How Plato and Hegel Integrate the Sciences, the Arts, Religion, and Philosophy

Plenary talk for the International Hegel Society conference, Tampere, Finland, June 6, 2018, revised Sept. 8, 2018; published in *[Hegel Jahrbuch](https://philpapers.org/asearch.pl?pub=7599)* 2019 (1):391-402 (2019)

1. Plato was among the first to give prominence to the apparent conflicts between philosophy, religion, and the arts, conflicts that are still alive in modern cultures. Philosophers often challenge the legitimacy of religion, in various ways; philosophy as an advocate of ethics challenges the arts as lacking a moral compass; and advocates of the arts and religion stage counterattacks against these challenges. However, Plato wasn’t only a critic of religion and the arts. He had his own preferred version of religion, and his own practice of art, of which he was quite aware. And in modern times, Hegel presents a systematic account of the sciences, the arts, religion, and philosophy, as aspects of “Spirit,” which shows how all of them make indispensable contributions to freedom and thus, in fact, to the highest and most "real" reality. My goal in this talk is to show how, elaborating on Plato’s hints on these issues, Hegel not only resolves the disputes between the sciences, the arts, religion, and philosophy, but reveals a unified higher and more real reality  that is composed of efforts within all of these cultural domains.

The notion of a single higher reality which is composed of efforts within various cultural domains is not widely understood or even glimpsed. If this notion were better understood by philosophers and by our culture at large, our cultural lives and especially the relations between religion and science would exhibit less fruitless argument back and forth, and more fruitful cooperation, than they do. Efforts by twentieth-century philosophers including Alfred North Whitehead and Michael Polanyi to unfold something like this notion have not been widely understood or built upon.[[i]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn1" \o ") In the ancient world, Aristotle, whom I won’t have time to discuss, was of course another major integrator along these lines. I hope that a better understanding of the efforts of Plato and Hegel, together with the others whom I’ve mentioned, may put us in a position finally to make this an ongoing program of integrative research and education. Not just a curriculum of “great books,” but a living synthesis that subsumes what’s true in all of these prior efforts.

2. So, first a few words about Plato. After criticizing the popular religion of Homer as promoting immorality, Plato makes it clear (in a way that is not at all axiomatic for *modern* thinking) that knowledge of nature nevertheless is a first step toward knowledge of the divine. The sciences and mathematics contribute as philosophy does to raising us above mere appetite satisfaction, opinions, and self importance, or the shadows on the walls of the Cave. In this way, the natural sciences and mathematics are inspiring and are parts of the philosophical religion that Plato adumbrates. Understanding inspiration on any of these levels is a step toward understanding divinity itself. I’ll show this in more detail in connection with Hegel, but what Hegel presents is not different in principle from what we already see in Plato.

Regarding the arts, Plato complains that they are not self aware enough; they cannot explain where their power comes from, and consequently they are unreliable and they can lead us morally astray. If we think of the power seeking “sophists” of Plato’s day, and in our own days of the unscrupulous arts of advertising and of propaganda, we can easily see how the arts are morally unreliable.

On the other hand, Plato is well aware that he himself is an artist, too. Plato has Socrates describe himself, in the *Republic*, as “greedy for images” (*Republic* 488a), and indeed Plato’s dialogues are full of striking images: the exit from the Cave, the chariot with its black and white horses, the tree whose roots are in the sky, the midwife…. Socrates, speaking no doubt for Plato, candidly admits that he can’t fully clarify, conceptually, what some of these images entail (*Republic* 517b). So Plato’s critique of the arts would apply to some of his own work as well as to the more traditional arts.

This observation about Plato invites the question, do the arts have anything in common with the “philosophy” that Plato is trying to practice? Plato’s most explicit answer to this question is his description of poetry, in the *Phaedrus,*as one of the “god given” forms of madness (*Phaedrus* 244a, 245). Not *mere* madness, but “*god given*madness,” which is to say, somehow higher than everyday life. “Inspired,” as we say.

