

**The Actual and The Absolute: Hegel's Concept of Actuality and Its
Connection with Böhme's Mysticism**

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This thesis is an attempt to articulate my perspective on and understanding of Hegel, mainly on his concept of actuality. The journey of the “actualization” of my understanding of Hegel and the “actualization” of this thesis has been with many twists and turns. The goal of my effort, as Hegel teaches, is to get a real grip on knowledge, instead of merely presenting the semblance of seriousness.

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Introduction

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel claims that the truth is the whole.¹ His insistence on grasping the “whole” stems from his belief that the world forms a single and intelligible totality. Philosophy’s job is to discern and reflect the totality as such. The totality, in other words, is the all-encompassing absolute. To do justice to the absolute, philosophy has to be in the form of science (*Wissenschaft*). For Hegel, instead of aggregating externally related parts, *Wissenschaft* is an organic and cohesive system that encapsulates totality and mirrors the structure of the absolute. The choice of personal tendency and distinction is excluded in *Wissenschaft* on the ground that “a system [is not] built on narrowly circumscribed principle distinct from other principles... [but should] contain all particular principles within itself.”² Philosophers cannot *put together* a *Wissenschaft* but should claim it by revealing the interconnections between the particularities intrinsic to it.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Terry P. Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. & ed. Terry Pinkard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), ¶20, henceforth *PS*, followed by paragraph number.

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I, Science of Logic*, trans. & ed. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33, §14. Henceforth, *Ency I*, followed by section number.

Nevertheless, the *Wissenschaft* is not a monotonous system that exists for itself in abstraction, its content is *actuality* [*die Wirklichkeit*].³ Actuality is a form of determinacy that, in Hegel's view, overcomes the opposition between subject and object, essence and existence, and any other metaphysical dualities that traditionally divide thought from reality. The importance of the category of actuality is pitched on the principle that the actual is the self-manifestation of the absolute. The uniqueness of Hegelian idealism stems from his belief that the absolute is reflected in actuality, which underlies both the thinking subject and the thing thought.

The idea that the actuality is "reflected absoluteness"⁴ bears a striking resemblance to mysticism's assertion that actuality is interconnected and serves as a reflection of God. Jakob Böhme, a mystic and theosophist, contends this kind of mysticism. He further rejects a detached and ineffable God, or the Eternal One, and establishes a dynamic relation of God to its creation. Jakob Böhme's thought intrigued Hegel in his Jena period (1801-1806). The philosopher thinks that Böhme was the "first German philosopher" who had a glimpse of the speculative truth.⁵ However, Hegel had double attitudes towards the mystic. He holds that, despite Böhme's originality and theosophist brilliance, the mystic shows a tendency to capture the truth in barbarous intuitions without the conceptual rigor necessary for *Wissenschaft*.

³ *Ency I*, §6.

⁴ Hegel, G. W. F, *Science of Logic*, trans. by A. V. Miller, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 541. Henceforth *SL*, followed by page number.

⁵ Glenn Alexander Magee, "Hegel and Mysticism," *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser, 253–80, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 261. Magee quotes Hegel's letter to a friend named Peter Gabriel van Ghert who sent the philosopher a book by Böhme as a gift. In the letter, Hegel writes, "Now I can study Jakob Boehme much more closely than before, since I was not myself in possession of his writings. His theosophy will always be one of the most remarkable attempts of a penetrating yet uncultivated man to comprehend the innermost essential nature of the absolute being. For Germany, he has the special interest of being really the first German philosopher." See *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. by Clark Butler and Christianne Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 573

This study argues that the inner-connectedness of the actual and the absolute, exhibited in the Hegelian concept of actuality, derives from Hegel's philosophical inheritance of Böhme. I will conduct a comparative study of Böhme and Hegel, aiming to illustrate Hegel's rewriting of the relationship between the absolute and actuality in Böhmean mysticism. This examination will be based on the overlapping of Böhmean vocabularies and Hegelian concepts. I will also establish that while Hegel adopts certain Böhmean concepts, his perspective remains firmly grounded in philosophy rather than mysticism, evidenced by his introduction of the concept of mediation in the absolute-actual relationship. In other words, despite his incorporation of Böhme's mystical ideas, I contend that he is still more of a philosopher than a mystic. This thesis will unfold in the movement of two sections. In the first section, I will outline the development of the concept of actuality as it progresses through Kantian frameworks and Hegel's *PS*. The first section will set a theoretical stage for the second section, in which I will discuss Hegel's relationship with Böhme's mysticism.

I. The Concept of Actuality

a. Overview of the Concept of Actuality: The Actual as the Absolute

Hegel's use of *Wirklichkeit* is multifaceted and in complicated relation to that of Kant: on the one hand, similar to Kant, Hegel retains the word's undertone of "to be" and "to exist," persisting in contrasting it with the merely possible;⁶ on the other hand, he sees the limitation of Kant's use of the term *Wirklichkeit* and extends its meaning beyond merely signifying things existing in the realm of real existence.

The Hegelian concept of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) comprises two parts:

- 1) the actuality of the existing objects and institution
- 2) the actuality of consciousness and thinking

The first meaning of actuality is Kantian, which regards sensuality and experience. The second meaning of actuality exists in the form of ideas that contemplate the objects in reality. Kant uses the concept of *Wirklichkeit* to mean the state of being real, which is usually contrasted with the

⁶ Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 33.

imaginary, fictitious, or merely possible.⁷ When Hegel asserts that something is actual, this declaration signifies that the specified entity possesses the quality of self-completion and self-realization. The actuality of the entity embodies 1) the aspect of its concrete manifestation, how it exists empirically and is relational to other entities 2) the aspect of its conceptual representation, how the entity is perceived and fits in the system of human reasoning. Hegel enriches the meaning of *Wirklichkeit* on the basis of Kant. This is particularly significant because it involves pure thinking in the process of reality's actualization, which was deemed purely external and isolated from subjectivity. Human reasoning constitutes what is considered subjectivity because the ideas and concepts enable subjects to think, act, and transform themselves and what is other than themselves. In Hegel's system, the reality is the object of contemplation, the "food for thought." On the other hand, what is conceptual (even what is metaphysical and philosophical) conceives and affects the category of what is substantial, material, and corporeal. In explaining philosophers' various attempts to grasp the truth, Hegel uses the phrase "absolute actuality"⁸ to mean the actualization of ultimate knowledge. Actuality, or *Wirklichkeit*, emerges as a congregation of the real and the conceptual, it determines itself as the "absolute actuality." The absolute used as an adjective denotes the same meaning as the "absolute" of Hegel's absolute idealism, which is emblematic of eliminating the separation between the real and the conceptual.

