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978-0-521-67850-6 - Heinrich Heine: On the History of Religion and Philosophy in
Germany and Other Writings

Edited by Terry Pinkard and Translated by Howard Pollack-Milgate
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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



HEINRICH HEINE
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Philosophy in Germany*

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EDITED BY
TERRY PINKARD
Georgetown University

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Introduction

At his death in 1856, Heinrich Heine was the most widely read poet in Europe. He was also a prolific essayist and critic, and his poems have been set to music more often than those of any other poet. Both in his own time and in ours, he has been known as a “political poet” since he championed the cause of the oppressed, and as a friend of sorts of Karl Marx, he was regarded as a “socialist” poet for many years, even though he himself was as wary of Marx’s communism as he was distrustful of the emerging commercial and industrial society around him.

Heine was also not merely a German poet, but a German Jewish poet (who for a while had rather *pro forma* converted to Christianity), and the anti-Semites in Germany did their best to make sure nobody forgot the “Jewish” part. If anything Heine seemed to regard himself as a German *European*; in 1822 while still in Berlin he himself noted, “I love Germany and the Germans; but I love no less the inhabitants of the rest of this earth, whose number is forty times greater – and it is surely love which gives a man his true value. I am therefore – thank God – worth forty times more than those who cannot pull themselves out of the swamp of national egotism and who love none but Germany and the Germans.”¹ But when, in the aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat in Russia and then a few years later in Waterloo, the various governments of the German principalities began their authoritarian crackdown on “demagogues” (the term of art used for alleged “subversives”), not unsurprisingly anti-Semitism began to increase. In 1831, Heine had decided that for the time being, Paris would

¹ Cited by S. S. Prawer, *Heine’s Jewish Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 57–58; Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke in vier Bänden* (Düsseldorf: Artemis und Winkler, 2001), vol. II, p. 467.

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be a safer home for him than Berlin or Göttingen; however, his temporary exile became permanent after 1835, when the Prussian government banned publication of his work and then the German *Bundesversammlung* issued a decree forbidding publication of many authors including him. His exile was sealed in 1844 when the Prussian government issued an order for Heine's arrest if he were ever to set foot on Prussian soil. But if their goal was to silence Heine or diminish his popularity, they failed utterly. Heine continued to weave his magic with the German public until his death, although he always remained a controversial figure.

As Heine's biographer, Jeffrey L. Sammons, has noted, it is very hard to pin down Heine on virtually anything, since he early on created a persona for himself that he himself continually shifted around; as Sammons remarks, "Heinrich Heine" is "a central, commanding, fictional figure in the works of Heinrich Heine."² Even his birth date is relatively hard to fix, since Heine himself regularly entered very different dates and years on various official and unofficial papers. In that light, it is not surprising that the twenty-five-year-old Heine himself noted in his 1822 *Letters from Berlin* that as far as he was concerned, the highest freedom comes at a masked ball:

What does it matter who is beneath the mask? The quest is enjoyment, and for that one only needs human beings. Nowhere can one be a human being more fully than at a masked ball, where the waxen mask hides our usual mask of flesh, where a simple *Du* [the familiar form of address in German] restores the primordial sociality of familiarity, where a Venetian cloak (*Domino*) covers all pretensions and brings about the most beautiful equality and the most beautiful freedom – the freedom conferred by masks, *Maskenfreiheit*.³

In fact, his name, "Heinrich," only came later; he was born Harry Heine in Düsseldorf (apparently on December 13, 1797). His father, Samson Heine, was a middle-class cloth merchant. His uncle, Salomon Heine (his father's brother), became an immensely wealthy banker in Hamburg and exercised a formidable influence on Heinrich for most of his life. Heine never quite got over the idea that his uncle could make him rich overnight with a large gift of money that his uncle would in fact never miss; but the

² Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), p. 5.

³ Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 466.

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uncle was a bit suspicious both of Heine's vocation as a poet and of what he saw as Harry's rather spendthrift ways, and the trials and travails of Heine and uncle Salomon, with the contentious and continual back and forth between them, form part of the fabric of almost all of Heine's adult life.

In Heine's youth, the part of Germany he lived in was ruled by the French in the progressive spirit of the Revolution, and this clearly made a mark on him; for the rest of his life, he was to be dedicated to the principles of liberty and equality and to be the sworn enemy of all the illiberal and repressive tendencies that he saw at work in the Germany of his day, seeing very early on some of the more sinister dangers beginning to take root in the land of his birth. He sardonically remarked to a friend in a letter written in 1823 that "although I am a radical in England and a carbonaro in Italy, I don't adhere to the demagogues in Germany; for the quite accidental reason that if the latter were to be victorious, a few thousand Jewish throats – and the best ones at that – would be slit."⁴ Around the same time, he wrote a verse play, *Almansor*, which nominally dealt with the expulsion of the Muslims from Spain, but whose subtext was the precarious status of Jews in Germany. One of the characters, Hassan, responds to the news that the Spanish are burning copies of the Koran in Granada with the line "That was only a prelude, for where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too."⁵ That youthful line became one of Heine's most often-cited phrases and proved to be eerily prophetic; in the great Nazi book burning in Berlin in 1933, the works of Heinrich Heine were among those consigned to the flames.

The young Harry Heine was pushed to go into the family business and was apprenticed first in 1815 to a Frankfurt bank owned by friends of his uncle Salomon, and then in 1816 to work for Salomon himself at his bank in Frankfurt. After he finished his apprenticeship, his uncle set him up in 1818 with a cloth business called "Harry Heine & Co.," which the young Harry ran without any attention to detail. By 1819, Heine's father, Samson, was suffering from a variety of illnesses which made it impossible for him to run his own business. Apparently Salomon Heine, in a mixture of compassion, family loyalty, and arrogance, stepped in,

⁴ Cited in Praver, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 177; Letter to Moritz Emden, February 2, 1823.

⁵ Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 859. ("Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort, wo man Bücher / Verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende / Menschen.")

