
Hegel and Feuerbach as Comparative Tools for Understanding Hermann Hesse's Demian

by

Michael James Mahin

"Each man's life represents a road toward himself..." *(Hesse,2).*

Emil Sinclair is a representation of the movement of one's inner spirit towards self-realization. In a related way, such a movement contains the ideas of G.W.F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. The purpose of this report will not be to elicit the ways in which these men influenced Hesse's writing. Instead, I would like to take a step further and, in a comparative way, reveal the spiritual development of Emil Sinclair as identical to the criticism and judgment that Hegel and Feuerbach themselves made of Orthodox Christianity. With these texts as an aide, we will be better able to understand the implication and developments within Herman Hesse's *Demian*.

When referring to Orthodox Christianity I will be eluding to a belief system based on the fundamental separation of God as transcendent and mankind as fallen. Because of the Reformation the Church divided into Protestant and Catholic denominations. Orthodox Christianity, within both churches, becomes a reference to the established way of conceiving mankind as needy of salvation; indeed this was a belief that crossed these overt, political distinctions. It is manifest in the Calvinist theology of predestination, the Lutheran idea of salvation through faith alone, and the pre-Thomist theology of the Catholic Church. Ultimately the separation of God and the depravity of the human will set both as polar opposites, one transcendent, and one fallen. This distinction might be diagrammed as such:

God (transcendent)

Man (fallen)

The diagram represents distinction and the ultimate separation of man from God.

What we need to understand about Hegel's "theosophy" is the way it determines to undermine this distinction." This is always the pattern of scientific knowledge: first the concept; then the particularity of the concept - reality, objectivity; and finally the stage at which the original concept is an object to itself, is for itself, becomes objective to itself, is related to itself" (Hegel, 391). This is the Hegelian dialectic which, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he also defines as the *movement of Spirit:* Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis; and as manifest in Christianity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By the *movement of Spirit,* Hegel meant to propose this progression of absolute reason or consciousness in the world as the fundamental basis for religion.

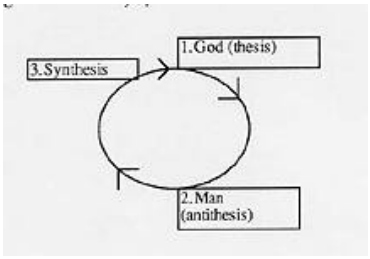
The focus of Hegel's *Lectures...* was to explore the content of religion. "Religion possesses its object within itself - and that object is God, for religion is the relation of the human consciousness to God" (Hegel, 76). By exploring religion, Hegel purports to explore the idea of God and the way this idea is related to man.

The Idea of God contains two elements: First, that God is a being that *is,* exists in-and-for-himself; second, that God exists in a relationship with man. What is most important to our understanding of the concept of *Spirit* is this duality of the Idea of God. God is at once, a being in-and-for-himself, and a being in a relationship, a being for an other. It must be noted that if God is not these things, then it is a deficient idea of God. With regards to the way in which the idea of God relates to the concept of *Spirit*: "According to the philosophical concept God is spirit, concrete ... If we ask our consciousness for a provincial account of what spirit is, the answer is that spirit is a selfmanifesting, a being for spirit" (Hegel, 90). This concept of *Spirit* contains within it the same elements that the idea of God contains within itself: First Spirit, like God, ***is***; - second, spirit ***is*** only insofar as it ***is*** for an other, like God is as the creator. With regards to the Idea of God, man is then part of God's being as a creator, for without man, God could not be God.

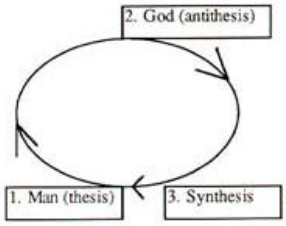
Hegel uses the idea of begetter and begotten to clarify this relationship: insofar as the begetter begets the begotten, so the begotten begets the begetter. The Idea of God, then, has, as a part of its idea, the necessity of a consciousness which can know it as distinct. This is not to lower God to a level of needing man, but is to be aware of the entire Idea of God and to know that man's consciousness is an essential part of this Idea. "Because of the inseparable unity of consciousness with God is affirmed in what immediate knowledge contains, the inseparability contains what is implied in the concept of Spirit: [namely], that spirit is for spirit itself, that the treatment cannot be one-sided or merely treatment of the subject according to its finitude, i.e., according to its contingent life; instead it must be considered under the aspect in which it has the infinite concept as its object" (Hegel, 90). Hegel purports that his consideration cannot be limited to the relationship of man to the infinite God, but must explore the relationship of man as he is an essential part of the infinite Idea of God.

