THE DIVINE SELF-MEDIATION IN THE UNIVERSE: EUTELEOLOGY MEETS GERMAN IDEALISM

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Abstract: The paper compares the non-standard theistic notion of God as presented by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk in their so-called "euteleological" concept of God with idealistic, especially Hegelian and post-Hegelian, concepts of the divine. Both frameworks not only share striking similarities, based on their guiding intuitions, but also have remarkably parallel problems that have already been discussed in 19th-century speculative German theology in the aftermath of German Idealism. The article offers some proposals to strengthen the euteleological concept of God metaphysically — based on some insights coming from post-Hegelian discussions.

I. INTRODUCTION

That the concept of a personal God should be placed under scrutiny is not just a recent idea or development, but, rather a basic tenet found for example in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's highly disputed remarks on the notion of a divine governance of the world, in which he proposes that a personal concept of God nearly always falls prey to superstition and eventually becomes religiously inadequate.

In the past two decades, a slightly different set of motives has fostered a comparable tendency to move beyond the notion of a personal God.[1] We can distinguish between motives stemming from: (1) perceived inconsistencies

1 For a survey, see Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, "Introduction: Alternative Conceptions of Divinity and Contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016); Thomas Schärtl, Christian Tapp, and Veronika Wegener, eds., *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God: Classical Theism, Personal Theism, and Alternative Concepts of God* (Aschendorff Verlag, 2016).

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among divine attributes (for instance, divine goodness, divine omnipotence, or divine omniscience); (2) metaphysical demands of naturalism and contemporary views on the origin of the universe or the evolution of life; and (3) evidential problems that any kind of supernaturalism, which seems to be a necessary ingredient of personal theism, must face.

II. THE EUTELEOLOGICAL PICTURE

The motives for the alternative notion of God that John Bishop and Ken Perszyk have developed come from all the above-mentioned sources, that is, their concept of God in opposition to the personal omniGod conception of the divine. Over the years, Bishop's and Perszyk's initial criticism of *classical* theism has faded and became, instead, directed towards contemporarily identifiable versions of *personal* theism (as found in the writings of Richard Swinburne, Paul Moser, and others) — i.e., concepts that hold that God is an incorporeal, almighty, everlasting person who has intentions, motives, develops a will, and behaves like an agent (who can be held morally responsible).[2] In their proposal, an axiological aspect — as a certain consequence of perfect-being theology — is still alive, but understood in a more specific and focused way, for God is the *id quod maius cogitari nequit* only in a very specified understanding, and for reasons that have to be unfolded. Ethical requirements take the lead, as seen below:

> Divine greatness is *onto-ethical*. It is greatness that should not be assessed against *merely* metaphysical criteria of greatness '*qua* being': *ethical* criteria of greatness must also be met. Still, ontological greatness must certainly be part of the mix — but it is important to challenge the assumption that ontological greatness *has* to be greatness with respect to a being's degree of dependence or independence *along the dimension of productive causality*. We warn against assuming that God must be that than which a greater producer cannot be thought — an Unproduced Producer of all else.[3]

Nevertheless, Bishop and Perszyk seem to incorporate the most fundamental insights of classical theism into their own concept as well, especially, classical

2 Cf. John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "The Divine Attributes and Non-personal Conceptions of God", *Topoi* 36, no. 4 (2017), esp. 609–610.

3 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 5*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (OUP, 2014), esp. 13.

theism's emphasis on divine *uniqueness*, to a certain extent, against the plausibility of personal theistic notions of God:

> [A] uniquely supernatural person still shares something with finite persons, since God's — agent-causal — relation to the universe is just of the same type of relation as finite agent-causes (supposedly) have to the events intrinsic to their actions. The personal omniGod conception, arguably, fails to capture the fullness of divine uniqueness. So long as God counts as an item — albeit highly exalted — God is still one item amongst many, and that is inconsistent with God's having the ultimate status 'he' must have to be God.[4]

So, if God is not a person, what is God's role and nature? In a very early attempt, Bishop tried to disentangle the notion of God from God's traditional role as the creator of the universe:

> God could be the Universe's ultimate explainer by being its overall final cause in the absence of the Universe having any efficient cause. The Universe would then be explicable in terms of its point. God would be the ultimate explainer, not by standing outside the Universe as its efficient cause, but by being its teleological culmination within it […].[5]