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paid off Samson's debts, took over all aspects of running the family, and liquidated the badly run "Harry Heine & Co.," thus freeing the young Harry to pursue university studies. Salomon paid for him to study law at Bonn University, and Harry enrolled there in 1819, switching in 1820 to Göttingen University (where he ran into fierce anti-Semitism amongst the fraternity set). Harry paid only passing attention to his legal studies, but he raptly attended the lectures given by August Wilhelm Schlegel, the great translator of Shakespeare, who had earlier (with his brother, Friedrich) participated in establishing "romanticism" at Jena at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1821, Harry Heine moved to Berlin University, which proved to be decisive for his later decision to pursue his true vocation as a writer and poet. He attended Hegel's lectures and befriended him, and he made acquaintances among the various movers and shakers in Berlin literary circles, including another Jewish figure, Rahel Levin Varnhagen von Ense, the celebrated hostess of one of Berlin's most famous salons and a woman of formidable intellect and literary interests. He also became a member of the Association for the Culture and Science of Judaism, a group founded in the face of a growing backlash against Jewish emancipation and whose explicit mission was to study "scientifically" Jewish history and culture, detached from Christian interpretations and distortions of that culture and even detached from orthodox Jewish interpretations of it.

In joining the Association, Heine also made friends with somebody who was to color his more philosophical thought for the rest of his life: the jurist and philosopher Eduard Gans. Both Gans and Heine came to Hegelianism as young Jews, each wanting to affirm their Jewish identity within the context of also being German. In the immediately post-Napoleonic milieu of Germany, that had at first seemed easily achievable; there had, after all, been various emancipation edicts, and there was a feeling that progress was quite simply in the air, that there was now no way to turn back the clock. However, after 1820 the repressive measures taken up by the Prussian government and the increasing strength of the forces of reaction throughout Germany had thrown all of that into question.

Against that background, both Heine and Gans at first responded in similar ways to Hegelian philosophy: each saw it as an insightful articulation of what it was they were trying to accomplish for themselves in the context of German life in the 1820s. Each found in it a proposal for a way in which he might live a somewhat alienated life but could nonetheless

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find a place for himself and therefore be reconciled, be “at home” in the modern world.

Two elements of their own biographies were crucial to this: each found an initial attraction to Hegelianism as an articulation of their own “self-division,” *Zerrissenheit*, and each experienced their world not in a sense of being “homeless” within it but in the sense of both belonging and not belonging to a cultural and social order with which they identified, from which they nonetheless felt estranged, and which never fully accepted them. Indeed, it was both Heine’s and Gans’s “outsider” status as Jews who were neither at home in orthodox Judaism nor at home in the context of Christian German life which gave them a fresh perspective on Hegelianism that differed from other, more utopian left-Hegelians.⁶ If anything, both Gans and Heine are much earlier versions of what the historian Peter Gay characterized as role of the “outsider as insider” in German culture.⁷

Eduard Gans himself met Hegel after coming to Berlin and after having finished his legal studies in Heidelberg (having done his doctoral work with Hegel’s old friend and comrade in arms there, Anton Thibaut). In addition to being an obviously gifted jurist and political philosopher, Eduard Gans was also one of the founders and became president of the Association for the Culture and Science of Jews; in his presidential addresses to the group from 1821 to 1823, he returned again and again to the issue of what constituted Jewish identity and what constituted *European* (and interestingly, not necessarily *German*) identity, and between 1821 and 1822, the Hegelian stamp on his answers became more evident.⁸

⁶ A major exception to the tendency to see Heine’s more philosophical writings as only an expression of some kind of attachment to Saint-Simonianism is to be found in Nigel Reeves, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). Reeves sees it as a founding text of “left Hegelianism,” but he takes that in the familiar way to be utopian, to be a secularizing of the Christian theodicy and the establishment not of salvation in heaven but of socialism on earth. The best account of the development of “left Hegelianism” in English (and which goes a long way to clearing up the deficiencies in the standard story) remains John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁷ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

⁸ The influence between Hegel and Gans went both ways; because of Gans’s influence, Hegel ended up changing his long-held, more or less genteelly anti-Semitic attitudes to Judaism and came to describe Judaism as the first religion of freedom, rather than in terms of hidebound legalism and egoism (as he done ever since his youth). This is the argument I make in Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In Gans’s first presidential address to the group (on October 28, 1821), he spoke of the basic issue facing the group to be that of

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Gans was especially attracted to three items in Hegel's philosophy. First, there was Hegel's argued view to the effect that what was genuinely *at work* in modern life – what in Hegel's special vocabulary counted as *wirklich*, *effectively* real – was a moral and political concept (one might even say a moral-political *ideal*) of freedom as self-determination. Second, Hegel's very original philosophy of history explained that the normative hold of this ideal of freedom had to do with the way in which it had come to be required of modern life by virtue of the very determinate failures of past forms of European life (paradigmatically, both in the collapse of the ancient world and the gradual and catastrophic failure of aristocratic court culture to sustain any normative allegiance to itself). Third, there was Hegel's idea that understanding these ideals *as* ideals requires understanding how they are supported in practices and institutions, and does not rest simply on moralistic appeals to strength of resolve on the part of individuals.

From Gans's own standpoint, however, these aspect of the Hegelian philosophy offered the best way for a young Jewish intellectual and budding academic like himself to understand the role of Judaism in modern life. As Gans saw it, Hegel's philosophy argued that minority identities could in principle sustain themselves if they were willing to identify themselves with the principle of *freedom* at work in the modern European social and political order; such minorities had their place within Hegel's own very complex account of the way in which such freedom was gradually being given shape in the institutionalization of a market society with careers open to all, and in the formation of a constitutional state that protected the basic rights of its members. This offered a blueprint, as Gans took it up, for how Judaism could be modernized without being abandoned. To become fully modern (which for Gans, as for Hegel, was summed up by the term "Europe") did not mean that one abandoned one's past. Being "taken up" or "absorbed" into European life did not mean for religious minorities that their traditions and identities would come to an end: as Gans put it in his second presidential address to the Association, "Aufgehen ist nicht untergehen" ("Absorption is not vanishing").

establishing a "reconciliation" (*Versöhnung*) between the Jewish identity of its members and their identity as Germans. In his second address (on April 28, 1822), however, Gans posed the question as: "What is Europe at the present time? And what are the Jews?" See Eduard Gans, "Erste Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein'," in Norbert Waszek, *Eduard Gans (1797–1839): Hegelianer – Jude – Europäer. Texte und Dokumente* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 55–62; and "Zweite Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein,'" in Waszek, *Eduard Gans*, pp. 62–75.

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Moreover, in his own lectures on Hegel's political philosophy in 1832–1833 (about a year after Hegel's death), Gans took Hegel's thought (which had led to Hegel's endorsement of constitutional monarchy) in a more republican direction, even going so far as to propose, among other things, the form of a state whose head was not a "prince" (a *Fürst*), and his example was the United States of America. In his lectures, Gans argued that because in America, "all the medieval traditions are not there, as they are in Europe," it was able to do without a prince, and, he added, "it may still take thousands of years for the state that has emerged from the concept, like that in North America, to emerge in Europe and before those [medieval] conditions die out."⁹ Also unlike Hegel, Gans formulated a theory of the necessity of oppositional parties within a Hegelian state.