In the subsequent sections, I will delineate the evolution of the concept of actuality as it traverses through Kantian contexts and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, leading to the point that determines the absoluteness of the actual.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *PS*, ¶12.

b. Kant's Concept of Actuality: The Empirical and The Real

Kant generally used the word “actual” to mean “real,” emphasizing the aspect of “what is” or “what exists.” Hegel diverges from this usage and persists in contrasting the “actual” with the merely possible.⁹ Kant typically employs “actual” and emphasizes sensory perceptibility. In *Critique of Pure Reason* translated by Norman Kemp Smith, Kant posits “[t]hat which is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation, is actual [*wirklich*].”¹⁰ In “Kant’s Categories of Reality and Existence,” Wolfgang Schwarz references the translation of *Critique of Pure Reason* by N. K. Smith throughout his article.¹¹ He provides a random sampling of Smith’s translation of “*wirklich*” or “*Wirklichkeit*.” The result of his sampling shows: “‘actual’ (B X); ‘real’ (B XX); ‘existence’ (B 5); ‘actuality’ (B 46); ‘real’ (B 53); ‘actual’ (B 272); ‘reality’ (B 585); ‘actuality’ (B 798); ‘reality’ (B 803); ‘reality’ (B 881).”¹² The proper translation of “*Wirklichkeit*” is “actuality” and the German translations of “reality” and “existence” are “*Realität*” and “*Dasein*” respectively in Kantian contexts.¹³ N.K. Smith uses “reality” indiscriminately for “*Wirklichkeit*” and naturally also for “*Realität*.” Schwarz believes that enquiring upon definitions of reality and existence helps distinguish these three concepts. In

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), B 266. Henceforth CPR.

¹¹ Wolfgang Schwarz, “Kant’s Categories of Reality and Existence,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 2 (1987): 343–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107635>.

¹² Schwarz, 344.

¹³ Schwarz, 344-345.

Critique of Pure Reason, Kant argues that “what corresponds in empirical intuition to sensation is reality (*realitas phaenomenon*)”¹⁴ and the existence of the thing is “bound up with our perceptions [of the thing] in a possible experience.”¹⁵ In other words, reality is our perceptions of the thing and its concept whereas our judgment of the existence of the thing requires either our perception of it or its concept. Kant continues that “the perception which supplements the content of the concept is the sole mark of actuality.”¹⁶ Therefore, the concept of actuality is in the same category as existence and is existence with material contents. For example, “from the perception of the attracted iron fillings we know of the existence of a magnetic matter pervading all bodies.”¹⁷ The actuality of magnetic force depends on the perception of the movement of the attracted iron fillings. It is comprised of both the sensory perception and the conceptual knowledge that the movement of the attracted iron fillings signals the existence of magnetic force. Schwarz proposes to treat actuality as equivalence with existence.¹⁸ In a note in “Kant and the Forms of Realism”, when discussing the definition of actuality, Dietmar Heidemann notes:

In his critical philosophy Kant distinguishes between “actuality” and “reality”. Whereas “actuality” (“*Wirklichkeit*”) or “existence” (“*Dasein*”) is a modal category, “reality” (“*Realität*” from *res* ‘Sache’ or ‘*Sachhaltigkeit*’) is a category of quality. The category of “actuality”, Kant claims, is derived from the assertoric form of judgment and determines, as “Second Postulate”, that something exists or is there (“*Dasein*”). By contrast, “reality” is derived from the affirmative form of judgment in so far as something is thought to have a (sensible and/or nonsensible)

¹⁴ *CPR*, B 209.

¹⁵ *CPR*, B 273.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Schwarz, 344.

quality. Thus, everything that is actual is also a reality but not everything that is thought as a reality is actual.¹⁹

Actuality should be best understood as concrete existence affirmed by conceptual understandings and distinguished from reality by not necessarily undergoing an imaginary process in Kantian contexts.

c. Hegel's Criticism of and Advancement from Kant

Hegel diverges from Kant's definition of actuality and notes that equating actuality with affirmable concrete existence fixes the concept of actuality in the domain of sensory experience. Separating activities of thinking from the realm of actuality renders philosophy rigid in the realm of pure ideas, severing its connection with material reality. Hegel writes, "The notion of the *actuality of the rational* seems immediately to come up against two objections: one, that ideas and ideals are nothing more than chimeras and philosophy a system of such phantasms," or "ideas and ideals are much too exquisite to be actual, or again too impotent to acquire for themselves the status of something actual."²⁰ Ideas, thoughts, and actuality are not incompatible because the object of thinking is actuality, and the actual transforms the thinkable.

According to Hegel, the actual and the conceptual interweave in the subjective consciousness. Subjects think in concepts and their thinking constitutes their reality. Hegel

¹⁹ D. Heidemann, "Kant and the Forms of Realism," *Synthese* 198 (Suppl 13), 3231–3252 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02502-4>.

²⁰ *Ency I*, 34, §6.

asserts that “the highest goal of the philosophical science [is] to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that *exists*, or with actuality.”²¹ In other words, philosophy, in interpreting the world, aims to testify to the alliance of rational understanding and actuality. Rational understanding as a characteristic of subjective reasoning represents one aspect of philosophy. The other aspect of philosophy comprises the objects that rational understanding perceives and processes. In other words, philosophy is actuality reflected in thoughts. Actuality can be in affinity with rational understanding because it includes both the concrete matters in the world and the abstraction of the concepts from the sensational data. Hegel claims that “to bring [philosophy] nearer to the goal where it can lay aside the title of *love of knowing* and be *actual knowing*—is the task I have set for myself.”²² The *actual knowing* means not only obtaining the knowledge of the actual but also learning that there is no non-conceptual access to the actual. The very contrast between the concepts and the actual is a conceptual construction. The knowing of the actual is fundamentally the knowing of the capacities and activities of thinking of the objects, namely the concept of objects. The actual is not sharply distinct from the concept. The concept bifurcates into the concept of concept and the concept of object. The actuality bifurcates into the sensible actuality of the world and the conceptual actuality that enables knowledge of reality and I, thereby making subjective existence possible. The phrase “concept of actuality,” in which the “concept” overrides the realm of “actuality,” is already laden with the dialectical implication that actuality overreaches what is other than itself.

²¹ *Ency I*, 33, §6.

²² *PS*, ¶5.

d. The Becoming of the Actual

In *PS*, Hegel argues that for a thing to become actual, it not only has to be something that exists and is there, but it also has to be sufficient in its development to reach its wholeness. Hegel gives the example of the growth of a plant to illustrate the dialectical process of the manifestation of a plant's actuality.