This sounds as if, based on the euteleological concept of God, there is *no* creation story to tell. In comparison, Bishop's and Perszyk's more recent answer to the creation-problem is more subtle and sophisticated: only by adopting a very *narrow* interpretation of efficient causality will one be required to rule out God as equivalent to an agent that (by efficient causality) brings about the existence of the universe. However, in a widened and liberalized interpretation[6] of the ways in which efficient causality might work, there is enough space for regarding the universe as a "divine creation" of sorts: creation is a cipher for the *permanent dependency* of the development of the universe on God as its goal:

> How is God to be identified under the euteleological conception? Under this conception, God's causing the Universe is understood as a matter of its realizing the divine purpose, namely the supreme good, rather than as a matter of super-natural productive agency. That may seem to make the ultimate explainer the supreme good itself. But euteleology does not make that direct Platonist identification of God with the supreme good. A closer

4 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 7.

5 John Bishop, "Towards a Religiously Adequate Alternative to OmniGod Theism", *Sophia* 48, no. 4 (2009), esp. 429.

6 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 614.

> candidate is identification as the Universe's being such that it realizes the supreme good, since this is what ultimately explains the Universe's existence.[7]

Within this picture, God is transcendent to, as well as immanent in, the universe: God is transcendent insofar as he is the yet-to-be-realized ultimate *telos* of the universe[8] and represents the *supreme good* to which everything is directed; but he is also immanent because the ultimate *telos* of the universe is — eventually — a stage of the universe.[9] Based on God's role as yet-to-be-realized *telos* and final stage of the universe, Bishop and Perszyk can claim that their proposal is monistic, but not pantheistic.[10]

In their proposal, there is also some space for what we might call "divine agency or activity," in another widened interpretation of the relevant concepts: divine actions are instantiations of the ultimate *telos* of the universe, alongside the realization of this very *telos* throughout the history of the cosmos.[11] This bi-directional perspective, which claims that God is as much the transcendent *telos* of the universe as he is present in the immanent realizations of the ultimate good, covers another traditional idea, which says that God must be perceived as an all-encompassing reality:

> On the euteleological conception, the divine may be identified not just with Love, as the supreme good which is the ultimate *telos* of all that exits, but, at the same time, with reality at its most profound or ultimate — that is to say, with reality as inherently directed upon the supreme good, and actually existing only because that end is fulfilled. It is thus essential to the ontological priority of the divine on the euteleological conception that particular instantiations or incarnations of it do not exhaust the divine — though that there are such incarnations is necessary, since the actuality of the Universe cannot be explained as existing to realize its *telos* if its *telos* were not actually realized. But the divine transcends its particular manifestations through its

7 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "A Euteleological Conception of Divinity and Divine Agency", in *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God*: *Classical Theism, Personal Theism, and Alternative Concepts of God*, ed. Thomas Schärtl, Christian Tapp and Veronika Wegener (Aschendorff Verlag, 2016), 221.

8 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 11–12.

9 Cf. *ibid.*

10 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 615.

11 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 13, 15, 17.

> status as all-encompassing reality existing for the sake of, and only because of, the realization of love, the supreme good.[12]

Most recently, Bishop and Perszyk gave the traditional attributes of classical theism (notably divine *necessity* and divine *simplicity*) a specifically apophatic reading: that there is no adequate metaphysical category into which the concept God can be placed.[13] For God, as the ultimate *telos*, is not just a supreme idea (seen as an abstract object). Neither is he identical to the universe as such (which would deprive him of his teleologically necessary distance) and, clearly, nor is he an entity in alignment with or in relation to other entities either:

> [What] *is* God […]; *with what* may God be identified? Our reply is that this query assumes that God is some kind of, uniquely special, entity — an assumption that euteleology explicitly denies.[14]

At first glance, the euteleological God seems to be an ideal as well as the very realization of that ideal in the universe. As an ideal, God would not be identical to the universe as the ultimate realization of the *supreme good* within the universe. God, however, would seem to be identical with a certain stage of the universe. Despite the fact that God as the ultimate *telos* has some sort of transcendence, there is no way of picturing God *without* the universe from the euteleological viewpoint. Would it follow then that, based on this approach, God's concrete reality (which is a necessary aspect of his nature as a realized *telos* and ideal) somehow depends on the universe, while — seen from a different angle — the development of the universe, directed towards the ultimate good as its driving force, depends on God?