There was, however, a deeper issue at work in Gans's appropriation of Hegelianism. However much Hegel's theory seemed to offer an account that made room for a modern form of Judaism within the context of Christian Europe, there remained the overall problem of just how much of Hegel's philosophy of history had to be accepted. In particular, Judaism presented Hegel with a particular problem. Egyptian, Greek, and Roman religion had had their moment on the world stage, and they vanished as they were supplanted by more rational religions, with all others finally being supplanted by the "consummate" religion, Christianity. Yet the Jews remained. Even though Hegel himself was in print as calling for full civil rights for Jews, and even though under the influence of Gans he came to change his entire evaluation of the importance and status of Judaism, his own theory still committed him to the view that it was in some very deep sense *irrational* to be Jewish in the modern world, much in the same way as it would be irrational to worship Pallas Athena in contemporary Europe. This was, of course, something that Gans and his friends could not easily accept. Gans thus formulated his own problem of being Jewish and being modern in different, non-Hegelian terms: the Jews, he proposed, went along the path of "their own history, parallel alongside world history," and the issue now was how the two parallel streams were to flow together without the Jews "vanishing" into the larger stream of world history culminating in modern Europe.¹⁰ Unfortunately, when Gans applied to be a professor in law at Berlin, the law faculty

⁹ Eduard Gans, *Naturrecht und Universalrechtsgeschichte*, ed. Manfred Riedel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), p. 100.

¹⁰ See Eduard Gans, "Zweite Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein'," in Waszek, *Eduard Gans*, p. 66.

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fought against taking a Jew into the faculty; the case was settled when the king abolished the entire edict of Jewish emancipation in order to prevent Gans from assuming such a position. (The king's action became known informally as the "*lex Gans*.") In 1825, Gans *pro forma* converted to Christianity, and the professorship became his.

Rewriting Hegel

Heine also had himself cynically baptized into the Protestant faith in 1825, and it is a staple of the Heine literature just how troubled Heine was by Gans's defection, as if he could forgive himself for his weakness but not Gans, who was seen by so many as the leading figure in the struggle for emancipation. Even worse: although Heine himself described his own baptism scornfully as his "entry ticket into European culture," Heine, unlike Gans, did not find that any doors at all opened up for him as a result, and it soon set in on him that he had made a terrible mistake, although he never officially recanted it.¹¹

His own career as a poet and writer, however, flourished rather early and continued to do so. He was able to abandon the plans his uncle had for him (to be a jurist, the field in which he actually got his doctoral diploma) and to focus on what he eventually succeeded at: becoming one of the most successful writers of his day. In 1834, shortly after he began his life as an exile in Paris, he wrote a series of articles that were collected and published in 1835 as *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. This was in part a response to Madame de Stael's famous book, *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)*, which had appeared with great success in 1810 and which established the view that Germany was the "homeland of thought" ("*la patrie de la pensée*"), that is, a land of poets and philosophers who were content to live in a world of thoughts to compensate for their lack of any political culture. Heine had always taken great exception to that description, and when the chance came to write, in effect, a rebuttal, he jumped at it. Written in his clear, sardonic, and witty style, the articles were in effect Heine's own reworking of Hegel's philosophy of history.

¹¹ For example, see the letter to his friend Moser in January 1826: "I am now hated by Christian and Jew. I very much regret having been baptized; I see no sign that things have gone better with me since then. On the contrary: I have experienced nothing but misfortune from that day on." Cited in Praver, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 207. Heine also notes something very similar in a passage from the *Geständnisse*.

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He had heard Hegel's lectures on the subject in 1823 (and probably also those on political philosophy in 1822), and he had surely discussed Hegel's philosophy with Gans and the other Hegelians of the Association, so he was not exactly a neophyte on the subject. He also had his own strong views on the relation between poets and historians; indeed, in 1834, as he was working on the book, he expressed his views on historical writing in a letter to the great French historian, Jules Michelet: "You are the true historian because you are at the same time a philosopher and a great artist . . . You believe in progress and in providence. In that belief we are one."¹² In his own youthful eyes, Heine also met both conditions.

The book has not been taken seriously as a post-Hegelian commentary; it has almost always been read as an example of Heine's own personal commitments, in particular his flirtation with Saint-Simonianism. Like Gans, Heine at first took a keen interest in the Saint-Simonian movement since on its surface it seemed to have a lot in common with Hegelian thought and even looked as if it might provide the necessary complement to Hegelianism in its concern with industrialization, the "social question," and the like. However, as Heine's biographer Sammons has made clear, closer acquaintance with the movement very quickly cooled Heine's initial ardor for it.¹³ Moreover, as Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch has shown, Gans lost his interest in it as he began to see its relative incompatibility with (and relative shallowness *vis-à-vis*) Hegelian thought, and it is hard to imagine that Heine was unaffected by his friend Gans's rejection of the doctrine. The biographical material on Heine, together with those attitudes on the part of Gans, make the view of him as a Saint-Simonian less plausible.¹⁴

Now, to be sure, the book also contains several examples of Heine's less than fully factual approach to some of the matters discussed, such as his quip that there is no need for him to give a biography of Kant since, after all, Kant had no life, or that Kant demolished God in his first *Critique* but, feeling sorry for the bad mood in which such a view

¹² Cited in Prawer, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 6.

¹³ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine*, pp. 159–168. Sammons also uses Heine's unpublished note on the Saint-Simonian leader, Prosper Enfantin, to illustrate Heine's attitude to the movement after he had come to know it, that in "His incarnation as Enfantin, God has made the extreme sacrifice – He has made himself ridiculous" (p. 165). Heinrich Heine, *Aphorismen und Fragmente*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV, p. 709.

¹⁴ See Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, *Religiöse Hingabe oder soziale Freiheit: Die saint-simonistische Theorie und die Hegelsche Sozialphilosophie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), chapter 10.