[H]owever, at the same time their fluid nature makes them into moments of an organic unity in which they are not only not in conflict with each other, but rather, one is equally necessary which alone constitutes the life of the whole.²³

For example, if a plant grows from seed to blossom to fruit, each stage of the growth is obtained by sublating the previous one. None of the states is the most essential; on the contrary, each state is equally necessary. Namely, it is not because a plant has a seed or a blossom that it can be called a plant. The true nature of an entity is that entity's fully developed form rather than its embryonic state. But this does not mean that the final form of the entity should represent the whole of the development: "Nor is the result which it is reached the actual whole itself; rather, the whole is the result together with the way the result comes to be". Therefore, the actual is the universal. Hegel holds the same view towards history that is unfolded by the movement of spirit:

[Spirit] is the whole which has returned into itself from out of its succession and extension and has come to be the simple concept of itself. The actuality of this simple whole consists in those embodiments which, having become moments of the whole, again develop themselves anew and give themselves a figuration, but this time in their new element, in the new meaning which itself has come to be.²⁴

²³ *PS*, ¶2.

²⁴ *PS*, ¶12.

In any process of development, there is a change from the moment to the whole and continues to the moment. The whole that is formed at each stage becomes the moment of the next stage, just as the universal particularizes and the particular continues to universalize.

Spirit has broken with the previous world of its existence and its ways of thinking; it is now of a mind to let them recede into the past and to immerse itself in its own work at reshaping itself...yet this newness is no more completely actual than is the newborn child... Its immediacy, or its concept, is the first to come on the scene.²⁵

The whole comes to comprehend itself as the end and also the beginning. As a result of this, it is able to move forward and actualize itself in the process of development and become new moments that have new elements and meanings. Similarly, these new moments will reach a stage where it becomes the new whole that again comes to grasp itself as a next new beginning. This grasping and comprehending are to become the concept of itself, which will immediately turn into actuality in the next stage of development. As Robert Pippin, in his article on Hegel's idealism states, this whole internal self-propelling progression towards a better end is also the structure of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which shows "how the collective human soul journeys through the series of its own shapes."²⁶

As above shows, a thing comes to be through change, variation, and opposition, from particular to universal, moment to the whole. This process involves mediation. For a thing to comprehend itself and become itself, it has to undergo an externalization of itself, namely, to become the other to itself. Since the thing wants to perpetuate its identity, the "other" and

²⁵PS, ¶11.

²⁶ Robert Pippin, "You Can't Get There from Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser, 52–85. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60.

negative self also work as a mediator for its ultimate self-affirmation and actualization. The mediation negates the opposition set by itself between itself and the new otherness. As a result, this otherness returns to itself. Therefore, Hegel asserts that the subject and the substance, which is supposed to be the other of the subject, are intrinsically “self-restoring sameness.” In order for a thing to become actual, it has to undergo this externalization process to mediate itself.

e. Conclusion

To summarise, Hegel puts forth that actualization involves more than mere existence; it requires a thing to undergo sufficient development to reach its wholeness. Using the growth of a plant as an example, Hegel illustrates this dialectical process where each stage is necessary for the whole. The true essence of an entity lies in its fully developed form rather than its embryonic state. Development entails a progression from moments to wholes, where each stage becomes the foundation for the next. This process involves mediation, where the thing externalizes itself to become the “other” to itself, ultimately leading to its self-affirmation and actualization. Hegel asserts that for a thing to become actual, it must undergo this externalization process and embrace mediation. Thus, actuality unfolds in a dialectical progression from the particular to the universal, from antithesis to thesis.

In Hegel’s framework, actuality emerges as a synthesis of the real, tangible world and the conceptual, abstract realm of thought. This synthesis represents a reconciliation of the perceived division between the real and the conceptual, thus embodying the absolute nature of actuality. Hegel’s use of the term “absolute” aligns with his broader philosophical perspective known as

absolute idealism, which seeks to overcome the separation between reality and thought, subject and object.

Hegel writes that the absolute is “the essence, or, what exists-in-itself. – It is what is self-comporting, or, the determinate itself, or, otherness and being-for-itself – and, in this determinateness, to be the self-enduring in its being-external-to-itself.” In short, the absolute represents the entirety of the inner (essence, thinking, reflection) and the entirety of the outer (existence, appearance, empirical reality). Moreover, it unifies these aspects, symbolizing both the initial and ultimate universality. Implicit in the assertion that the actual is absolute is the idea that absolute unity precedes all divisions and contradictions. Without the absoluteness of its content, the unity of the real and the conceptual, actuality would cease to be as a category in Hegel’s system. Within Hegel’s philosophical framework, the absolute serves as the generative force behind actuality, underpinning its movement and manifestation.

Kant defines “those who start from an insight into the ultimate and descend from there” as mystics.²⁷ Hegel’s idea of the actual as the absolute has mystical elements as it starts from the presupposition that the absolute transcends all oppositions. In the next section, I will claim that Hegel transcends the actual into the realm of the absolute (and also the incarnation of the absolute in the realm of actuality) because he is influenced by the mysticism of Jakob Böhme. Jakob Böhme equates the absolute to God, claiming that God is in everything. He treats actuality as a direct representation of the absolute and expresses the actual in the language of the divine absolute. I will argue that the absoluteness of Hegelian actuality, the overcoming of differences,

²⁷ Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. by David S. Pacini. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 67.

is a result of Hegel's accommodation of Böhme's idea that ordinary actuality expresses the absolute, universal, and divine truth.

II. The Absolute as the Actual: The Influence of Böhme's Mysticism on Hegel

It is believed that the first evidence of Hegel's contact with the mysticism of Jakob Böhme dates back to his years in Jena (1801-1807). Hegel began to read *Theosophia Revelata* by Böhme in later years, after which his interest in Böhme grew from 1811 onward.²⁸ Hegel, as an ardent student of Böhme, recognizes that Böhme's thought is directed to the most inward, which is centered on the subject. It is in this sense that Hegel identifies him as the first German philosopher, who directed attention from the sensuous to the inward structure (of subjectivity), in a letter to van Ghert.²⁹ Jakob Böhme believes that in order for God to obtain the highest power and to be truly absolute, God needs to gain self-knowledge through objects that stand in opposition to Him. In addition, since God is in everything, God is knowable and the knowledge of God is accessible through ordinary observation. In this sense, everyday objects and phenomena can be sources for divine contemplation.

Hegelian concept of actuality shows a movement that is analogous to the Böhmean self-knowing movement of God. Hegel acknowledges that the Böhmean mysticism makes judgments on actuality that is closest to the representation of the speculative truth. The Hegelian concept of actuality designates actuality's connection with the absolute. A being's actuality embodies

²⁸ Cecilia Muratori, *The First German Philosopher*, trans. Richard Dixon and Raphaëlle Burns (Springer, 2016), 84.

²⁹ Muratori, 254.

absoluteness since it encompasses the entire journey of a being's development from beginning to end, and this process involves a dialectical shift where the being must overcome its opposition to achieve its actuality.