What do we mean when we describe some aspects of life as “higher,” more “inspired” and “inspiring,” than other aspects? Plato’s answer to this question is that some aspects of life are more responsive to the eternal Forms, and especially the Form of the Good. Other aspects, such as mere appetite satisfaction, opinions, and self importance (*thumos*, in Greek), are less responsive to the eternal. To turn toward the eternal, as the soul does when it turns to the Forms and the Good for guidance, is to be higher than what does not make this turning. In fact, because this turning contrasts so sharply with our ordinary pursuits of appetite satisfaction and self importance, Plato calls it “divine” (*Timaeus* 41c, 90a).

The problem with the arts, Plato implies, is that they do not fully make this turning toward the eternal. They are inspired and inspiring, but not as a result of turning explicitly to the Good.

But it remains the case that the arts evoke something that is “more intense,” for us, than our humdrum eating, sleeping, and reading the newspaper. By doing this, the arts testify to the dimension of inspiration, by which some aspects of life seem to be truly “higher” than others. And this is what they have in common with “philosophy,” as Plato understands it, as well as with religion and the “gods.”

3. Now Hegel, as one of Plato’s major modern successors, sets out explicitly to explore the relationship between these four forms of inspiration, the sciences, the arts, religion, and philosophy, and in so doing to explain how it is that the four of them are inspiring, even though they don’t always explicitly aim at the Good. Hegel explains this in the “Spirit” section of his *Encyclopedia.*The natural sciences are an aspect of “Subjective Spirit,” by which individuals achieve a significant degree of freedom, while art, religion, and philosophy are aspects of “Absolute Spirit,” which is called “absolute” because it is set free (*absolvere* means to loosen or set free) from the limitations of “subjective” and “objective” Spirit.

To understand how Hegel’s account of Spirit integrates these four aspects we must first understand Spirit as such. Hegel’s account of Spirit begins, in effect, in his *Science of Logic,*in which he shows how being and nothing are initially interchangeable insofar as neither of them has a determinate characteristic that would distinguish it from the other. Perhaps, Hegel supposes, the “becoming” of being or nothing, their coming to be or ceasing to be, might be more determinate. But this becoming still presupposes something determinate that comes to be or ceases to be. The question then arises, is this determinate “something” determinate through itself, or through its relations to others? If it is separated from others, by being finite, it is still determined through its limit, and thus through something that involves it with others. Hence, the only way for it to be determinate entirely through itself is for it to be infinite. The infinite, however, cannot be something *other than* the finite, on pain of being limited by the boundary between it and the finite, and thus failing to be infinite. So, Hegel concludes, it must be the finite’s going beyond itself.[[2]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn2" \o ")

The “true infinity” that is the finite’s going beyond itself is fundamental for everything that follows it in Hegel’s system. In particular, it’s fundamental for his conception of “Spirit.” Spirit aims to be free, self determining (*Encyclopedia*§§382-385). But if it’s to be self determining, it can’t be something separate from material nature, as it seems to be in Descartes’s dualism of mind and body or in Kant’s dualism of noumenal freedom and phenomenal determinism. For if it were separate, it would be determined in part by the boundary that separates it (from body or from phenomena), and thus it would not be fully self determining or free. Consequently, Hegel conceives of freedom and Spirit on the model of true infinity: as the *self surpassing* of unfree, mechanical nature. The second and third parts of his *Encyclopedia*, on Nature and Spirit, trace out in detail this process of Nature’s self surpassing as Spirit.

The key thing to bear in mind here is this word, “surpassing” (*Hinausgehen über*). Hegel makes it clear that what he has in mind is not merely an anodyne “emergence” of something that’s different from and not reducible to what it emerges from. On the contrary, he asserts that in addition to not being reducible, the infinite is “*real*” in a way that the finite is not, and Spirit is the *truth of* Nature.[[3]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn3" \o ") What “emerges,” here, is more real and more true than what it emerges from, in that by being self determining it is real as itself, and not merely as the product of its heritage and surroundings.