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left his poor manservant, decided to put Him back in the picture in the second *Critique*. Heine's lively style also takes what might be called a somewhat comic approach to the problems of post-Kantian philosophy, and that unfortunately has helped to reinforce the charge of "frivolity" against it, a common enough charge against Heine's writings even in his own day. However, the suspicion that because it is comical it must also be frivolous, together with the view that Heine's treatment is only some kind of watered down version of Saint-Simonian views, fails to grasp the immense importance that Hegelianism had for Heine. Indeed, what informs Heine's writings on that point is not Saint-Simon's view of the struggle of the senses with the body, but rather Hegel's own emphatic doctrine, found in his lectures on aesthetics, that the "Ideal" for art, its ultimate aim, is the expression of the unity of soul and body in aesthetic form, such that the "inner" and the "outer" are in perfect harmony – something which Hegel thought was achieved only in classical Greek art. Beneath the exuberant wit that is so characteristic of all of Heine's writing, there is a serious thesis at work; indeed, the seriousness of the thesis could perhaps only be made manifest by the ironic wit with which it is presented.

Like Hegel, Heine was interested in the "phenomenology" of historical movement, the "true motion" of spirit in history, and, like Hegel, he was therefore interested in the *meaning* of historical events, not the discovery of some kind of social scientific law of history. For Hegel, the meaning of history was (to put it in Hegel's own vernacular) that of spirit coming to a full self-consciousness of itself. Put in more colloquial terminology, this amounts to the claim that what we are to make of history has to do with the ways in which humans, as self-interpreting animals, had found various collectively established self-interpretations to be unlivable, unsustainable and to lead to other versions; the *meaning* of historical events has to do with how each new version at least implicitly understands itself to be making good on the failures of the past in terms of the cards that had been dealt it, and this culminates in modern Europeans being called to establish and institutionalize their own freedom. In this interpretation of history, Hegel thus radicalized Kant's own claim in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* that the failure of all prior moral theory lay in its failure to understand that, to be binding, moral law had to be *self-legislated*. Hegel (following Fichte's and Schelling's leads on the matter) extended this beyond morality to issues of all normative authority. Kant's

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account of the moral law's obligatory force lying in our being the *author* of that law contained a paradox within itself: we can be obligated only by non-arbitrary laws, and we can be obligated only by self-authored laws, and therefore we can author an obligatory law to ourselves only if we presuppose a law that is not self-authored in terms of which we author the law. Or, to put it in terms that states the paradox fully, if we are to be bound only by a law that is self-authored, we must first be bound by a law that is not self-authored, which (because it is not self-authored) is therefore not binding on us. Hegel saw that this had to be given an explanation that tamed the apparent contradiction in it. Part of that overcoming lay in the history of religion as culminating in Christianity, in which a divine person gives us the law that in effect says: Be free! On Hegel's account, this religious way out of the paradox gives us a "picture," a "representation" (*Vorstellung*) of an external, authoritative person who is decidedly *not* the product of our own willing, but who is nonetheless *authoritatively* (as the "divine man") giving us the law that is "really" our own will; for "us moderns," however, such a "representational" account is now to be supplanted by the fully conceptual, philosophical account of our own free willing (as subject only to those laws of which it can regard itself as the author). In the Hegelian story, a good part of the rational superiority of Christianity to all other religions, including Judaism, is due to the fact that all the other religions can only represent the "divine" author of the law as something either indeterminate or so distant from us (as Hegel thinks is the case with the Jewish god) that we receive either no determinate law or no law that we can really call our *own*. Moreover, in becoming human and issuing the law as a person, the divine, as Hegel says, has finally fully revealed itself, leaving no mystery any longer to itself.

Hegel's contemporaries took this account in two ways. One group took Hegel to be offering an orthodox Christian account and regarded his claim that philosophy had supplanted religion as a fancy way of saying that philosophy *merely* reaffirmed the content of Christian religious thought as fully rational, as if philosophy itself could not contravene what it was that revealed religion propounded. The other group took Hegel to be saying that once one had modern philosophy in hand, one did not need the religious account any more since one had the true (that is, rational and secular conceptual) rendering of what had been only a more pictorial, popular idea of the same thing, even if the development of modern philosophy required a corresponding development in the history of religion for it to

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be in the proper historical position to claim this. Heine's position was more or less in the latter camp.

In Hegelian fashion, Heine begins his account on a Hegelian note by telling his readers, innocently enough, that his account has to do with the development of Christianity and how it led to German philosophy. However, he quickly shifts his inquiry into a post-Hegelian tone, claiming: "The ultimate fate of Christianity thus depends on whether we still need it." Rather than seeing Christianity as the "consummate religion" of freedom, as Hegel had done, Heine (using Hegel's term of art) sees the "genuine Idea of Christianity" ("*die eigentliche Idee des Christentums*") as being that of a kind of *sickness*, the roots of which lay in the early Church's implicitly having internalized the ideas of Gnosticism, which it then turned around and condemned as heresy: body and soul are separate, and the pleasures of the body are evil, the province of Satan, while the soul is pure and "can rise aloft, all the more nobly, into the lucid sky, into the bright kingdom of Christ." Why, Heine asks, could such a religion that inflicts such pain on people, which makes them so *ill*, take hold? And what would justify it? The answer, which sounds as Nietzschean as the question, is that Christianity offered consolation to the weak who were derided and exploited by the strong; Christianity, that is, found its value in "taming the strong, strengthening the tame" and offering the downtrodden the consolation of reward in heaven. Heine notes, again in tones to be taken up later by Nietzsche, "Even if many a one of us has already convalesced, he still cannot escape the general atmosphere of the sick-room, and he feels himself unhappily to be the only healthy one among the infirm." It is only when Luther in his "divine brutality" broke with the established Church and established the rights of the claims of reason on Christianity that "we see the Jewish-Deistic element again on the rise. Evangelical Christianity emerges." With that, the principle of freedom of thought soon followed as the new Idea (or *Idee* in the Hegelian sense) worked itself out, and that in turn established the primacy of the universities in Protestant life (a connection so close that, as Heine puts it, with the destruction of the "universities, the Protestant Church will fall," a sentiment also expressed by Hegel in private correspondence to Immanuel Niethammer).¹⁵

¹⁵ In a letter to Niethammer in 1816, Hegel claimed, "Protestantism is not entrusted to the hierarchical organization of a church but lies solely in general insight and *Bildung*," adding, "our universities and schools are our church. It is not the clergy and religious worship that counts as in the Catholic Church." *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix

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The conclusion Heine draws from this is Hegelian, but with a new twist. Virtually parroting Hegel at first, Heine claims that as a result of the rise of Protestantism, the content of modern literature must therefore be “subjective, lyrical, and reflective.” But Heine twists Hegelianism into the opposite direction when he points out that the result of the triumph of Protestantism is not, as Hegel seemed to think, the supremacy of the Protestant Christian Church as the only genuine *modern* (and therefore *rational*) religion but simply the prosaic fact of European modernity itself: the advent of industrialization, the aftershocks of the French Revolution, the coming to power of the merchant class, and the condition in which “the authorities have collapsed; reason remains the one lamp of humanity, and one’s conscience is the only staff in the dark labyrinth of this life,” such that “the general character of modern literature consists of the fact that now individuality and skepticism predominate.” (In a later unpublished set of notes, Heine noted that the new “worldly redeemer” – the new messiah – would arrive not on the back of a donkey but via the railway, bringing with him the blessings of “industry, labor and joy.”¹⁶)

This move into prosaic modern life is possible only because Luther translated the Bible, the book the Jews had preserved (as Heine describes it elsewhere) as their “portable fatherland” (“*aufgeschriebene Vaterland*”).¹⁷ Indeed, it is only when Christianity ceases being “Catholic” (and therefore Gnostic) and becomes instead Protestant, that is, “Judeo-Deistic,” that it approaches becoming “modern” at all. Reversing Hegel’s own list of valuations, Heine claims that seen in this light, it was the Jewish reverence for the law that made *them*, not the Christians, the first truly *modern* people, and it is that reverence for the law that is now being realized in modern Europe. The Kantian overtones to Heine’s claim are surely intended. The charges that Hegel himself had in his youth made against the Jews were

Meiner Verlag, 1969), vol. II, no. 272; *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984), p. 327. In another letter he reiterated the point: “Our more immediate safeguard is thus the universities and general institutions of instruction. All Protestants look upon these institutions as their Rome and council of bishops . . . The sole authority [for Protestants] is the intellectual and moral cultural education of all, and the guarantors of such cultural education are these institutions . . . *general* intellectual and moral education is what is holy to Protestants.” Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. II, no. 309; *Hegel: The Letters*, p. 328.

¹⁶ See Heinrich Heine, *Aphorismen und Fragmente*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV, p. 735.

¹⁷ “I say the discovery of the Bible, since the Jews, who rescued it from the great fire of the Second Temple and carried it around with them in exile like a portable fatherland for the entire Middle Ages, kept this treasure carefully hidden away in their ghetto.” Heine, “Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, p. 600.

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the same charges he also made against Kant, namely, that both adhered to a too rigoristic subordination of life to the law, a subordination that divides people into two parts (inclination and reason) and which, Hegel claimed, is overcome only in Christianity. In the new turn that Heine gives to the argument, however, it is in fact *Christianity* that split people in two, and it is the Jews who “from the start . . . carried within themselves the modern principle, which is only today unfolding itself among the European peoples.”¹⁸ “Cosmopolitanism,” Heine says, “genuinely sprang from the soil of Judaea” by virtue of the way in which Jesus (Spinoza’s “divine cousin,” as Heine calls him) universalized the Jewish reverence for the law, which eventually metamorphosed into the Kantian reverence for the moral law within.

Indeed, the truth about Christianity in Germany is that it has long since ceased to be the *actual* religion in German life – to be, in Hegel’s sense, *at work* in everyday life – even if it nonetheless remains the official state religion. In Heine’s famous phrase: “No one says it, but everybody knows it; pantheism is the open secret of Germany . . . Pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany.” In Heine’s version of how that came to pass, after Luther had brought the Bible to the German language, the next step was to demystify that book itself, a task whose preparatory work Heine attributes to Lessing, the great eighteenth-century hero of German letters. For Lessing, the slavish attention to the literal words of the Bible threatened to conceal the genuine truth in Christianity, and that genuine truth turned out to be, well, Deism and then ultimately a religion of the (moral) law. That in turn only prepared the German intelligentsia for the reception of that *genuinely* modern thinker, Spinoza, in whom, as Heine puts it, we are stirred “with the winds of the future.” Spirit and matter, which Christianity had rent asunder, were reunited in Spinoza’s thought but only in a way that was equivalent to pantheism. In Heine’s account, Spinoza’s thought indeed supplanted what came before in a *practical* way, to which Heine gives a formulation that again smacks of

¹⁸ In *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen*, Heine notes: “But not only Germany bears the physiognomy of Palestine; the rest of Europe too is raising itself up to the Jews. I say ‘raising itself up,’ for from the start the Jews carried within themselves the modern principle, which is only today unfolding itself among the European peoples . . . The Jews adhered only to the law, to the abstract thought, like our more recent cosmopolitan Republicans, who respect as their highest good, not the land of their birth or the person of their prince, but only the law. Cosmopolitanism genuinely sprang from the soil of Judaea; and Christ who . . . was actually a Jew, genuinely founded a propaganda of world-citizenship.” Heine, “Jessica,” in *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. III, p. 659.

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Nietzsche: “The attempt to implement the Idea of Christianity failed most miserably, and this unfortunate effort demanded incalculable sacrifices from humanity – whose dismal consequence is the social unease in all of Europe today.” In this failure of Christianity to realize itself, it has produced an “ill” social order that has now “grown tired of such hosts and hungers now for nutritious food, true bread and beautiful meat.”

This practical failure of Christianity meant that for people now nourished on Spinozistic pantheism, “the task now is to become healthy,” which meant that modern Europeans had become ready for the Kantian revolution, in which in Kant’s words, “philosophy is to be put in a precarious position, which should be firm even if there is in neither heaven nor on earth anything upon which it depends or is based.”¹⁹ Thus, Moses Mendelssohn’s description of Kant as the “all-destroyer” is, in Heine’s terms, completely apt, for the Kantian revolution itself is part of a larger world-historical event on the horizon in contemporary European culture that is in the process of being culminated; again anticipating Nietzsche’s more famous formulation, Heine notes that with the arrival of Kantianism on the scene, “Our heart is full of terrible compassion – It is ancient Jehovah who is readying himself for death – . . . Do you hear the bell ringing? Kneel down – Sacraments are being brought to a dying God.”

In Heine’s account, the death sentence passed on God went into its final funereal march to the gallows when Kant destroyed all prior metaphysics; Kant’s undoing of the metaphysical tradition removed the one last hope of defending a form of life already in the process of expiring; the nail in the coffin was Kant’s own substitution of human spontaneity and the “kingdom of ends” for religion (thus removing even the weak appeal to “tradition” to hold on to what was already on its way out). For Heine, what followed Kant could only be a denouement. If, as Heine puts it, Kant was the Robespierre of the philosophical revolution, then Fichte was its Napoleon. Kant still felt himself bound by the forms of intuition in theoretical knowledge, even if had thrown off all such shackles for practical thought. It was Fichte, who by generalizing the problem in Kant’s practical philosophy about self-legislation into a universal problem for all normative authority, solidified the Kantian revolution into a system. Playing no doubt on Hegel’s own account in the *Phenomenology*, Heine draws the conclusion that just as Napoleon solidified the Revolution into

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 34 (AA 425).