This slightly paradoxical impression is exactly the point where we should refer back to German idealism and the 19th-century discussions on God's personhood — emerging within Protestant theology and theology-friendly philosophy in the aftermath of the reception and criticism of Hegel's concept of the divine. Bishop's and Perszyk's endeavor could face the very same opposition: the personal omniGod concept, in defense of the adversary's counter-

12 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016), esp. 121.

13 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 612; Bishop and Perszyk, "A Euteleological Conception of Divinity and Divine", 222.

14 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 618.

maneuver, eventually revolves around the question of whether a metaphysically robust notion of divine being[15] is to be found in such an overall monist layout or whether God is merely an anthropologically relevant metaphor for ultimate concern (*love*) and human (or cosmic) progress.[16] The adversary's litmus test for Hegel, as well as for Bishop and Perszyk, can be identified as the question of whether there is enough space for divine transcendence — seen as some kind of *divine independence* — traditionally described as divine aseity and ontologically conceptualized as divine substantiality. In the euteleological as well as in the Hegelian picture, the history of the cosmos as well as the history of mankind seem to give birth to the Godhead while, at the same time, the universe exists *because of* the Godhead (in a widened interpretation of causality). While Hegel adopts Trinitarian theology to resolve the problem of God's transcendence in immanence, Bishop and Perszyk either face a bootstrapping objection[17] or turn to a more explicit *axiarchic* perspective, which holds that the reason for the universe's existence is nothing else but the goodness of its existence that might be measured against its directedness towards an ultimate goal. As a third alternative already alluded to, they could move the euteleological concept of God in a more Trinitarian and Christological[18] direction. Perhaps, Hegel's overall picture of God as a *living idea being a substance in becoming a subject within the realm of finite subjectivity* — an idea which states that God is in need of a self-mediation that is based on the development of life as well as the history of mankind — can give a hint as to where to find a suitable concept — a concept that fulfills the above-mentioned requirements in order to flesh out God's independence while reconciling it with his dependence on the development of the universe.

15 For such a rather orthdoxy-friendly interpretation of Hegel see Carl F. Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie von Gott und dem Menschen und vom dem Gott-Menschen* (Duncker und Humblot, 1838), esp. 121–125, 128–135.

16 Cf. Walter Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion: Studien zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie Hegels* (Frommann-Holzboog, 1986), 361–370, 381–385.

17 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 614.

18 *Ibid.*

III. THE DIAGNOSTICS THAT LEAD TO EUTELEOLOGY

Bishop's initial criticism of (personal) omniGod theism starts as a highlighting of certain problems that are well-known as intricate questions of religious epistemology: on what basis is it perceived as *rational* to believe in the existence of God (and on what basis would such a belief be called *non-rational*)? It has become clear that the shape, quality, and amount of evidence we may be able to propose in favor of our religious convictions crucially depends on *what* we believe God to be. Furthermore, it might also be the case that a certain concept of God severely weakens or undermines the weight of evidence we would otherwise have, if our belief in God would force us to agree to something that — outside the area of religious convictions — may be unacceptable for various reasons. Bishop underlines what seems to be widely acknowledged — if one signs off on the most basic insights Immanuel Kant (among others) has developed within moral philosophy — namely, that faith-commitments and moral judgments must *coalesce together*, i.e., that mature morality requires the same mature self-reflection regarding one's own religious convictions.[19] In other words, it is highly problematic to have a certain religious conviction if this very conviction severely hurts our mostly undisputed moral judgments or our highly esteemed ethical theories. To put it the other way, something must have gone wrong in our conceptual networks if religious convictions (like a specific concept of divinity) would hold us to believe what is morally problematic or even depraved. If we, nevertheless, should get thrown into such conceptually muddy waters, from a contemporary point of view, it would be absolutely prohibited to give up our moral commitments and convictions. Rather, we would have to renounce certain religious ideas — not just for the sake of honoring "pure reason," but also, for the sake of honoring a (religiously and axiologically adequate) concept of God, which necessarily entails that God cannot be conceived of being anything less than the "epitome of the moral law" and pure goodness.