In this notion of the finite’s “surpassing itself,” Hegel takes Plato’s hint in *Republic*books iv to vii that reason (and thus ultimately the Good) is what enables the soul to be “entirely one” (*Republic*443e), and thus Hegel spells out the nondualistic conception of transcendence, transcendence as surpassing one’s finitude in the pursuit of *one’s* *own true self*, that this implies. Because they are both ways of surpassing one’s being determined by externally induced appetites, opinions, self importance, and so forth, so as to be determined instead by “oneself,” Hegel’s “freedom” and Plato’s ascent to the Good amount to the same thing.[[4]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn4" \o ")

How “Spirit” emerges, then, is first of all that, following the example of Plato’s “demiurge” who cannot be “jealous” (*Timaeus* 29e), Hegel’s “Idea” opens out into the sheer spatiotemporal externality of “Nature.” “Spirit,” then, is the process of self surpassing in pursuit of self determining unity and full reality for itself, by which this external Nature finds its way back to the infinite Idea.

The Idea’s opening out into Nature corresponds to the “coming forth” or *proodos*that Plotinus saw in Plato’s *Timaeus*; and Spirit’s return to the Idea corresponds to the “turning back” or *epistrophe*that Plotinus saw in Plato’s *Republic* and *Symposium*. Critics have objected that Hegel, like Plato and Plotinus, seems not to conceive of the “creator” as sufficiently separate from the “created.” To which I think Hegel’s response is simply that since what is “separate” is limited by what it is separate from, an infinite and fully free creator cannot be separate, but must be engaged in the kind of process (being the “truth of” or the “reality of” the world) that Hegel describes.

This is Hegel’s response to the common suggestions that he is advocating a kind of “pantheism,” or a Feuerbachian “anthropotheism.” Because what’s separate is limited by what it is separate from, the infinite and fully free creator cannot be a separate being. So rather than being a separate being, an infinite and fully free creator must be the self surpassing of the finite world, to which it gives whatever full reality the finite world can possess. In presenting this view, Hegel is confident that he follows in the footsteps of St Paul (“in [God] we live and move and have our being”), St Athanasius (God “was made man so that *we might be made God*”), and St Augustine (God is “*more inward to me*than my most inward part”).[[5]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn5" \o ") None of these canonical authorities appear to preach a God who is, in the normal sense, a separate being from us. But they are never accused of advocating pantheism or a God who is not “transcendent,” because it is clear that the God whom they preach, though not a being that is separate from us, is in general, *higher*than us. And of course the same applies to Hegel’s God.

4. Having Spirit’s general character thus in view, as Nature’s return, in search of full reality for itself, to the Idea, we can now examine the main lines of its development. Hegel first identifies ways in which Nature achieves forms of centeredness or “selfhood.” When these eventually become articulate enough to form a conception of themselves as having a finite life span and destiny, separate from what surrounds them, and thus having an “inner” life, they emerge as Subjective Spirit: soul, consciousness, intelligence, and will.

One implementation of intelligence and then of will would be the natural sciences. Through them, as through subjective Spirit in general, we achieve inner freedom by seeking truth rather than being guided merely by our intuitions, representations, or “drives” (*Triebe*).

Rich though it is, this life of soul, consciousness, intelligence, and will is still limited, finite, and therefore unfree, insofar as an inner life by definition faces an “external” world which is not composed of soul, consciousness, and so forth, and the resulting boundary between it and the outer is a limitation for it, which prevents it from being completely self determining or free.

Subjective Spirit’s limitation, it turns out, can be partially overcome by what Hegel calls “objective Spirit,” which is composed of such things as property, morality, family, the state, and history. Each of these embodies an “inner” idea *in* the “outer” world, and thus serves to make the outer world more like the inner one and less of a limitation for it. Through the combination of inner, subjective Spirit and outer, objective Spirit, which is a combination that no doubt is especially evident in human societies, a remarkable degree of self determining freedom can be achieved.

However, insofar as subjective and objective Spirit are still understood to be divided from each other, one as inner or subjective and the other as outer or objective, each of them is still bounded and limited by the other. So the only fully free or “absolved” (“absolute”) Spirit, the only Spirit that’s fully self determining rather than being determined in part by its relation to something that is other than it, will be a Spirit that goes beyond the division of subjective versus objective.

5. Now the first reality, Hegel tells us, that does this—that goes beyond the division between the inner phenomena of soul, consciousness, and so forth, and external phenomena like property, the family, and so forth—is Art.