Hegel believes that Böhme reveals the speculative truth that the absolute manifests through opposition, and acknowledges that the absolute's return to unity with itself conveys its profound negativity. However, Hegel criticizes Böhme for submitting to the intuitions of barbarism. Böhme claims that the Divine Being of God consists of heavenly power. Therefore, the Being of God and the world he creates are articulated through mystical, abstract, and oftentimes alchemical-astrological language.³⁰ Hegel sees Böhme's thinking as lacking the necessary conceptual rigor for a scientific philosophical approach, instead relying heavily on sensory experience and imaginative language. In short, Böhme's thinking is not science (*Wissenschaft*). With this crucial shortcoming being discerned and evaluated, Hegel's authentic aim, according to Glenn Magee, is revealed as to "translate Böhme's eccentric, sensualistic theosophy into scientific terms."³¹ In the rest of this section, I will launch a comparative study of Böhme and Hegel. I will show that Hegel interprets and translates the important conceptions in Böhmean mysticism, particularly God's relationship with Lucifer, into conceptual and philosophical terms. The act of interpretation and translation exhibit Hegel's incorporation of the mystic ideas of

³⁰ In the period which *Aurora* was produced, there was widespread preoccupation of alchemical physicians. Böhme's language is tainted with alchemical terms because he was trying to keep pace with the medical alchemy and other kinds of alchemical studies around his time. For example, he adopts the triad of nature, Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt in his theology and he also uses the alchemical term *Salitter* to express the universal and absolute divine being of God. According to Böhme, *philosophia* is theology and alchemy; this is a kind of philosophy that sets out to observe nature, yet it comes to the conclusion that it consists of relationship of macrocosm and microcosm and signatures of things. See Andrew Weeks, "Böhme's Vocabulary and Terminology," *Aurora (Morgen Röte Im Aufgang, 1612) and Ein Gründlicher Bericht or A Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³¹ Magee, Glenn Alexander. *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition / Glenn Alexander Magee*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, 48.

Böhme. I will also demonstrate that although Hegel adopts certain Böhmean ideas, his perspective remains rooted in philosophy rather than mysticism. I will exemplify by showing that Hegel accommodates Böhme's mystic ideas about God's unity with opposition, particularly in his theory of the sensuous-certainty and self-consciousness in *PS*.

a. Böhme's Theosophy

Before delving into my argument, I will first provide a concise overview of Böhme's mysticism, which will later be contrasted with Hegel's interpretation. Böhme was a cobbler in Görlitz, in Lustasia on the borders of Bohemia. He experienced a mystical vision in 1600, where he suddenly found himself able to intuit the essence of all things for a quarter of an hour when he was enchanted by a glimmer of light reflected on a pewter vessel. The essence of all things is that God does not exist "outside" the world, but He is everything *in and about* the world. Böhme claims,

You must, however, elevate your mind in the Spirit, and consider how the whole of nature, with all the powers which are in nature, also extension, depth and height, also heaven and earth and all whatsoever is therein, and all that is above the heavens, is together the Body and Corporeity of God.³²

The core of Böhmean mysticism is summarized in philosophical language by Glenn Magee in "Hegel and Mysticism" as follows: "the conception of God not as transcendent and

³² Jakob Böhme, *Aurora (Morgen Röte Im Aufgang, 1612) and Ein Gründlicher Bericht or A Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, with a Translation, Introduction, and Commentary by Andrew Weeks; and Günther Bonheim in Collaboration with Michael Spang as Editor of *Gründlicher Bericht*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), chap. 2, § 16. This passage is also quoted in Magee 39.

static...impassive and complete, but as an active *process* unfolding within the world, within history.”³³

God demands self-manifestation to be God and the self-manifestation of God is possible only because God is the “self-separating unity of absolute opposites.”³⁴ Böhme explains, “No thing can become manifest to itself without opposition; for if it has nothing to withstand it, it always goes forward on its own account and does not go back within itself. But if it does not go back into itself as into that from which it originally arose, it knows nothing of its original state.”³⁵ In short, God needs the “other” for its own self-consciousness and to affirm its existence. Without self-consciousness, God’s knowledge will be incomplete and limited and thus will not be the One.

Böhme comes up with pairs of elements to give an account of how oppositions and the overcoming of oppositions regulate this world. He writes,

God is all. He is the Darkness and the Light, Love and Anger, Fire and Light, but He calls Himself God only as to the light of His love. There is an eternal *Contrarium* between darkness and light; neither comprehends the other and neither is the other, and yet there is but one essence or substance, though separated by pain; it is likewise so with the will, and yet there is no separable essence. One single principle is divided in this way, that one is in the other as a

³³ Magee, *Hegel and Hermetic Tradition*, 48.

³⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy MEDIEVAL and MODERN PHILOSOPHY Volume 3*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1840), 3:198. Henceforth *LHP*, followed by section number and page number.

³⁵ Jakob Böhme, *Vom Göttlicher Beschaulichkeit*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Will-Erich Peuckert (Struttgart: Frommann, 1955-61), vol. 4, chap. i, § 8. Hegel quotes this passage in *LHP* 3:203. Magee quotes this passage in *Hegel and Hermetic Tradition* 38.

nothing which yet exists; but it is not manifest in the property of that thing in which it is.³⁶

Darkness is in eternal contradiction with Light because the former is unmanifest and hidden while the latter is manifest and pure principle of openness. Darkness yearns for Light as the unmanifest strives to be manifest. In Darkness, there is the might of fire that is capable of transcending Darkness to Light. The principle of Darkness and Light shows the othering of the divine element into the element that is the opposite of itself. It shows that the claim “God is all” is plausible because every object and its contradictory part derive from one essence. In other words, God maintains his integrity and identity because all contradictions reconcile in him.

Böhme believes that things in the world unfold in the way of a triad. Hegel writes,

Böhme’s chief, and one may even say, his only thought—the thought that permeates all his works—is that of perceiving the holy Trinity in everything, and recognizing everything as its revelation and manifestation, so that it is the universal principle in which and through which everything exists.³⁷

Böhme coins seven “source spirits” that explains the process of divine self-manifestation. They are Sour, Sweet, Bitter, Heat, Love, Tone, and Body.³⁸ The first three spirits form a primordial Trinity. Sour (*Sauer*) embodies a negative force, reflecting the will of God to remain unmanifest. It represents a primal urge towards self-assertion without introspection. In contrast, Sweet (*Süss*) symbolizes a positive force, urging expansion and outward expression, countering Sour’s inward pull. Bitter (*Bitter*), the third spirit, serves as a synthesis of Sour and Sweet, facilitating outward

³⁶ Jakob Böhme, *Von wahrer Gelassenheit*, chap. ii. § 9, 10, p. 1673. Hegel quotes this passage in *LHP* 3:197.

³⁷ *LHP*, 3:196.

³⁸ Magee, 40.

expression while maintaining God's integrity. It embodies the movement of freely giving oneself while retaining a sense of identity.