Having established such a philosophical perspective, it becomes clear why Bishop identifies the problem of theodicy as the most problematic aspect of personal omniGod theism: if for personal omniGod theism the only viable

19 Cf. John Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic Commitments: Exploring an Alternative to Classical Theism", *Philosophia* 35, no. 3–4 (2007).

option in facing the problem of evil is a combination of the so-called greater good defense with the so-called free-will defense then, inevitably, we have to picture God as a sovereign who proceeds on a rather utilitarian and consequentialist basis.[20] He permits natural and moral evil to occur in order to, hopefully, safeguard or bring about a greater good — which might be something one does not yet understand and which is, apparently, more important than the fate of the suffering victim. However, such a rather wildly utilitarian view runs counter not only to our modern-day ethical convictions (which are inclined to refer to unalterable rights that must not be violated — not even for the sake of a greater good); it also stands against the very ethics established within the familiar framework of religious convictions. For a religious ethics — here Bishop and Perszyk take mainly the Christian tradition into account — is built on the idea of mutually supportive, loving relationships, and of attitudes that always and under any circumstance seek the flourishing and well-being of *each and every* individual — an attitude that firmly rules out the permissibility of using one person's suffering and pain for the advancement of another person, let alone of an impersonal entity.[21]

In a revised version of a *Logical Argument from Evil*, Bishop and Perszyk point out that, at least within the framework of a religiously-based ethics, the prerequisites of greater-good defenses or free-will defenses lead to severe conceptual conflicts:

> If one requires, for instance, that a morally perfect God not only bring about the maximum good, but also ensure that he is *good to* each person (and perhaps each sentient being), then a viable speculative theodicy will have to show how God might meet this requirement. Otherwise, the logical possibility of God's having sufficient moral reason for evil will not have been established […].[22]

Underlying these conceptual conflicts (that eventually lead to a *reductio* argument) is a double role the omniGod apparently must play within the framework of traditional theism: God is regarded as the ultimate cause of everything and is, therefore, ultimately responsible for any event and being

20 Cf. Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic", 394.

21 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", 112–13; see also John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 70, no. 2 (2011), esp. 110.

22 Bishop and Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", 115.

that originates within the universe (evil and suffering included), but he is also conceived as the one who is supposed to bring healing and grant liberation from all evil and salvation. He is like a doctor who is eager to cure the diseases he has ultimately brought upon his people himself.[23] Early on, Bishop states that there remains an unbearable dilemma for traditional theism. (*Please note* that the following remark is directed towards classical theism, while — assessed from the most recent writings — its observation is mainly true for personal theism):

> When we reflect on what seems morally problematic about classical theism, I think we find a basic assumption coming under severe pressure — namely, that God is *both* the supreme individual personal agent on whose creative activity all else depends *and also* the One who actively brings good from evil, redeems, restores, forgives, reconciles.[24]

Once we approach this diagnosis from the point of basic logic, we can reshape Bishop's main intuition as a double destructive dilemma — using our intuition of what it means to be *morally praiseworthy* on the one hand and to be *worthy of worship* on the other:

(1) If God is the omnipotent sovereign, he cannot be morally praiseworthy in every respect. AND if God is the most praiseworthy redeemer, THEN he cannot be the first cause of everything — a cause on which everything depends. [Bishop's premise].

(2) God is morally praiseworthy in every respect AND he is the first cause of everything [omniGod theism].

(3) God is not the omnipotent sovereign AND he is not the most praiseworthy redeemer. [from 1) and 2) Destructive Dilemma].

If we replace God's *ethical praiseworthiness* with his being worthy of worship, we arrive at the very same result:

23 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 618. For a condensed analysis of their main logical argument from evil and related sidesteps see also Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrors: To What End?", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016), esp. 129–130.

24 Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic", 397; see also Bishop, "Towards a Religiously Adequate Alternative to OmniGod", 426–28.

(1) If God it the omnipotent sovereign he cannot be worthy of worship in every respect AND if God is the one redeemer who is truly worthy of worship, THEN he cannot be the first cause of everything — a cause on which everything depends [Bishop's premise].