Works of art, whether they are buildings or paintings or poems or pieces of music, are entirely “physical” and in that sense entirely “outer.” And at the same time they have an “inner” logic, an “inspiration,” that makes them integrated wholes in a way that *merely* external things like (say) random collections of rocks are not. Unlike the soul and consciousness, works of art take up physical space and (in the case of music) time. But unlike property, the family, and so forth, which likewise take up physical space and time, works of art have individuality. They have an inner inspiration that unifies them more fully than a piece of property or a family or a state can be unified. A family or a state is still, in one respect, a collection of individuals. A work of art is more integrated than that. It supersedes, renders irrelevant, whatever individuality its ingredients may previously have had. And in that way the work of art, which is an external object, is also fully “inner.” It defines itself, from within, in the same way that a soul or a consciousness does.

So in this way we can say that works of art go beyond the division between subjective and objective Spirit. They unite both categories in a way that yields an entirely new category: “absolute Spirit.” And in doing this they yield a degree of freedom (*absolvere,*again) that’s greater than the previous categories could provide us with.

This is freedom in the sense of self government and wholeness, as well as independence from prior and surrounding circumstances. It’s not, clearly, “freedom” in the sense of arbitrariness, which would not produce a coherent whole. Rather than being the absence of any government, freedom as Hegel and Plato understand it is being governed by oneself, through some sort of inner law. Works of art exhibit precisely this kind of freedom. They define themselves by an inner law, of which we are more or less explicitly aware.

It’s no wonder, then, that the arts inspire us and have occupied a central place in human cultures since the beginning. If we presume that freedom and being fully oneself are a built in, central human concern, the arts speak to this concern or satisfy this need more fully than anything that we have considered so far. This has the consequence that for many people, the arts are (as it were) the nearest thing to a “religion” that they possess, and they pursue the arts with the same devotion and zeal that religious devotees exhibit. They do this because the arts are the highest incarnation of freedom, and therefore the most inspiring thing, that they are aware of. They are higher, more free, than the freedom of one’s inner life, because they are also fully “outer”; but they are higher also than the freedom of one’s outer, social life, because they are also fully “inner.” This is Hegel’s explanation of how the arts are inspiring (“god given,” as Plato says), even though they may not be guided in any direct way by a conception of the Good.

However, in Hegel’s view as in Plato’s, the arts are not what is *most* inspiring. The reason is, first of all, that works of art are many and finite. Each work is not the others, and vice versa. And likewise, each work has a relation to its producer, the artist, who played a role in its coming into being. The work’s relations to other works and to its author are always somewhere in the background, so that no work can be utterly self determining and utterly free, in the way that complete self determination would require. So however excellent and inclusive it may be, no single work can ever be fully self determining, and consequently no single work (and no finite number of works) can ever fully satisfy our demand for freedom.

6. This, Hegel suggests, is why we wind up with religions. Religions seek to integrate not only subjective and objective Spirit, with all of their respective components, but also all of the arts, into (as it were) a “super art” that is no longer simply an art, because nothing is left outside it to compete with it. They seek to be a thoroughly inclusive, and thus truly absolute freedom.

Here we may think of Plato’s critique of Homeric religion, which he accused (like Homer’s poems that incorporated it) of promoting immoral behavior. It is not just that Plato, like many religious reformers, was a moralist *as well as* a religious person. Rather, Plato was pointing out that ethics, as a form of freedom, had to be incorporated into any fully satisfactory religion, insofar as religion aims to embody all forms of freedom and thus to be absolute.

Ethics is a form of freedom insofar as it integrates one’s own freedom with that of others and thus prevents one’s freedom from being circumscribed and limited by one’s relation to those others.[[6]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn6" \o ") By including ethics within religion, Plato was trying to make religion measure up to the role that Hegel was later to specify for it, of being a form of absolute freedom. Plato felt that as long as religion left a significant form of freedom or rational self government such as ethics outside itself, it would fail to measure up to what the religious spirit really dreamed of. And indeed many religious believers have felt that Plato and others (such as, for example, the Hebrew prophets) were right about this, which is why the tendency in the development of religions has been towards greater emphasis, within them, on ethics.