This relationship propounds that man, with regards to the dialectic, is the antithesis of God. He is not the antithesis in terms of a moral opposite of God, but he is the antithesis insofar as he is finite and God is infinite; man is that stage through which God may be present to an other, may be spirit for spirit. Hegel sees Jesus Christ as the absolute

ideality of the return of man's spirit to identity with that of God's absolute Spirit. Religion is the real expression of man's relationship with God, not his separation from him. One could diagram Hegel's *movement of Spirit* as such:



Ludwig Feuerbach's main criticism of Hegel lies in his belief that Hegel perceived this movement from the wrong starting point. God, Feuerbach believes, is the projection of man's own being, he is an embodiment of all that man himself is. For Feuerbach, it is not God that realizes himself through man, it is man who realizes himself through God.



"The fact is not that a quality is divine because God himself has it, but that God has it because it is divine" (Feuerbach, 21). God is a projection of what man finds in himself to be divine. To clarify this point, Feuerbach alludes to the way the Greek gods embodied characteristics and traits essentially human. "The Homeric gods eat and drink; that implies that eating and drinking is a divine pleasure. Physical strength is an attribute of the Homeric gods: Zeus is the strongest of the Gods. Why? Because physical strength, in and by itself, was regarded as something glorious and divine" (Feuerbach, 21). Thus Feuerbach establishes that gods, including the Christian God, have been manifestations of mankind's highest goals and wishes.

By virtue of this idea, it may be said that in God, man has an extension of his own being. "The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective - i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature" (Feuerbach, 14). To understand the true nature of God as a projection of the true nature of man is to regain the positivity and potentiality of the human nature.

What Hegel did, and Feuerbach expanded on, was to affirm man's participation in the *being* of God, to affirm a relationship, not the separation that "Orthodox Christianity" had propounded. This separation of God as transcendent, and man as fallen, is exactly that

which Emil Sinclair struggles to understand. The conclusion he comes to, like that of Hegel and especially Feuerbach, is one that synthesizes polar opposites into a whole, and affirms a God of unity, not of separation.

The path Emil Sinclair is traveling is the path of self-discovery. "Each man's life represents a road to himself, an attempt at such a road, the intimation of a path" (Hesse, 2). Such is the progression, the movement of spirit if you will, as it is within Sinclair. The most essential thing that Sinclair will struggle with is dichotomy of the world, the "Two Realms" as the first chapter presents it. "The realms of day and night, two different worlds coming from two opposite poles, mingled during this time" (Hesse, 5). Opposition is marked and clarified as being as distinct as night and day. The poetic connotation of such a comparison carries a metaphor: night is evil, day is good. "My parent's house made up one realm ... It was the realm of brilliance, charity and cleanliness, gentle conversations, washed hands, clean clothes and good manners" (Hesse, 5). Sinclair describes this first realm as being ordered and controlled; his parent's household, with its set rules and set beliefs, takes on a Biblical symbolism: "Straight lines and paths led into the future: there were duty and guilt, bad conscience and confession, forgiveness and good resolutions, love, reverence, wisdom and the words of the Bible" (Hesse, 6). This is a realm ordered by the idea which Orthodox Christianity presents; it is a world based on good and evil, on sin and repentance, on God as transcendent and man as depraved.

The "other realm" is presented as the opposite of the world of his parents. "This second world contained servant girls and workmen, ghost stories, rumors of scandal. It was dominated by a loud mixture of horrendous, intriguing, frightful, frightful mysterious things, including slaughterhouses and prisons, drunkards and screaming fishwives, calving cows, horses sinking to their death, tales of robberies, murders and suicides" (Hesse, 6). One must note that this world contains things not only bizarre and disturbing, but things natural and real. The "calving cow", for example, is an image of birth yet has, for some reason, been classified with things of death and filth. "Servant girls and workmen" are not necessarily evil in their dispositions, but they are placed here, like the "calving cow" because they are below the "cleanliness" of his parents' household. This "other realm" encompasses those things which in some cases are deplorable, but are also, in other cases, natural and necessary. Reality is comprised of these polar worlds that Sinclair has observed, but his upbringing has taught him to favor one over the other.

Sinclair's dilemma lies in his attraction to this other, "dark" world. "There were times when I actually preferred living in the forbidden realm, and frequently, returning to the realm of light - necessary and good as it may have been - seemed almost like returning to something less beautiful, something rather drab and tedious" (Hesse, 7). The idea that the "other realm" is not only different but also forbidden, echoes of the moral absolutism of Orthodox Christianity. Things are forbidden because someone or something has construed them as evil. How can the things we have been shown be classified as evil and "forbidden" when they are in part manifestations of the reality of mankind's existence?

Adam and Eve, after eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, are condemned as hopelessly fallen. In Sinclair's predicament with Franz Kromer one could interpret Franz as the serpent who, through cunning, lures Sinclair into acts of deception

and stealing, into falling from the "realm of day". Sinclair is not necessarily a bad person, but he has partaken in acts which are not "morally appropriate". "My sin was not specifically this or that, but consisted of having shaken hands with the devil" (Hesse, 16). Sinclair interprets his actions in an absolutely Christian way, as having shaken hands with the devil, listened to the serpent and fallen.