Another important conception in Böhmean theosophy is the relationship between God the Father and the Son of God, and Hegel regards it as the permeating clue to interpret the holy Trinity that Böhme understands and explains. God the Father is the universal power in which all differences unite. On the other hand, God the Father is also the separation into all differences.³⁹ Böhme explains,

You should not imagine that God stands and holds sway in and above the heavens as a force without rationality or consciousness in him, like the sun which runs the ambit of its circle and emits heat and radiance regardless whether these harm or help the earth and its creatures, which indeed is what would happen if not for the planets and stars. Not so at all. This is not how the father is. He is rather an all powerful, all wise, all knowing, all seeing, all hearing, all smelling, all feeling, all tasting God, who in himself is gentle, friendly, mild, merciful, and joyous, indeed the very joy itself.⁴⁰

Böhme claims that the Divine Being of God consists of heavenly power, out of which all creatures, elements, and forces arise. However, it is not the case that every force in the Father is a single distinctive force standing alone. Instead, all forces (*kreffte*) exist interconnectedly with each other: they are in one another as if they are a single force (*krafft*). Böhme speaks of God the Father in the likeness of the myriad of stars:

If you contemplate the entire curriculum, the complete round circle of the stars,
you discern that it is the mother of all things, the nature from which all things

³⁹ *LHP*, 3:201.

⁴⁰ Jakob Böhme, *Aurora (Morgen Röte Im Auffgang, 1612) and Ein Gründlicher Bericht or A Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, with a Translation, Introduction, and Commentary by Andrew Weeks; and Günther Bonheim in Collaboration with Michael Spang as Editor of *Gründlicher Bericht*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), chap. iii. § 11, p. 149.

have arisen and within which all things dwell and abide, and through which everything is moved.⁴¹

Stars' innumerable and expansive nature corresponds to the omnipresent and all-encompassing God the Father. God is divided into the multitude, yet the multitude remains unified in the One that is God.

God the Father gives birth to the Son, which is the sun that is born out of the stars. Böhme contends that if one wants to envision the Son of God, one should not imagine that the Son is a different God than the Father. However, neither should one think that the Son is outside the Father or a particular part of the Father. The Divine Being of the Son of God is rather in the heart within the Father.

All the forces which are in the father belong to the father. Hence the Son is the heart of kernel in all the forces within the entire father. Moreover, he is the cause of surging joys in all the forces within the entire father. From the Son who is indeed the father's heart in all his forces arises the eternal celestial joy.⁴²

It is true for Böhme that "[w]ere the father to stop giving birth, the Son would no longer exist. And if the Son no longer shone within the father, the father would be a dark vale."⁴³

Paradoxically, in Böhmean theosophy, since God the Father needs the "other," an opposition, to realize itself, the Son, who is the direct opposite, gives birth to the Father and supplements His divine power. Drawing from his understanding of the Son of God from Böhme, Hegel goes on to write his own "Life Cycle of God" in Fragment 49, in which he advances from Böhme and interprets the Son as Lucifer, the evil out of God.

⁴¹ *Aurora*, chap. ii. § 15, p. 133.

⁴² *Aurora*, chap. iii. § 15, p. 151.

⁴³ *Aurora*, chap. iii. § 22, p. 155.

b. Hegel's Rewriting of the Myth of God and Lucifer

Hegel's Fragment 49 stands out in the collection inherited from Rosenkranz for its distinctive use of terminology reminiscent of Jakob Böhme, albeit without direct attribution. The text doesn't serve as a commentary on Böhme nor is it explicitly linked to any of his specific works, lacking direct quotes or references. Nonetheless, Hegel's discourse revolves around prominent terms from Böhme's lexicon, such as "*Grimm*" (anger) and "*Zorn Gottes*" (God's wrath), as well as the concept of "*Anderssein*" (Being-Other) applied to Lucifer and the *fiery* nature of his descent. The fragment appears to experiment with a blend of Hegelian form and Böhmean vocabulary, suggesting a departure from its original context while retaining its essence.⁴⁴ The fragment opens with:

God, having turned toward nature and expressed Himself in the pomp and dull repetition of its forms, became aware of His expansion . . . and became angry over it. Wrath is this formation, this contraction into an empty point. He finds Himself in this way, with His being poured out into the unending, restless infinity, where there is no present but an empty transcendence of limit, which always remains even as it is transcended.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Muratori, *The First German Philosopher*, 209.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke, Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808), Volume 5*, ed. Manfred Baum and Kurt Rainer Meist, in collaboration with Theodor Ebert, (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), 497. The original text is: "Gott, zur Natur geworden, hat sich ausgebreitet in die Pracht und den stummen Kreislauf der Gestaltungen, wird sich der Expansion, der verlorenen Punctualität bewußt und ergrimmt darüber. Der Grimm ist diese Bildung, dies Zusammennehmen in den leeren Punct. Er findet sich als solchen, und sein Wesen ausgeschüttet in die ruh'= und rastlose Unendlichkeit, wo keine Gegenwart, sondern ein wüstes Hinausfahren über die Grenze ist, die immer wird, wie sie aufgehoben ist." The English translation is from Glenn Alexander Magee, "Hegel and Mysticism," *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser, 253–80, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259.

The adjective angry (*grimm*) is very frequent in Böhme's writings, especially in *Aurora* as he describes the Devil's attitude toward the opposition of God and God's momentary furiousness toward the descent of the Devil. Hegel's use of "wrath" (*Zorn*) suggests God's will to remain a simple being-for-itself and unmanifest self-assertion because he is all-powerful and knowledgeable; it is similar to Böhme's use of Sour (*Sauer*) to represent the initial moment of the Divine Being of God that is self-closing and transcendent, with extreme inwardness and depth. God's wrath thus stands for the all-mightiness, stillness, and passivity of God before he becomes active in his creation of the world. In *LHP*, Hegel identifies the wrath of God (*Gott in Zorn*) as the first *Principium* in Böhme's mysticism.⁴⁶ God's wrath is also the engendering moment of his externalization, which is also the spirit of Lucifer in his jealousy of God's power. Böhme depicts the source of his sinful opposition to God: "Lucifer had the most beautiful and powerful body of all the princes of God in heaven...rose up resolved to triumph over the divine birth and raise itself above the heart of God."⁴⁷ Hegel writes in Fragment 49, "This wrath (of God), in that it is this going out/externalizing [*Hinausfahren*], is the destruction of nature (of Himself)."⁴⁸ God transitions to his Otherness through the Devil's separation from himself. Lucifer is the first-born son of God, the being-other and annihilating power of the Being-for-itself. Despite being the antithesis of God, Lucifer, born from God's wrath, which embodies the extreme inward contraction of God, also embodies God's self-knowledge, the "[self-awareness] of His expansion," the "I" (*Icheit*). On the other hand, Lucifer, the first-born son of God, since he parrots God's wrath in his jealousy and wishes to become exactly like God, represents the same

⁴⁶ *LHP*, 3:192.