Finally, however, Hegel (again like Plato) thinks that we need to go beyond religion, as such. One reason is that we find that in practice we have many religions, each competing for the role of the all inclusive religion and none of them appearing to have clearly the best claim to that role. Hegel does describe Christianity as “the consummate religion” (*die vollendete Religion*), thus intentionally suggesting that Christianity has more successfully articulated what religion as such aims at, than other religions have. But he goes on, in the *Encyclopedia*as well as in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* to make it clear that the “philosophy” that understands religion goes beyond religion as such.

Philosophy goes beyond religion as such because no religion, including Christianity, spells out and lives by the analysis of science, ethics, art, and religion that Plato and Hegel have given us. That is, no religion understands itself fully in terms of freedom and the various forms that attempts at freedom necessarily need to take. Consequently no religion grants to each of its component elements, such as consciousness, science, the family, the state, and the arts, the relative autonomy that each of them needs to have in order to qualify for the role of a form of *freedom*.Rather, religions often lay down rules for these subordinate realms which restrict or throttle their inner, free development. Because religions often don’t comprehend how their power to inspire embodies and depends upon freedom, they often become authoritarian. Since religions as such don’t (fully) understand their relationship to freedom, no religion as such is in a position to fully carry out the program of absolute Spirit, which every religion nevertheless dreams of and seeks to represent.

No doubt some will object that religion simply *is* authoritarian, and has no constitutive relation to freedom whatever. As evidence that this isn’t the case, Hegel would point (for example) to the increasing emphasis on ethics, within many religions, over time. And to the manifest fact that millions of humans have in fact found religions inspiring, and not merely something that they have to put up with. Hegel’s proposal that this inspiration derives from religions’ celebrating, through images and stories, an ascent that amounts to freedom, must be taken seriously. So when a religion appears to call for abject submission, we must consider the possibility that what its believers are being asked to submit to is, in fact, a requirement of their own freedom. As when (according to the argument that I gave a moment ago) treating others morally is necessary for one’s own full freedom. Though certainly greater clarity about why “submission” is called for is likely to produce greater clarity also about what, in particular, believers can appropriately be asked to submit *to*. As, for instance, in the long debate about Abraham’s obedience to the supposed divine command to sacrifice Isaac, and in the parallel debate in Plato’s *Euthyphro* about whether the pious is pious because the gods love it, or they love it because it is pious.

The notion of God as a “supreme being” that issues commands has, of course, worked against the idea that religion has to do with a freedom in which we could be self governing. But Hegel never speaks of God as “a being,” if for no other reason than because “a being,” one being among others, would ipso facto be finite, limited by its relations to other beings. Whereas God, Hegel assumes, must be infinite. Therefore Hegel thinks of God on the model of true infinity, which surpasses the finite without being separate from it.[[7]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn7" \o ")

When we think of God in this way, God surpasses humans as such, and thus embodies higher standards than we often obey, but these standards aren’t literally “commands” inasmuch as their source is our own self surpassing, rather than a separate being from us. God’s freedom and authority are ours insofar as we go beyond our finite selves into the divine reality and truth. Thus the conflict between divine and human freedom that we see in Augustine’s debate with Pelagius and in Luther’s debate with Erasmus need not be unresolvable.

If the notion that we can “become” (in any respect) “God” sounds grandiose or insane, remember that we become this God only by becoming fully free, which means precisely *not* being driven by our separateness from other beings, and our self importance. So Heinrich Heine misunderstood Hegel when he wrote in a much quoted humorous recollection that *“*I was young and proud, and it gratified my self esteem to learn from Hegel that, contrary to what my grandmother thought, it wasn’t the Lord in heaven, but I myself here on earth who was God.”[[8]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_edn8" \o ") Pride has to do with one’s relations to others, and thus is a feature of a finite being which is not self determining. So to the extent that Heine was proud, he definitely was not God.  Whether he failed to understand this, or chose not to understand it, for the sake of the joke, is hard to determine

Perhaps I should add that the common criticism of Hegel’s supposed “arrogance” or “hubris” makes the same mistake that Heine made, of ignoring the way in which Hegel draws on Christian notions of “becoming God,” which are never accused of being arrogant. Nor would it be appropriate to accuse them of that, insofar as these notions require (as in “the last shall be first”) that we go beyond the self importance of our finite selves.