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an empire, the move from Kant to Fichte solidified the same revolution, only in philosophy; the political revolution in France passed over into Germany, where it became a revolution in thought. As Fichte himself put it (in terms that almost ensured that he would be always misunderstood), the “I” must posit the “Not-I”; that is, if the subject of thought and action is to be the final source of all normative authority, then it must somehow authorize itself to bestow such authority on other things. To do this, it must “posit” that there is something external to itself to which it answers for its authority, but, paradoxically, which it itself endows with the authority to direct it. There is no other possibility, Fichte thought: either the “dogmatist” is right, and it is the object of knowledge which guides us in some fashion (which, so Fichte seemed to think, would lead to some version of what Wilfrid Sellars later called the “myth of the given”); or the “idealist” is right, and it is the subject which guides itself and bestows on itself the authority to guide itself (which, to appropriate John McDowell’s metaphor, leaves it in the danger of spinning frictionlessly in the void, which is what led Fichte to posit the necessity of the “Not-I” in the first place). But also like Napoleon, Fichte bit off more than he could chew and quickly vanished from the philosophical scene, as did Napoleon’s empire from the political scene, but not before both had changed the landscape of everything around them.

Continuing the metaphor, Heine notes that the restoration that put Charles X back on the throne in France found its counterpart in Schelling becoming Fichte’s successor at Jena: Schelling “restored” Spinozism to its rightful place in German philosophy. Schelling saw that Fichte’s tortured use of the distinction of the “I” and the “Not-I” rested on his prior assumption that the distinction itself between what is subjective and objective had to be itself *either* a subjective *or* an objective distinction (corresponding to the distinction of “idealist” versus “dogmatist”). Schelling, in effect, said no, it was neither; or, rather, that it was both at once. Thus, Schelling set up a two-track way of doing philosophy, in which one track starts from self-consciousness (Fichte’s “I”) and, in Kantian/Fichteian fashion, looks for the conditions of possibility of self-consciousness, which finally culminates in a doctrine of nature as consisting of objects in space and time behaving according to determinate laws; the other track starts from a theory of nature (as the natural sciences have discovered it to be), and shows how the tendencies in nature themselves lead to the emergence of self-conscious agents. Both “tracks” have their

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unity in the “absolute,” which, since it is neither subjective nor objective but prior to both, can itself only be the object of an “intellectual intuition” and cannot be discursively articulated. In effect, Schelling restored Spinoza’s idea that there is only *one* substance, of which both mind and matter were simply attributes or ways of appearing. Our grasp of this one substance, the absolute, is of course non-discursive, which leads Heine to the conclusion that

Schelling now abandons the way of philosophy and seeks, by means of a kind of mystic intuiting, to arrive at an intuition of the absolute itself; he seeks to intuit it in its center, in its essentiality, where it is neither something ideal nor something real, neither thought nor extension, neither subject nor object, neither spirit nor matter, but . . . who knows! / This is where philosophy ends in Mr. Schelling and poetry, or I would say, folly, begins.

(Heine could just as well have said: Schelling’s philosophy is the night in which all cows are black.)

With the metaphorical crowning of Hegel as the king of German philosophy in Berlin, the German “philosophical revolution,” Heine says, “is over. Hegel completed its great circle.” (In a work written earlier, with the same metaphors of Kant as Robespierre, etc., Heine called Hegel “the Orleans” of philosophy, making reference to the way in which the Duc d’Orléans, under a constitutional settlement, stepped in as the “bourgeois king” to replace the despised restoration monarch, Charles X, in the French Revolution of July, 1830.)

Heine gives almost no characterization of Hegel’s philosophy at all, nor does he point out to the reader that he or she has just read a treatise “on the history of religion and philosophy in Germany” that is itself a development of certain Hegelian ideas taken in a very different direction. Heine apparently felt that he had exhibited Hegelian philosophy enough not to have to explain it.²⁰ Although this has been noted by almost all

²⁰ In his *Confessions (Geständnisse)* written near the end of his life, Heine claims that he at first intended to write a short essay explaining the Hegelian philosophy as an appendix to a new edition of *Towards a History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* but after two years of work on the manuscript, he found it not to his liking, to be too abstract and pointless: “I was attempting to translate these formulas from the abstract school-idiom into the mother tongue of healthy reason and general comprehensibility, French. The translator must know for certain what he has to say, and even the most embarrassed concepts are forced to let fall their mystical garments and show themselves naked. You see, I had resolved to present Hegelian philosophy in its entirety in generally comprehensible form, as a supplement to be absorbed into the new edition of my book

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commentators on Heine's book – and it is, after all, a rather obvious point – it has also been often taken, very wrongly, I think, to be evidence for Heine's lack of interest in "bourgeois" Hegelian philosophy and evidence for his "socialism" or at least his "radical politics" (a view that was actively promoted by eminent critics such as Georg Lukács in the old Eastern bloc). But, as noted earlier, the truth of the matter is that for virtually his entire life, Heine subscribed to a version of Gans's own interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy: Heine endorsed a version of Hegel's conception of a *free* life being led in terms of its embodiment in the characteristic modern institutions of family, civil society, and a state based on representative (but not necessarily democratic) constitutional government; that government, though, was supposed to be interested in the social question, and it was supposed to contain an opposition party within itself.²¹ In his "English Fragments," written in 1828, Heine made his Gans-Hegelian sympathies clear:

It is no longer the crowned chieftains but the people themselves who are the heroes of modernity, and these heroes have themselves also committed themselves to a Holy Alliance; they stick together where it counts for common rights, for the international right of religious and political freedom; they are bound together through the Idea, they have sworn themselves to it and shed their blood for it, they themselves have even become the Idea – and hence the hearts of the people painfully shudder when anywhere, even in the most remote corner of the world, the Idea is insulted.²²

De l'Allemagne. I worked at this for two years, and only with anguish and exertion did I manage to overcome the refractory material and to present the most abstract parts in the most popular way possible. But when the work was finally complete, I was grasped by an uncanny horror when I looked at it. It seemed to me as if the manuscript was looking at me with strange, ironic, even malicious eyes. I had arrived at a strange quandary: author and work no longer fit together." Heine, *Geständnisse*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 769.