⁴⁷ *Aurora*, chap. xiii. § 31-32, p. 385.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe*, 497. The original text is: "Dieser Grimm, indem er dies Hinausfahren ist, ist die Zerstörung der Natur."

inward imagining and fashioning of himself. Therefore, Lucifer and his descent represent nothing but a re-affirmation of God and a reformation of the absolute One. Lucifer's rebellion against God represents the self-separating aspect of God, since he, though separate from God, contributes to God's self-conscious existence. The "self-conscious, self-experienced, self-relating"⁴⁹ God symbolizes the absolute negativity since he does not require nor allow another positive existence. Nevertheless, precisely because God embodies a perfect Oneness, he is the absolute affirmation and positivity. God's rule is "the other is for one."⁵⁰ Self-externalization ends up in self-awareness, a process that approximates the journey of spirit in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This similarity is important in elucidating Hegel's philosophical revision of Böhme's thought and is going to be elaborated later in subsection d.

c. Hegel's Criticism of the Barbarity of Böhme and A Divine Actuality

As mentioned above, Hegel's depiction of the conflict between God and Lucifer, as well as the language he employs to articulate this struggle, appears to draw inspiration from Böhme. However, Fragment 49 takes an unexpected turn toward criticizing Böhme, a critique that also resurfaces in *Lectures on History of Philosophy*. Hegel offers a pointed critique of Böhme's philosophical system, denoting a notable presence of barbarity within it. This barbarity stems

⁴⁹ *LHP*, 3:197.

⁵⁰ *LHP*, 3:206.

primarily from Böhme's reliance on theological and mystical vocabularies. According to Hegel, these facets of Böhme's framework exhibit a fundamental lack of sophistication and refinement, failing to meet the standards of conceptual rigor and depth necessary for a scientific philosophical system. Philosophers like Epicureans and Bacon are categorized as skeptics or empiricists, as they all contend that human truth transcends the mundane activities of daily life. Böhme's distinct status is primarily attributed to his embrace of sensory experience and perception. Hegel writes that "for ordinary sensuous perception and inward feeling, praying and yearning, and the pictorial element in thought, allegories and such like, are in some measure held to be essential in Philosophy."⁵¹

Celilia Muratori, in his book *The First German Philosopher*, contends that Hegel employs a double meaning when discussing the perceived barbarity within Böhme's philosophy. The first meaning suggests the *naïvety* of Böhme's philosophical form, namely, his reliance on the limited and alchemical language that confuses readers about what is mythical and what is philosophical in the truth he claims. The second meaning of Böhme's barbarity emphasizes Böhme's *incapacity*. Böhme has a glimpse of the speculative truth, but he is unable to express himself in the pure form of thought, and transcend the coarse initiative of his contemplation. Muratori captures Hegel's nuanced attitude towards the case of Böhme's barbarity and explains that "Böhme's *Barbarei* is not just a limit, a negative element that troubles and confuses thought: while certainly problematic, it is at the same time a constituent element of his mystico-speculative philosophy."⁵² The *Barbarei* of Böhme manifests the extraordinary power of

⁵¹ *LHP*, 3:189.

⁵² Muratori, 246.

Böhme's mystical vision that bends reality to his conceptual imagination. This force exhibits a conflict between the significant content of this barbarous thinking and his incapacity to frame his thinking in a scientific clarity and philosophical form. Therefore, myth is here to reconcile the incapacity to speak the truth in the pure form of thought.

Hegel terms Böhme's God conceptually as the absolute and claims that the appropriation of sensualistic and mystic expressions, such as God, Lucifer, Sour, or Sweet, cannot capture the truth Böhme was driven for. The essence of truth in philosophy resides within the domain of thought and relies on conceptual presentation. It is because of this that the absolute can be fully expressed. If the absoluteness of God is devoid of concept, then any attempt to state God "give[s] free rein to its own arbitrariness."⁵³ Hegel writes, "Looked at from this point of view, Böhme is a complete barbarian, and yet he is a man who, along with his rude method of presentation, possesses a deep, concrete heart."⁵⁴

Hegel respects Böhme's almost impossible attempt to reveal the speculative truth in a forceful, intuitive, and imaginative language. Böhme demonstrates a robust and impressive effort to recognize the speculative truth as lies in actuality. Hegel writes,

As Böhme places the life, the movement of absolute existence in the heart, so does he regard all conceptions as being in a condition of actuality; or he makes use of actuality as Notion, that is to say he forcibly takes natural things and sensuous qualities to express his ideas rather than the determinations of the Notion.⁵⁵

⁵³ *PS*, ¶10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ *LHP*, 3:192.

Notion is another name Hegel has for the speculative truth. In this context, it means the absolute, Hegel's scientific term for God. Böhme's extraordinary undertaking incarnates the absolute in the realm of actuality and reveals that the absolute cannot stay unconditioned but has to be actualized, otherwise it won't stay absolute. Böhme's mysticism is thought-provoking for Hegel because of his remarkable and forceful endeavor to merge the absolute with actuality. Böhme yields actuality, in this context meaning the ordinary objects and appearance in reality, into abstract and mystical form of the absolute. These objects no longer possess the sensuous significance that belongs to them. For example, the term Sour no longer means an acidic taste or an unpleasant person or thing; instead, it means an inward state of God. However, the rid of the sensuous significance of these expressions does not transcend them into metaphysical and philosophical language, since they preserve the barbarous imageries that are central to these sensuous expressions. For example, the term Sweet means a positive force that opens for outward expansion, preserving the meaning of the pleasing taste, contrary to Sour. Hegel writes that "[f]or instance, sulphur and such like are not to him the things that we so name, but their essence; or the Notion has this form of actuality."⁵⁶ Böhme's employment of the sensuous modes as crucial language for his philosophical articulation is an indication of his underlying principle that these sensuous forms have the imageries as their essence and not their practical properties and functions. These imageries, on the other hand, are interpreted by Hegel as the potential forms of the absolute. In this regard, it can be observed that Böhme sees actuality in two separations: 1) the actuality is the reality sensuously perceived, and 2) the actuality is the ground of the Notion, which expresses the absolute. The fact that actuality expresses the absolute is analogous to Böhme's central idea that God is present in everything. Since God actualizes itself in concrete

⁵⁶ *LHP*, 3:192-193.

incarnations, the sensuous reality comprises both the form of its perceived existence and the divine essence.

For Hegel, the absolute epitomizes the overcoming of the subject-object and essence-existence opposition, and it best captures this truth only if it is expressed philosophically. Hegel writes, “The simple substantial identity of the absolute is indeterminate, or rather in it every determinateness of *essence* and *Existence*, or *being* in general, as well as of *reflection*, has dissolved itself.”⁵⁷ The absolute, representing the absolute unity of oppositions, serves as the reconciliation for the determinate contrasting moments. Conversely, each determinate moment reflects the absolute. The concept of the absolute bears compelling similarities with Böhme’s conception of God. Both theories articulate a concept that includes multiplicity, while each determinate element within this concept also reflects its entirety. Although this way of considering actuality bears the seed of the speculative truth, Böhme’s attempt to connect actuality with the absolute without mediation reduces this bold philosophical attempt to a resolution in mysticism. Instead of devising methods to *feel* the truth, as Böhme does, Hegel aims to understand the conditions that enable the possibility of knowing the truth and grasping such truth in thinking form. Hegel writes that “it is only in the Notion, in thought, that philosophy can find its truth, and that the Absolute can be expressed and likewise is as it is in itself.”⁵⁸ Hegel, as a philosopher, seeks to translate Böhme’s mystical language into terms of science (*Wissenschaft*).