(2) God is the one redeemer who is most worthy of worship AND he is the first cause of everything [omniGod theism].

(3) God is not the omnipotent sovereign AND he is not the most praiseworthy redeemer [from 1) and 2), Destructive Dilemma].

Of course, many discussions of the problem of theodicy as well as an abundant interpretation of how to squeeze human responsibility into the ultimate responsibility of an omni-powerful Godhead on which everything depends might try to escape this dilemma by arguing against the credibility of Bishop's first premise. But, despite these attacks, the most important intuition, which is couched in the first premise of each argument, won't disappear: namely, that the personal sovereign omniGod, on whose activity and will everything causally depends, won't be able to meet the most fundamental ethical standards — at least not those standards that are established within religious convictions that picture God as the epitome of love and the source of flourishing.[25] Consequently, not even the eschatological promise of ultimate salvation will be able to resolve this problem:

> So if God does finally bring participants in those evils into the joy of eternal relationship with him, he will be coping with the effects of evils *that he himself ultimately produced*.[26]

Bishop's and Perszyk's answer to the dilemma in which the personal omniGod seems to get unavoidably trapped is *euteleology*: God's role, as the ultimate salvific force, must be established over and (perhaps) against his traditional position as the ultimate (efficient causal) source of being. Bishop and Perszyk give traditional personal attributes of the divine a rather anti-realistic reading, but according to their multi-layered proposal, God is still a reality (but clearly *not a thing among other things*): God is the *supreme good* for and the *ultimate telos* of the universe. First of all, he serves as the truth-maker of value-ascriptions if they presuppose a standard of unrestricted goodness.

25 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", 122.
26 Bishop and Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", 109.

However, he is also the driving force of the realization of ultimate goodness and love *in* the universe. Salvation, in their view, is nothing else but the ultimate reign of goodness and love in the universe. Based on their criticism of supernaturalism and on their endorsement of a rather monistic and naturalistic worldview, salvation, however, has to remain a this-worldly affair.[27] There is no space for an afterlife outside of or beyond the universe wherein the ultimate salvation is supposed to take place.

IV. HEGEL'S PARALLEL DIAGNOSTICS

In his *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is dealing with the problems and prospects of a personal God — in his words, of a Godhead that is conceived of as an individual subject — in a surprisingly parallel way. Of course, his treatise of these problems is steeped in his idealistic and dialectical reconstruction of the history of religion — a reconstruction some might find highly artificial or rather schematic. Despite the fact that some of his considerations might not be historically accurate, the layout of Hegel's assessments will, nevertheless, help us to get closer to one of the burdens of personal theism: the problem of *anthropomorphism* — a problem Hegel touches on in discussing the classical Greek and Roman religions, as well as the God concept of some of the Hebrew scriptures. Hegel's assessments could — on first attempt — serve as support for the critical evaluations of personal omniGod theism, upon which the euteleological perspective is built. Moreover, Hegel's somewhat metaphysically more robust but, nevertheless, monistic understanding of divinity might present a pattern, which sheds some light on the requirements, conceptual promises, and the possible range of monistic non-standard-theisms — euteleology included.

In his schematic history of the evolution of religious thought, Hegel regards the transformation from the Indian gods to the Greek and Roman gods as an important step within the history of religion: transforming the concept of God from a kind of *raw substantial power* — which might be equated with some kind of force of nature — to a new form of divine subjectivity, which is, so to speak, *reflected* in itself. On the first level of religious awareness, the divine is, therefore, conceived as an all-encompassing infinite in which the finite is

27 *Ibid.*, 122–23.

encapsulated. On the second, slightly improved but still not fully reflected level, God is conceived as a sovereign and powerful substance, clothed as a subject (a self) that is disconnected from the world based on its sovereignty.[28]

For Hegel, the first of both stages leads to a concept of the Godhead which is inseparable from the forces of nature and which is — to a certain extent — identical to the various forms and shapes of finite beings. In contrast, the concept of God as a subject — the second of the above-mentioned stages — seems to introduce a most welcome distance: God distancing himself from the forces and powers of pure nature, with a raw substantiality turning into self-reflective subjectivity. Hegel regards this second stage as a conceptual necessity, a necessary evolution of a religiously and metaphysically sophisticated concept of God, which holds that the multitude of beings cannot be identical to God. There must be a metaphysical difference.

