different from Hyman.

In *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics* Tubbs states that the idea being tested is that 'God, seen in the Western tradition as *thought thinking itself* (*νοησις νοησεως, noesis noeseos,*) is experienced by the individual as the educational necessity to *know thyself* (*γνώθι σεαυτόν, gnōthi seauton*).'⁸⁵ Its leading questions are 'can religion—referring specifically to the logic of God shared by the three Abrahamic faiths—be retrieved in the modern rational and reflective mind by the notion of *modern metaphysics*? Can this modern metaphysics reform the concept of the religious for a modern reflective, critical and sceptical age? Might it be able to retrieve the religious character of scepticism in an age where spirit is both religious and political, or is both God and freedom? Can modern metaphysics reform the idea of religion so that it comes to know itself in the rational spirit of modernity, and to know the truth of this as *education*?'⁸⁶ And, more bluntly, he offers the following challenge; 'we are commended to ask if God is not in fact to be found in education, and more challenging still, to ask if God *is* education.'⁸⁷

This is given what appears to be a more secular treatment in his recent dialogical recreation of Plato's Republic and Apology, called *Socrates On Trial*. This and the God book need to be read together as torn halves of an integral freedom, God and the state, to which, however

⁸⁵ Tubbs, *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

they do not add up. Or, at least, they do not add up according to the ordinary logic of identity or non-contradiction or the logic of mastery, in which as Aristotle said, something which is itself cannot also not be itself. The Socrates book spells out clearly the history of this logic in western thinking, and the necessity of presupposition that it has carried which consistently and inexorably undermines and collapses the mastery inherent in this logic. Its educational implications are fleshed out in a conversation between Socrates and two interlocuters regarding the possibility of a new 'un-propriety' notion of truth in the city. The question is asked, can truth be absolute if it is no longer in-itself and, if so, is it knowable. Socrates responds by saying that presupposition can 'be its own kind of truth,'⁸⁸ one capable of carrying life and death differently as just social relations. It is an 'un-propriety logic', rather than a 'non-propriety logic' because presupposition cannot claim immunity from property. Truth which is un-propriety, 'carries the struggle of the negation of property without resorting to a mastery of non-property.'⁸⁹ Justice in the city is the justice that preserves the struggle of this negation and the only experience that does justice to preserving struggle is, he says, learning. 'Unlike propriety truth,' says Socrates, 'learning is not in denial of its own vulnerability. Which means that education has... a different necessity than that of mastery and property.'⁹⁰ In fact, presupposition is the necessity which will always oppose itself. Where the logic of mastery or identity imposes 'a vicious circle' of infinite regression, the logic of education 'preserves what is negated as learning.'⁹¹

It is this different necessity, argues Tubbs, that offers a different conception of the absolute. Here negative and positive co-exist in the necessity that learning holds within itself. The Socrates book offers a different picture of a polis that tries to live within this educational logic. Tubbs paints a picture of a city where family, civil society and state have their truth within learning, and therefore no longer within the ordinary logic and its masterful notion of truth which, as Tubbs shows, have their own basis in property relations. He also rewrites the cave in terms of educational logic. All of this is presented by a Socrates who has returned to the city and is charged again with undermining the city by means of his education. He is put on trial and Tubbs is able to offer new verdict that is in harmony with the Socratic life. It is

⁸⁸ Nigel Tubbs, *Socrates on Trial* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), p.186.

⁸⁹ Tubbs, *Socrates on Trial*, p. 186.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

this logic, for Tubbs, and for Hegel and Rose, that makes God and the absolute knowable within the tradition.

Both ... and; know thyself

The insights of Hyman into the logic of 'both... and' regarding the new interpretations draw attention to new aporetic ways of thinking Hegel's God and the absolute in a post-secular age. He wants to keep Hegel's God open against the charges of a totalising rationalism and does so without falling into one sided dogmas or scepticisms. It is significant for Hegel and Rose scholarship that he reworks the transcendent dimension in immanence and the immanent dimension in transcendence into a deeper and more difficult conception of the triune God than much of traditional scholarship has been willing to work with and he is right to note that Williams' more theological reading of Rose and Hegel in the terms of dispossession perhaps comes closest to a more 'substantial' account of the absolute as radical political experience.

But in relation to Tubbs insistence on exploring the necessity and logic of aporia, I think that Hyman's own equivocation regarding aporia is one grounded in the old logic of non-contradiction. This means it still holds to the logic that God is unknowable and that perhaps this is, as he says, the whole point. However, perhaps it is the case that just at the point where Hyman finds the equivocation of aporia necessary and unavoidable, this marks the beginning of a new and old Hegel, one where one logic manifests itself within another logic, or where a logic of education manifests itself in the logic of mastery that still dominates the tradition. This domination ensures that, even in works championing equivocation and difficulty, the unconditioned God or Absolute is abstracted from the necessity that is its presupposition, which is to say, the educational logic within which God and the absolute are true in learning, and as learning. In Hyman, necessity is acknowledged as the condition of 'both... and' but not worked with as its own logic of educational experience.

What I have suggested here is that, perhaps, there is a demand in Hegel and Rose, via Tubbs, to do justice to the educational logic that lies within what is already presupposed in how transcendence and immanence, God and freedom, religion, and the state etc. are to be understood, together and apart. Tubbs' theory of educational logic, I argue, opens a way for

thinking and knowing and living the absolute not just abstractly in all its propertied forms but also educationally in the necessity by which propertied masteries collapse in on themselves.

Tubbs' work perhaps suggests that while Hegel and Rose reach deeply enough into the logic of the aporias they are working with to find its own necessity, and its own positing of itself as education, it does not lead them to express that truth directly as education, or as a re-conception of God as education. Tubbs' explanation of this overlooking of education is that the propertied conception of education makes it appear a purely instrumental affair, seemingly unable to carry serious and substantial philosophical weight.

Educational necessity is clearly present in Hyman's own approach to the new readings of Hegel, and to the way he employs Rose's work in regard to working with rather than against oppositions. Indeed, it is in many ways the unacknowledged logic of his own thinking about Hegel, Rose and God. He is clear that Williams and Žižek, for example, are implicated in each other, and he seeks to preserve that implication so as not to fall into dogmatism. This offers a new kind of relation, one whose contradictions are not resolved, but carried. It avoids the binary of having to choose between them, or to choose a winner and a loser in the argument. However, as I have tried to show, when he ends his article with the reaffirmation of the necessity of *both ... and* as a new configuration of God, he does not allow this necessity to be its own truth, or therefore, to be the thinking of God. Still working within the logic that judges truth unknowable and unthinkable, this is neither the God of Hegel or Rose, or Tubbs.