Now although religions may lend themselves to the kind of “mystical” interpretation that I have just sketched, according to which God’s freedom and authority are *ours* insofar as we go beyond our finite selves into the divine reality and truth, it’s sufficiently obvious that religions in general don’t *describe themselves* *as* promoting freedom, as such. What’s missing from the religious version of absolute Spirit is, as I said, an explicit comprehension of what absolute Spirit as such inherently but so far only implicitly aims to be, namely, the fully articulated project of freedom.

7. Plato and Hegel both locate such a comprehension in what they call “philosophy.” Of course they are speaking of philosophy in an ideal sense, and not of any particular institution or social group that goes by that name. Plato and Hegel are simply saying that a concentrated effort needs to be made to understand and live by the requirements of freedom, in its various different dimensions. And that such an effort has indeed been made in numerous different realms, though seldom if ever with full consciousness of what’s being attempted over all, and thus of how the various realms are best practiced in relation to the others and how they are all needed, from the point of view of the whole.

This, then, is what such Hegelian dicta as “the truth is the whole” are driving at. Not at the idea that some individual has grasped everything, and the rest of us can bow down before him, but rather at the consequences of always taking *context* into account in our efforts to be free, self governing, and thus fully ourselves. These consequences are what a philosophy of “Spirit” and inspiration can clarify for us.

It may have struck you that in the realms of absolute Spirit, we no longer seem to see the human individual playing the role that we might have imagined her playing in regard to subjective and objective Spirit, as two aspects of her life. No doubt art, religion, and philosophy are aspects of individuals’ lives, but they don’t appear to be this *primarily*, as (for example) consciousness and property were. Instead, a work of art (for example), insofar as it has its own law within it, seems to leave its creator and its audience behind it. How, then, can we speak, as we have, of absolute Spirit as consummating *freedom*? Surely freedom is primarily an attribute of individual humans?

The answer to this question, I believe, is that like the state and history, but more so, absolute Spirit demonstrates how freedom can take us individuals beyond the constraints of an individual life as we normally conceive of one. We are familiar with the idea that politics and art can give a practitioner’s work an influence that extends far beyond his or her lifetime. But in religion and philosophy, one’s actual *identity* can go far beyond a lifespan from birth to death. Spirit originated in the awareness of a life span from birth to death; but it concludes with the awareness of a reality with which we are (in any important sense) identical and which surpasses such a lifespan. It’s another case of the finite surpassing itself. As Hegel says, Spirit is “the *infinite* Idea” (*Encyclopedia*§386, emphasis added), which becomes “self thinking” (*Encyclopedia*§577) in philosophy. As infinite, Spirit surpasses time and finitude in eternity. And insofar as we identify with this project—insofar as we take ourselves to be something that seeks to be truly free and truly ourselves (or truly our “self”)—we too surpass time and finitude.

8. So, to sum up our path briefly. Spirit from its beginning seeks freedom, first internally in science and the like and then in the external, objective world, as the family, the state, and so forth. Art goes beyond this duality, inspiring us by integrating subjective and objective aspects of freedom in a way that nature, consciousness, science, ethics, and politics cannot. Religion then extends this “inspiration” to the whole of our experience, and philosophy comprehends and clarifies this whole process of nature, subjective and objective Spirit, and the arts and religion, and thus makes it fully effective. Science and the arts are indeed indispensable forms of inspiration, each embodying, in a certain way, our highest potential. But they don’t incorporate that potential *as a whole*, in the way that religion does. And neither science, the arts, *nor* religion fully understands or implements the articulation of Spirit or inspiration as a whole. Only philosophy can do this, and only philosophy, therefore, can show how the different domains of Spirit need to relate to each other.