In a way, the concept of God seems to restart itself — based on the notion of perfect subjectivity and (in our words) personhood. But, within this evolutionary transformation of religious convictions, what formerly has been a raw force of nature, turns into some kind of decision-making, although still-arbitrary power, whose expressions are purely based on a self-determination not subject to any external factor or force. To Hegel, the arbitrariness of free decisions is what marks the sphere of isolated, completely independent, and all-powerful subjectivity as such. Therefore, its liberty is not bound by anything, as Hegel points out — neither by content nor by any kind of concept. Its decisive power consists of its raw selfhood.

Yet, in Hegel's picture of the evolution of religious convictions, the notion of *supreme subjectivity* (as it is at work within the concept of a personal God) is not just connected to the idea of unlimited power but also almost always to the notion of *infinite wisdom*. In order to reconcile both notions within this concept of God, the necessary step in the evolution of religious convictions would be to conceive of the supreme divine subject (as the supreme divine intellect) as *forcing* its goals and aims onto a world which seems to be entirely passive and powerless, because God as a supreme subject — at this level of religious conceptualizing — is primarily seen as an unsurpassable power against which nothing can stand. So whatever goals we detect in the world,

28 Cf. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Teil 2: Die bestimmte Religion [1824]*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Meiner, 1994), esp. 282.

they would appear to be purely external (i.e. installed by an outside force and will) compared to what mundane structures might reveal to be in themselves and in their own rights. To make a long story short: what we experience as the core problem of any greater-good theodicy — namely, that God seems to make us subject to aims that are external because they violate our basic ethical rights, is the result of a deeper problem contained in a second-stage religious conviction which states that God is to be pictured as a supreme power forcing its will upon anything else: we end up by appealing to goals a supreme power has imposed on us in a rather arbitrary way — goals with inner connections and aims we do not understand, because they are the product of a supreme power that is rather alien to us.[29]

This concept of God — to Hegel, visible, especially in the Roman gods — carries further problems: for *pure* power is, to Hegel, also *empty* power. Along these lines, the alleged wisdom of the all-powerful personal God turns out to be an equally empty wisdom because there are neither rules to be followed nor things to be learned that an all-powerful sovereign could not overturn. Every goal this omni-sovereign God can come up with could have been completely different. Since raw power is not, and cannot be, determined by any content (which is not itself subject to this very power and which, therefore, could not have been otherwise) we must end up with a concession of emptiness regarding such goals, because, again, any determination could be theoretically overthrown by the raw power as such. However, for Hegel, a goal that is devoid of any determinate content cannot serve as a goal at all. So, for the goal to become *real*, in the full sense of the word, (that is, content-full and apt for guiding the processes that are subject to this goal), it craves determination. Still, if we start contemplating such a determination within the mentioned framework of God being an all-powerful sovereign, we end up again with the notion of a purely arbitrary, purely accidental goal: for the supreme power cannot be determined by anything but itself. To escape these problems, Hegel hints at the idea that, whatever the goal might be, it can neither be something that is subject to divine decisions — for, in that case, it would remain purely arbitrary — nor something that is different from the divine nature itself, for, in this case, it would appear to be an external force that threatens the sovereignty of God.[30]

29 Cf. *ibid*., 283–84.
30 Cf. *ibid.*, 286.

What Bishop and Perszyk have shown in relation to the problem of evil is deepened by a Hegelian perspective: as long as we conceive of God as the omni-powerful sovereign, any ontological and ethical order this God may have laid out, remains the result of a purely arbitrary decision. This God is not just a utilitarian being: he remains a *decisionistic emperor* and *despot* whose raw pronouncements somehow turn into binding metaphysical and ethical laws.

However, this is, to Hegel, only one side of the problem: if we really conceive of God as the omni-powerful sovereign, the dignity of the world — its self-sustaining nature and prerequisites of nature turning into history — starts to vanish as well. For as a purely passive material, subject to an all-powerful sovereign's decisions, the world and its inner structures become demoted to a mere playground of power and to pure instruments — falsifying our basic impressions of mundane nature as having a genuine power and a genuine dignity in itself.[31] Of whatever the order of the world might consist, in the face of the omni-powerful God, it is just a tool for the execution of the will of an almighty emperor.