⁵⁷ *SL*, 531.

⁵⁸ *LHP*, 3:189.

d. Hegel's Interpretation and Translation of Böhme

Hegel's primary critique of Böhme revolves around the latter's elucidation of the connection between the absolute and the actual: the absolute needs to be actualized and the actual is a reflection of the absolute. Although revealing the interconnection and inter-implication between the absolute and the actual places Böhme close to the core of the speculative truth, Hegel contends that Böhme's forceful merge of the absolute with the actual lacks conceptual mediation. The pivotal aspect of this mediation, as Hegel highlights, is (self-) consciousness. (Self-)consciousness endeavors to become absolute during its journey toward self-actualization. In order to become actual, (self-)consciousness needs to reach its wholeness, embracing all facets of existence. It also needs to undergo an externalization process, in which it becomes the "other" for itself, in order to actualize itself. Böhme's claim that God needs opposition for its self-assertion is analogous to Hegel's conception of "becoming-other-to-itself," or externalization.

In his commentary on Böhmean philosophy in *LHP*, Hegel regards the birth of the Son of God as the "othering" of God the Father, that is also to say, the first opposition and externalization that God experiences and overcomes in its self-actualization. Hegel is interested in Böhme's word play on "*Ichts*," meaning something. He quotes from Böhme in his discussion of the Son of God: "From such a revelation of powers in which the will of the eternal One contemplates itself, flows the understanding and the knowledge of the something [*Ichts*], since the eternal will contemplates itself in the something [*Ichts*]." ⁵⁹ *Ichts* is a play on the words "*Nichts*" (nothing) and *Ich* (Ego). According to Hegel, the something, *Ichts*, is the positivity, the

⁵⁹ Jakob Böhme, *Von gottlicher Beschaulichkeit*, chap. ii. § 4, 5, p. 1756, qtd. in *LHP*, 3:205.

immediate and simple being-for-itself. However, thanks to its immediacy and simplicity, which requires no externalization process to confirm its being-for-itself, the *Ichts* is thereupon negative. Yet, as the wordplay on *Ich* (Ego) shows, *Ichts* contains another positive element in itself, namely self-consciousness. The Son of God, as Hegel contends, is the concept that encompasses the meanings of the *Ichts*, namely, the I, the consciousness, and self-consciousness. God the Father feels the necessity for the “something,” a determinate form that directly opposes his absolute Oneness. As a result, in an effort to consume the *Ichts*, God the Father alienates his form and destroys his universal nature. But this consumption is designed for him to re-consummate with himself and preserve his divine Being-for-itself. Hegel calls the *Ichts*, the Son of God, as the separator of God that engenders God’s self-differentiating process. “The ‘other’ of God is thus the image of God.”⁶⁰

According to Hegel, “Knowledge and truth are not to be found by asking questions about the object, but by seeking knowledge and self-knowledge of the capacities and activities of thinking itself.”⁶¹ Throughout the sections on consciousness to self-consciousness, Hegel presents his theory of the thinking self, asserting that the subject’s formation inherently desires the elimination of external entities, prioritizing only itself. At the root of all the different stages of development of consciousness, as well as Spirit, lays the primary and Luciferian drive to absorb everything into itself and have complete possession of all the objects and its own subjectivity. The impulse to emanate absolute negativity around itself, aiming to become absolute and alone, finds its foundation in Böhme’s notion of the wrath of God. To explain this

⁶⁰ *LHP*, 3:205.

⁶¹ Karen NG. “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 1 (2009): 139–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40387730>, 139.

connection, I must scrutinize further the nature of this absolute negativity and how it functions in the *Phenomenology*.

Sense-certainty is the most initial form of consciousness where the impulse to dominate or negate external beings first emerges within consciousness. The primary purpose of consciousness as it first appears on the scene is to maintain its uncomplicated, absolute universality, perceiving everything else as existing solely for its own benefit. Consciousness at the stage of sensuous-certainty possesses two contents. The first content is the “this” of the object, namely, the presence of the object in concrete reality. The second content is the subject that confronts the object. Currently, this sense-consciousness deludes itself in being hand in hand with the real particular objects and being face to face with the definiteness of the concrete world.

Nevertheless, sensuous certainty is only capable of comprehending the universality of reality.

When sensuous certainty experiences a “here” or “now,” this “here” or “now” always points to a universal “here” and “now” that persists through different variations of itself. A particular sunrise at the start of the day indicates and represents the generic sunrise every day. The true object of sensuous-certainty is its own abstract conception of the “outside” world. Since for sensuous-certainty the world expands in its imagination, it represents the most inward and negative form of thinking: the case of I think I think about the world. The paradox of sensory-certainty lies in the fact that it doesn’t engage with actual sensory beings but rather with abstract representations of them. It regards its own conjurations as the threats posed by another abstract universality, which it wants to eradicate with the intention of preserving its pureness and simplicity. Hegel’s description of sensuous-certainty and its absolute negativity agrees with Böhme’s conception of “Sour,” which represents an extreme inward pulling force, a shut-off, and a complete negation, while they differ in form.

Hegel's account of self-consciousness involves the same process of the cancellation or the abolishment of the otherness. Hegel states that self-consciousness is essentially desire, is fundamentally a movement that directs to something that it wishes to overcome and incorporate. Self-consciousness is desire, the essence of which requires it to seek for the nullity of the other for the preservation of itself. It can only be certain of itself by sublating the other, exhibiting itself as a self-sufficient entity in an individual and objective manner. For this reason, "self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."⁶² This doubling of self-consciousness is key to understanding the completion of the concept of self-consciousness. There are three moments in which the becoming of self-consciousness unfolds. At the genesis, the pure "I," bereft of differentiation, stands as the immediate object of self-consciousness—an unadulterated essence, untouched by external distinctions. Yet, in the Hegelian dialectics, this immediacy reveals itself as absolute mediation, since it comes to be through its desiring force directing to the other. Desire, an insatiable yearning, propels self-consciousness towards an object outside itself, initiating a sublating process that transcends the boundaries between itself and the other object. The satisfaction of desire marks an inverted reflection into the self, a grasping that renders self-consciousness consciously certain of its own existence. This certainty, however, unveils a profound revelation—a doubled reflection, the intricate interplay of self-consciousness with its own mirrored image, or another self-consciousness. Hegel beckons us to comprehend this doubled reflection not as a mere duplication but as the essence of living self-consciousness—a self-sufficient object, intricately positing its own otherness within the realm of isolation. Here, self-sufficiency converges with negativity, for in its absolute negation of everything beyond itself, self-consciousness paradoxically becomes the very universal fluidity of