This ultimate trespass becomes the focus of Sinclair's struggle. "A strange spirit had taken hold of me; I no longer fit into our [parent's and family's] community, once so intimate; yet often a wild longing came over me to return to it as if to a lost paradise" (Hesse, 35). How is the return to be made by one who has fallen. Christianity offers salvation through Jesus Christ, but according to the Orthodoxy, in particular the Neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth, Jesus comes as the Christ, in the German sense of the word the Crisis: the ultimate affirmation of the judgment and distinction of man as fallen and God as transcendent. "The Gospel proclaims God utterly distinct from man. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are as man, incapable of knowing Him, and because they have no right to claim anything from Him" (Barth, 28).

The destruction of this idea of man as fallen and God as transcendent, the Krisis of Barth's theology, is what Hegel and Feuerbach's ideas battle against. This, with all its implications, is what Max Demian introduces to Emil Sinclair.

As we have noted, Feuerbach presents that the distinction of man from God and God from man leads to the alienation of man from his own true being. "...The more by reflection on religion, by theology, is the identity of the divine and human denied, the human, considered as such, is denied ... To enrich God man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing" (Feuerbach, 26). The divinity of the God of Orthodox Christianity is based on his distinction from "fallen" man. What Demian points out to Sinclair is that what he has conventionally considered part of the "forbidden and fallen realm" is that which makes up man's world.

First, Demian deconstructs the idea of absolutes, especially the idea of absolute evil, which Orthodox Christianity has perpetuated. Cain killed his brother Abel. For his crime he is given a mark to set him apart from the rest of the world, this is the "mark of Cain". In an Orthodox interpretation Cain is a murderer and he is evil. Demian's recounting eliminates the absoluteness of this interpretation. "...One can give the story of Cain a quite different interpretation ... The first element of the story, its actual beginning was the mark. Here was a man with something in his face that frightened others ... he impressed them ... It is much more likely that he struck people as faintly sinister, perhaps a little more intellect and boldness in his look than people were used to. He had a 'sign'. It was a scandal that a breed of fearless and sinister people ran about freely, so they attached a nickname and a myth to these people to get even with them ... in that case Cain wouldn't have been evil at all" (Hesse, 29-31). In his retelling, Demian elucidates the possible inauthenticity of the perception of Cain as evil. The absolutist ideas of Orthodox Christianity are presented as being questionable, fallible and possibly misconstrued. And as would follow, Demian has questioned the veritability of the idea of the "forbidden realm".

Demian criticizes the castigation of Cain as a socially based phenomenon. He introduces, as Feuerbach does, the anthropological basis of such stories and myths. Demian then introduces a religious idea that realigns the duality of man's existence and reaffirms the relationship of man with his God. Abraxas is a god which embodies the polarities of night and day, good and evil, the polarity of the "two realms". Abraxas reaffirms the syntheses that Feuerbach and Hegel alluded to. "The point is that this God of the Old and New Testaments is ... not all he purports to represent. He is all that is good, noble, fatherly, beautiful, elevated, sentimental - true! But the world consists of something else besides. And what is left over is ascribed to the devil. In exactly the same way they praise the God as the father of all life they simply refuse to say a word about our sexual life on which it's all based, describing it wherever possible as sinful, the work of the devil ... we ought to consider everything sacred, the entire world, not merely this artificially separated half! ...you must create for yourself a God that contains the devil too" (Hesse, 62). Demian classifies the God of the Bible as being a transcendent figure and then observes that everything else, including the world of man, is attributed to the devil. This misguided distinction is that which Feuerbach purported to eliminate. The unification of man with his own nature consists in the destruction of man as fallen and God as good. This unification is present in the idea of Abraxas. "But it appears that Abraxas has a much deeper significance. We may conceive of the name as that of a godhead whose symbolic task is the unity of godly and devilish elements" (Hesse, 95). Thus we have, in Abraxas, a manifestation of the Feuerbachian synthesis of God and man.

With this realization, the world progresses away from one based on guilt and alienation. Sinclair's feelings of alienation came at the hands of "his parents' realm", as they inundated him with morality, the ideas of duty, transgression and trespass. Sinclair found not only that the "other realm" was intriguing, but that it was at times unavoidable. His accidental apprenticeship to Franz Kromer, his sexual intimations and puberty, were things that his parents' world had made no allowances for. In this regard it is similar to the predestined and inevitable fall as presented in Milton's *Paradise Lost.* God sets out, as an omnipotent being, to assert man's free will, yet also asserts the inevitability of Adam and Eve's fall from grace. The Feuerbachian synthesis, and the idea of Abraxas eliminate the potentiality of such a "fall", for in a world ordered by a god that is both good and evil, a god that is the representation of man, there is nothing to fall from or fall into.

The transcendent imperative which Feuerbach, after Hegel, sought to eliminate, was the Christian God. It was not an attempt to will the "death of God", as Nietzsche put it, but to reaffirm the relationship that man has with his God, the relationship that Orthodox Christianity had subverted. In this, man destroys his alienation and affirms his authenticity as a human being, and as Sinclair realizes, "finds a way to himself" (Hesse, 132).

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