However, Hegel takes it even further. For although we are inclined to call the omni-powerful God omniscient and wise, it is divine wisdom, as we have seen, that turns out to be an empty concept as well, for the very reasons already mentioned: if being wise rests on insights into both goals and order and if the omni-sovereign God decides on order and on goals as he pleases, then divine wisdom turns out to be as circular as it is empty.

So, within the conceptual framework of the all-powerful Godhead, we are left with a dilemma: either whatever qualifies as divine wisdom consists of goals that ultimately are the product of divine decisions (with arbitrarily dreamed-up and even empty goals) or the divine goals are — in order to be called the product of divine wisdom — primarily determined by something rather *external* to the divine wisdom. Then the problem of divine power arises as the limitation of a divine power that, by definition, must not be limited.[32]

From a Hegelian perspective, it does not come as a surprise that Bishop's and Perszyk's transformation of the concept of God and the overcoming of a personal notion of God are ultimately motivated by a bewilderment caused by so-called greater-good defenses and the problem of theodicy. For as long

31 Cf. *ibid*., 284.
32 Cf. *ibid*.

as we conceive of God as someone who is able to decide, yet even to choose the goods and goals that are meant to be greater ones, i.e., more valuable and important than other estimated goods and aims, we are bound to the notion of a decision-making, and presumably, arbitrarily deciding divine king.

In order to arrive at a *third stage* of religious convictions, per Hegel, one must integrate whatever serves as a goal for the development of the world *into the very nature of God*. This leads to the interesting, yet somewhat dialectical consequence, that God cannot have power over such inner-divine goals, because he does not have power over his own nature. Additionally, in Hegel's view, once we are denying a relation of choice between God and his nature (as well as between God and his goals), we are unavoidably stepping into a rather non-personal or supra-personal concept of God, i.e., towards a concept of God that makes God resemble a supreme principle and metaphysical anchor rather than an all-too-human sovereign or despot.

Carl Friedrich Göschel († 1861), one of Hegel's followers, even calls the concept of the omni-sovereign God the outcome and epitome of humankind's wishful-thinking stage: with the idea of a bourgeoisie liberty shot into the stratosphere of transcendence as nothing but a subtle version of anthropomorphism. The concept of an omni-sovereign God is born, as Göschel says, out of a purely human imagination of individualism, a tribute to the finitude of human existence despite its prolongation into infinity. Göschel adds, we are doomed if this God loves and wills as human lovers and human decision-makers do.[33]

What is the solution to this problem? In Hegel, we find the idea that we must move on to another level of conceiving divinity — a level Hegel identifies with the contribution of the Christian concept of God as Trinity. Whether or not this identification is accurate is certainly up for debate. Nevertheless, the transformation of the omni-sovereign God into something different is quite remarkable.

33 Cf. Carl F. Göschel, *Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntniß: Ein Beytrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit* (E. Franklin, 1829), 15.

V. HEGEL'S ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT OF GOD

To what concept of God is Hegel pointing? Hegel's first order of business is a recommendation: we have to let go of a concept of God that is circling around the notion of raw power. Whenever power must be executed, this power is — so to speak — in need of direction. So, then, what are its intrinsic goals? Formally, in order to overcome the stint of arbitrariness (i.e., whenever such goals seem to be externally imposed on the world), these goals must be the same for God as for the world: they have to reflect God's innermost nature as well as the world's innermost determination and destiny. So, if we can identify the reason why God exists, and if we can identify that reason as the same reason why the universe (or the multiverse) exists, then we are clearly breaking away from an empty, omni-sovereign Godhead who comes up with orders and rules as he pleases.

Contentwise, the situation is more complicated, if we take a closer look at Hegel. In his view, the one basic reason for the existence of God, as well as for the existence of the universe, is the process and development of life. To Hegel, life is one of the most important metaphysical features we have to take into consideration because life has the ability to turn an abstract principle into something concrete — to turn essence into 'appearance'. This very mediation is a common ground between the Godhead and the finite world. For Hegel, having an inner goal reveals itself as a self-sustaining power or, at least, as a self-sustaining potential. This is something we can find if we take a metaphysical look at the phenomenon of life: life is self-sustaining and self-oriented.[34] Moreover, everything alive carries its goals within itself — as an ἐντελέχεια.