⁶² *PS*, ¶ 175.

its own life. As a result, the negation turns out to become a positive affirmation. The conflict between self-consciousness and another self-consciousness mirrors the dynamic between God and the Son of God, Lucifer. Each entity perceives itself as the ultimate truth of the absolute and seeks to assimilate everything within its domain. Recall that in *LHP*, Hegel appreciates Böhmean conception of the Son of God and reads it as the separation of self-consciousness from God, another self-consciousness. He writes, “The Son...is thus...self-consciousness.”⁶³ God’s wrath empowers God to absorb Lucifer back into itself, which is in parallel with the desire of self-consciousness, the desire to obtain absolute positivity through an absolute negative force. Recall the previous quote on Hegel’s discussion of God’s wrath: “[It is] expressed that which we know as the absolute negativity—that is the self-conscious, self-experienced, the self-relating negativity which is therefore absolute affirmation.”⁶⁴ As emphasized by Böhme regarding God’s consummation with its opposition, he writes, “No thing can become manifest to itself without opposition; for if it has nothing to withstand it, it always goes forward on its own account and does not go back within itself. But if it does not go back into itself as into that from which it originally arose, it knows nothing of its original state.”⁶⁵ In the same way, self-consciousness is revealed to itself through opposition.

⁶³ *LHP*, 3:205.

⁶⁴ *LHP*, 3:197.

⁶⁵ Jakob Böhme, *Vom Göttlicher Beschaulichkeit*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Will-Erich Peuckert (Struttgart: Frommann, 1955-61), vol. 4, chap. i, § 8. Hegel quotes this passage in *LHP* 3:203. Magee quotes this passage in *Hegel and Hermetic Tradition* 38.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have read Hegel's concept of actuality and its relation to the absolute as the philosopher's rewriting of Böhme's mystical conception of the absolute-actual relationship. My goal has been to show that despite Hegel's concept of the absolute being isomorphic with Böhme's notion of God, they link with actuality in different ways. For Hegel, the process of actualization is a process of becoming absolute and *total* in itself. To present itself in its actuality, the entity becomes "other" to itself and then immediately overcomes this opposition. This dialectical process exhibits remarkable similarity with the self-manifestation of God in Böhmean mysticism. To realize its singular universality, God undergoes externalization. Yet, this process is merely a means for God to reunify with itself, achieving self-affirmation.

In Hegel's system, actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) acquires its absoluteness because it includes both the aspect of the conceptual and the aspect of the empirical, connecting the realm of pure thinking with reality. It is an embodiment of Hegel's main concern of usurping the traditional subject-object, essence-existence, and being-reflection dichotomies. The absoluteness of Hegel's absolute idealism lies in his practice of considering the empirical not as external to thinking but always already thought. Similarly, he views the conceptual not as independent from the

empirical world but always entangled in the relationship with *real* experience. However, Böhme, as a mystic, does not acknowledge that concepts and rationality are crucial mediations between the absolute and the actual. For him, the absolute can be perceived directly from ordinary actual objects. According to Hegel, the mystic makes a forceful attempt to connect the absolute directly with actuality without mediation and mistakes the sensuous for its conceptual representation. For this reason, Hegel criticizes Böhme for succumbing to what he perceives as barbarous intuitions that the mystic claims to reveal the Divine Essence. Fundamentally, Hegel recognizes that the mystic possesses an insight into the speculative truth: that the absolute does not exist in abstraction but actively seeks to know and manifest itself through actuality. However, Hegel contends that philosophy should refrain from becoming entangled in the divinity of the absolute. Instead, it should present itself as science, or *Wissenschaft*, grounded in conceptual rigor.

Even though Hegel attempts to establish a philosophy of the absolute, he regards *Wissenschaft* as an exoteric study. He writes that science should not be “the esoteric possession of only a few individuals...without general intelligibility;” it must “at the same time exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and possessed by everybody.”⁶⁶ Robert Pippin highlights the exoterism of Hegelianism and suggests that it can potentially be read as a “phenomenological anthropology demonstrating the essentially historical, self-made nature of human being.”⁶⁷ Hegelian idealism is interested in the manifestation of speculative principles in actuality and the substantiation of rationality in human society. However, when discussing practical entities and institutions, Hegel portrays them as mere expressions or deviations from the

⁶⁶ *PS*, ¶ 13.

⁶⁷ Pippin, “You Can’t Get There from Here,” 53.

absolute. Marx interprets this as indicating that in Hegelian philosophy, concrete entities only matter insofar as they exist and are discussed in the form of thought.⁶⁸ That suggests a potential paradox in Hegel's account of actuality for the purpose of an absolute ideal.

Further exploration can be done by interrogating the contradiction in Hegel's system. Despite striving for synthesis, Hegelian philosophy still regards the opposition between idea and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, internal and external, and similar dichotomies as significant sources of philosophical inquiry.⁶⁹ Hegel views the discussion of external objects and institutions as estrangements from the subjective mind of the world and exists only as matters for rationality to substantiate itself. Jean Wahl, at the end of "Mediation, Negativity, and Separation" in which he tries to understand the spirit in Hegelian philosophy, even says, "Phenomenology in its entirety is, one could say, a movement of dis-incarnation of the particular, which is explicated through the inverse movement thanks to which the universal was incarnate, and became truly universal by becoming a particular, while being incarnate."⁷⁰ Adorno, in his "World Spirit and Natural History," discusses the aspect of Hegel siding with the universal in Hegelian dialectics, saying that, "the particular would be the universal, because it can find no definition of its particularity except by way of the universal only; without the universal...the particular is

⁶⁸ Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General, Marx, 1844," Marxists.org, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>.

⁶⁹ Marx points out the contradiction within Hegelian speculative philosophy, and says, "The *estrangement*, [*Entfremdung*] which therefore forms the real interest of the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of this alienation [*Entäußerung*], is the opposition of *in itself* and *for itself*, of *consciousness and self-consciousness*, of *object and subject* – that is to say, it is the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself." See Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General, Marx, 1844."

⁷⁰ Jean Wahl, "Mediation, Negativity, and Separation," *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Dennis King Keenan, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 17.

nothing.”⁷¹ Along the same line, he continues, “When the universal is defined, it is the particular,”⁷² echoing Marx’s criticism that only in purely abstract philosophical thinking is the particular grasped in his philosophy. Hegelian philosophy seems to be embracing the exoteric and profane entities in the world while displaying an esoterism that directs knowledge to an absolute ideal.

⁷¹ Theodore W. Adorno, “World Spirit and Natural History: An Excursion to Hegel,” *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Dennis King Keenan, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 239.

⁷² Ibid.

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