²¹ See Sammons, *Heinrich Heine*. Sammons, whose biography of Heine has been deservedly praised as among the best works on Heine, nonetheless overlooks this point because, I think, of his failure to appreciate the link between Heine and Gans, even though he himself in a second-hand way offers up some of the best evidence for it. Sammons sums up Heine's political position by noting that Heine "does not appear to me to have had any ideas at all on the formal structure of political institutions, except that he disliked parliamentarianism, wanted to see the overthrow of the nobility, and was in an abstract and highly personal sense inclined to monarchism" (p. 330). That statement could equally well apply to Hegel (except for the part about the nobility – Hegel was simply indifferent to the nobility, although he gave them a nominal place in his system of the representation of estates in the *Philosophy of Right*). Heine's own life-long political beliefs fairly well match up to Gans's own reconstruction of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, not so much to Hegel's book itself.

²² Heine, "Englische Fragmente," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 414.

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However, it is obvious that there is at least one crucial aspect in which Heine departs from orthodox Hegelianism, namely, in his disagreement with Hegel over the status of Christianity in keeping the new, modern order in Germany together. Hegel, of course, thought that Protestant Christianity (in its subordinate status to philosophy) was the only sufficiently modern, rational religion and was adequate to serve as the civic religion certainly of Germany and even of the new emerging European order as well. However, without any argument or explanation, Heine simply notes that after Hegel established himself at the pinnacle of German philosophy, “all we see since then is the development and expansion of the doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*,” surely an odd thing to think of as the development of Hegelian philosophy. (It is almost as if Heine is saying that Hegel may be the “bourgeois king,” but the “restoration king,” Schelling, remains the king in the hearts of the people.) After he had recanted his views on religion and become disenchanted with Hegel after about 1848 (when his great illness set in), Heine revealed how he had understood the Hegelian philosophy of religion to be really a form of atheism. Both he and Gans had taken the twin Hegelian doctrines of, first, the superiority of Protestant Christianity to all other religions and, second, the assumption of religion into philosophy (and into subordination to philosophy) to be an overall argument to the effect that religion *per se* really did not count any more (or that it remained at work only for those people for whom neither art nor philosophy were approachable or efficacious). However, once one had fully understood that religion was only an intuitive, pictorial presentation of the deeper conceptual truth about freedom as the basic “norm” of modern life, one simply did not need religion any more. (Interestingly, the same did not hold for art; art presented in sensuous form what philosophy presented in conceptual form, but philosophy could never replace the concreteness and impact of art.)

When Heine wrote his book in the early 1830s, he seemed to share something like that view of religion, but he had doubts as to whether the replacement of the Christian religion with the new philosophy (or with whatever was supposed to be its successor) would produce something which could in fact play the same role in the social whole that Christianity had done. His work concludes with some well-known and often-cited dark warnings about the German love of battle and conquest, all of which have since been taken as fearsome premonitions of the Hitler nightmare yet to come (as they in fact partly are). The problem, as Heine sees

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it, is the same one Nietzsche raised in the *Genealogy of Morality* when he remarked: “Have you ever asked yourselves properly how costly the setting up of every ideal on earth has been?”²³ Heine himself notes that “the *Naturphilosoph* will enter into terrible association with the original powers of nature. He will be able to conjure up the demonic forces of old-Germanic pantheism, and that lust for battle which we find among the old Germans will awaken in him,” whereas “Christianity – and this is its greatest merit – has to some extent tamed that brutal Germanic lust for battle, but could not destroy it.” It is also clear here that, in Heine’s eyes, for “Germany” one could pretty well substitute “modern Europe.” Although reason may be *at work* in the modern world, it is, to Heine, unclear if it can be *enough* at work to hold modern life together.

However, Heine is not making the kind of claim (later put forth most famously by Theodor Adorno) about any kind of “dialectic of Enlightenment,” about emancipatory reason turning around to produce new conditions of dependence; his worry is not, that is, that “reason” has somehow produced *Naturphilosophie*, which in turn has thrown the claims of reason up in the air and reinstated irrationality. It is whether the modern disposal of tradition and “all prior metaphysics” can practically sustain itself, and Heine suggests that there is something more to the story than the Hegelian triumph of a social and political order consisting of universal but abstract rights to life, liberty, and property, the limited but crucial role of a morality that appeals to conscience, and a constitutional state based on a market-based, civil society and the sanctity of marriage in the form of a nuclear family. But, as Heine chillingly warns, given how Christianity has tamed people, in a German state finally freed from the moral constraints of Christianity, “a play will be enacted in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like a harmless idyll.”

Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heine?

The immediate post-Kantians wanted to use Kant to get beyond Kant, which led to the various different post-Kantian systems which culminated in Hegel’s system, each of which claimed, using the rhetoric of the day, to be playing down the Kantian letter in order to work in the Kantian spirit.

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 70.

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Similarly, some of the immediate post-Hegelian generation wanted to use Hegel to get beyond Hegel. Gans pushed the Hegelian system in directions that were already internal to the system's own dynamic, but he stayed overall close to the letter of the system.²⁴ Heine undertook a more radical rewriting of the Hegelian philosophy of history which, although remaining in the spirit, departed far more audaciously from the letter. In doing so, he gave us a view that in one sense stands midway between Hegel and Nietzsche. One of the problems of the emerging commercial culture of the nineteenth century was that it threatened to eat up the human capital that had provided the revolutionary impetus for its creation in the first place. In casting off religion, modern Europeans were moving toward the freedom that Kant said characterized morality: it was to be firm while realizing that nothing in either heaven or earth supported it. With all irony intended, Heine noted that nowadays, after Kant, "Humanity does homage today to the system of earthly utility; it thinks seriously about a prosperous, bourgeois order, about a sensible household budget, and about comfort for its old age." Nietzsche's worry about "last men" living lives of "pitiable comfort" is not far off from this view.