Thus science, the arts, religion, and philosophy each have an indispensable role to play in the full articulation of freedom. And to the extent that their respective roles are understood, each of them plays its role correctly, there is no need for any of them to dispute the rights of others, and the “supernatural” whole that they constitute is intensified to the maximum degree. In this way, though unbeknownst to many of us, Plato and Hegel resolve the disputes between science, the arts, religion, and philosophy which still, in numerous ways, pervade our culture. The Plato/Hegel resolution of these disputes is unlikely ever to be universally understood, since true infinity, as the self surpassing of the finite, depends upon the persistence of the finite as finite as well as on its (sometimes) surpassing itself. However, in another way, the Plato/Hegel resolution is always already understood, as the goal that we all pursue in our efforts to be ourselves by being self governing, and which we constantly experience, therefore, as present and operating within us, in our experiences of what we call “being inspired.” All that we lack is an explicit understanding, such as Plato and Hegel provide, of this entirely familiar experience.

[[1]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref1" \o ") Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*(New York, 1929), and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*(Chicago, 1958). In the twentieth century, see also R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*(Oxford, 1924), and Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*(New York, 1993). In the twenty-first century, Sebastian Rödl’s *Self-Consciousness*(Cambridge, MA, 2007) and Irad Kimhi’s *Thinking and Being*(Cambridge, MA, 2018) are outlining a path forward on these issues.

[[2]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref2" \o ") Infinity as the finite’s going beyond itself: “Infinity *is*only as a self-transcending [*Hinausgehen über sich*] of the finite…. [The finite’s] infinity consists in sublating its own self” (*Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller [Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1989], pp. 145-6 (translation revised); *Wissenschaft der Logik,*GW21, 133. I give a detailed account of Hegel’s argument to true infinity in Chapter 3 of my *Hegel’s Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God*(Cambridge, UK, 2005).

[[3]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref3" \o ") The infinite is real in a way in which the finite is not: “It is not the finite which is the real [*das Reale*], but the infinite” (*Hegel’s Science of Logic*, p. 149; GW 21, 137). Spirit is the truth of nature: “Der Geist hat für uns die Natur zu seiner Voraussetzung, deren *Wahrheit*und damit deren absolut Erstes er ist. In dieser Wahrheit ist die Natur verschwunden” (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, §381, emphases altered).

[[4]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref4" \o ") I explore Hegel’s relation to Plato further in my essay on “Infinity and Spirit: How Hegel Integrates Science and Religion, and Nature and the Supernatural,” in B. Göcke and C. Tapp, eds., *The Infinity of God*(South Bend, Indiana, 2018).

[[5]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref5" \o ") St Paul, Acts 17:28; St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation,*section 54; St Augustine, *Confessions,*III.vi (11).

[[6]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref6" \o ") I explore Hegel’s presentation of the relationship between ethics and freedom in detail in my *Hegel’s Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God*, passim.

[[7]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref7" \o ")  Citing the intimate connection that Hegel claims to establish between God and humans, Stanley Rosen writes that “it seems evident that [Hegel] cannot be an orthodox Christian” (*The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic*[Chicago, 2014], p. 452). But in view of the Christian literature that I mentioned in note 5, the evidence that Rosen cites does not establish his claim. The canonical Christian writers I cited seem to instinctively avoid the conception of God as a fundamentally separate being which many recent commentators on Hegel take for granted as the “orthodox” conception. My explanation of why Hegel never speaks of God as “a being” is a response not only to Rosen but also to the many recent commentators who assert that Hegel’s God is “immanent” rather than, like the traditional God, “transcendent.” Presumably a God that’s truly transcendent would be truly *infinite*—and therefore not a separate being, like the spurious infinity over against the finite. (A separate being is limited by what it’s separate from, and therefore not infinite.) So Hegel’s account of true infinity as the self surpassing of the finite is equally an account of true transcendence. I discuss Hegel’s theology in more detail in *Hegel’s Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God* (2005), and in “Infinity and Spirit: How Hegel Integrates Science and Religion, and the Natural and the Supernatural” (2018).

[[8]](https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?rinli=1&pli=1&blogID=2963816821295169750" \l "_ednref8" \o ") Heinrich Heine, *Confessions,*trans. P. Heinegg (place of publication not given, 1981), p. 47; *Heinrich Heine’s Sämmtliche Werke*5 (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 9.