However Heine's essay should be viewed not as merely some stage along the way from Hegel to Nietzsche but as an alternative and competing account. Nietzsche called for a new kind of person who could live without the metaphysical consolations of the past, but Heine did not, as it were, simply fail to take that next Nietzschean step. Heine was at home in the modern world but not fully "of" it. Although the easiest way to think of Heine, the life-long exile in Paris dreaming of Germany, is to view him as the embodiment of modern "homelessness" (which was Adorno's take on Heine), it fails to do justice to the specific kind of alienation both he and Gans shared: this was a matter of belonging and not-belonging, of identifying with an order and not being fully identical with it, a matter

²⁴ Although staying closer to the letter of Hegel's system than Heine did, Gans nonetheless downplayed certain key element of Hegel's system, particularly the way in which "absolute spirit" (that is, art, religion, and philosophy) performs an *Aufhebung* of the realm of politics and world history (interpreted as the history of states, that is, of *politics*). Angelica Nuzzo argues that in fact this is not just incidental to Gans's Hegelianism; for Gans, so Nuzzo argues, absolute spirit "no longer possesses the status of a self-sufficient, form of spirit from on high . . . They [art, religion, philosophy] belong to world history itself." In Angelica Nuzzo, "Begriff und Geschichte – Eduard Gans' Stellung zu Hegels Systematik der Philosophie," in Reinhard Blänkner, Gerhard Göhler, Norbert Waszek (eds.), *Eduard Gans (1797–1839): Politischer Professor zwischen Restauration und Vormärz* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), pp. 137–151 here p. 150.

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of existential *ambivalence* and not just homelessness.²⁵ Heine's lyrical poetry was formed around this problem; as Adorno himself noted, it used the language of everydayness, even of everyday banality, but added ironic twists to it, usually at or near the end of a poem, to transform the "everyday" into something else. Adorno took Heine's use of irony to be his way of coming to terms with "the dawning realization of the impossibility of poetry itself."²⁶ That is in part true; Heine's use of irony was a way of maintaining a commitment to art and to poetry *together with* the full self-consciousness that in modern commercial society it was becoming more and more of a problem. Even in his very earliest successful poetry, *The Book of Songs*, he manages to mesh the images and sound of romantic poetry with the more prosaic elements of modern life, with its emerging commercial ethos and crass sentimentality.

Two short and well-known poems from Heine's works illustrate Heine's use of irony for his transfiguration of the commonplace, particularly in the way he adapted old romantic tropes to new ironic uses. In one of them, he takes a standard romantic line and twists it to show its tried and true nature:

Das Fräulein stand am Meere
 Und seufzte lang und bang,
 Es rührte sie so sehre
 Der Sonnenuntergang.
 "Mein Fräulein! sein Sie munter,
 Das ist ein altes Stück;
 Hier vorne geht sie unter
 Und kehrt von hinten zurück."

[The young lady stood on the seashore, / And sighed long and anxiously, / So much did the sunset move her.

"My young lady, perk up, / It's an old story / It goes down in front of us, / And behind us it returns again."]

This is the kind of ironic, shrug of the shoulders, "yes, we've all heard that before" move that Heine likes to push on to one of the tried and true tropes. But compare that with another well-known poem by Heine:

²⁵ See Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Der Fall Heine* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000).

²⁶ Theodor Adorno, "Toward a Reappraisal of Heine," *Vermischte Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), vol. XX, p. 448.

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Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen,
 Die hat einen andern erwählt;
 Der andre liebt eine andre,
 Und hat sich mit dieser vermählt.

Das Mädchen heiratet aus Ärger
 Den ersten besten Mann,
 Der ihr in den Weg gelaufen;
 Der Jüngling ist übel dran.

Es ist eine alte Geschichte,
 Doch bleibt sie immer neu;
 Und wem sie just passiert,
 Dem bricht das Herz entzwei.

[A young man loves a girl who has chosen another, / This other one
 loves another girl and has married her.

Out of anger, the girl marries the very first man who comes her way, /
 The young man is beside himself about it.

It is an old story, but it remains ever new. / And when it has just
 happened to somebody / It breaks his heart in two.]

The twist on the trope points out that yes, of course it is tried, true, trite and banal . . . except when it happens to you. The shrug of the shoulder there is out of place. The unity of the universal (the tried, true, even the trite and banal, or what one might call the “philosophical” component) and the particular (the lived experience, the actual encounter with, for example, having one’s heart broken, or what one might call the “existential” component), the “old piece” which is something which has always happened, always will happen, but which always hits us anew whenever it happens, is very much a component of Heine’s lyrical, ironical maneuvers. On the one hand, Heine’s use of irony resembles the teaching of the classical stoics, whose point was to remind us of the therapeutic use to which the knowledge that such things are indeed “old stories” can be put. For the stoics, we were continually to remind ourselves that they “happen to everybody,” so that we are more likely not to be put off by them when they in fact do happen to us; on the other hand, they are the kinds of things that always are new to the person undergoing them, so treating them as tried and true (and trite) misses their point, and merely pointing out their banality (as tried and true) is itself a piece of banality.

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Heine's technique of taking a banal and tired out mood of a traditional love poem and then "breaking the mood" through an ironic turn-around was yet another way in which he absorbed the Hegelian lessons of the modern self as existing in a kind of perpetual alienation – an internal division of the self from itself, which love promised to heal but which was always provisional, always subject to both disappointment *and* renewal. This provided Heine with the means to give what looked like a tired genre a new form of aesthetic tension. It enabled him to lift the ordinary out of its banality by transfiguring it into ironic poetry; that was Heine's *métier*, which few can match.

In his Hegelian commitment to and even celebration of the ordinary while all the time maintaining a critical stance towards it, Heine prefigures not so much Nietzsche as Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is reported to have said, "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."²⁷ Heine could have said the same. Nor is Heine's irony that of a person who cannot justify his basic commitments and wishes to avoid that uncomfortable fact by shrugging his shoulders and laughing it off; it is more of the irony of seeing that our commitments are not yet reconciled with each other and that this lack calls out for a kind of intellectual honesty about itself. It includes both a commitment to the ideals of poetry itself and a refusal to compromise, for the sake of politics, what Heine, a master at his art, took to be good poetry, without at the same time falling into the trap of arguing that politics was somehow therefore a less worthwhile or less noble endeavor than art.

Heine's commitment to poetry in the face of conditions that seemed to make it less relevant, if not impossible, was indeed mirrored in his ironic politics. He remained committed to the liberal, egalitarian ideals of his youth even as he became progressively more disenchanting with how those ideals had worked themselves out in practice (in the few places where they had even been tried). Near the end of his life, he stated his fears that the "dark iconoclasts" of communism (some of whom were friends of his) would come to power and destroy virtually everything he held dear in art and life; yet he also confessed that they seemed to be the only ones who were seriously dealing with the problems of poverty and exploitation that he saw as endemic to the modern free-market commercialism, so that

²⁷ Cited from Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 83.