So, the first step towards an alternative concept of God, in Hegel's view, is to conceive of God as something that has an intrinsic goal in itself and that, then, is shared with and manifested in the world. Beyond this important but formal outline, can we say something specific about the innermost divine goal that is, at the same time, the innermost goal of the universe's existence and development? To Hegel, the ultimate divine goal, which reflects the nature of God and the nature of the created world at the same time, is *incarnation*. For, in Hegel's view, the true basis for the realization of the goal that the Godhead and the finite world have in common, is what Hegel calls *spirit* — encompass-

34 Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion 2*, 308.

ing the divine and human minds and consciousnesses (which is expressed in the Christian doctrine of incarnation). However, if the ultimate goal of the finite universe is to bring about the all-encompassing Spirit in the form of human subjectivity and self-consciousness, and if, moreover, this very goal is identical to the inner goals of God's divinity, then we can conclude that the self-manifestation of the divine spirit in the form and emergence of a finite, human spirit is nothing other than the ultimate self-manifestation of the inner goals of the divine.[35] Admittedly, this seems to be a bit of a stretch. However, for Hegel, it isn't, since it is the innermost aspect of the reality of the spirit to be all encompassing and to encompass even what seems to be contrary to the spirit's initial nature. Therefore, the absolute spirit has to encompass the plurality of finite spirits in order to be an all-encompassing reality.

Of course, we have to look at this innermost goal from the perspective of finite entities as well. To Hegel, it is the innermost goal and destiny of finite beings to become, so to speak, integral parts of an all-encompassing reality or, in order to phrase it in more orthodox terms, to become the material of divine incarnation and self-manifestation. Incarnation, to Hegel, is nothing else but the divine self-manifestation that is — as such — the innermost goal of the divine. For being Spirit means becoming transparent to oneself while being mediated through the other (a process which is achieved in becoming manifest to the other and in the other). For Hegel, becoming a reality within the other does not necessarily entail crossing out the reality of the other.

To Hegel, the 'process' of self-manifestation, which contains the true grammar of revelation, is the true nature of being a spirit (i.e., of having consciousness and self-consciousness). An isolated, self-enclosed mind could not be what spirit is meant to be, as a process of self-determination and self-manifestation. In this view, it is clear to Hegel that God somehow depends on the universe, because to be self-manifest to the other requires the appearance of an instance of what is called the *Other* — especially, if we think of self-manifestation as something that is a necessary part of God's nature as an absolute spirit.[36] Based on these considerations, Hegel is well-prepared to criticize a personal concept of

35 Cf. ibid., 322.

36 Cf. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Teil 3: Die vollendete Religion [1824]*, ed. Walter Jaeschke, Vorlesungen ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte; 5 (Meiner, 1995), esp. 105.

God: the notion of personhood does not fit well into the concept of the infinity of the *absolute Spirit* and its self-sustaining process of self-manifestation.

Thus, what survives this process of philosophical concept clarification, in Hegel's view, is a notion of absolute consciousness which is stripped of its finite limitations — limitations that would still be in place if we were to consider God to be a mere person. Instead, God is a process of self-manifestation as the absolute Spirit. In Hegel's view, such a process presupposes an inner self-differentiation within the nature of God — a self-differentiation (in a wider interpretation of the term) that is — at the same time — the ultimate cause for the existence of the other (the world, for instance) within God itself. For Hegel, to have the power of self-manifestation and self-differentiation is a sign of being a spirit. However, to be a *living Spirit* requires every goal to be an *inner* goal, to which everything else is oriented.[37]

The concept of a personal God remains problematic for various reasons: its hollow notions of power and wisdom are symptoms of a much deeper problem (i.e., how we reasonably conceptualize the relationship between God and the world). Furthermore, the concept of a personal God fails to put the notion of divinity into full-blooded metaphysical infinity. If God is truly perceived as an infinite reality, this divine reality must be pictured as an all-encompassing reality. Therefore, divine subjectivity (and personhood) must be seen as, somehow, growing 'out' of the limitations of being a single subject — limitations we become aware of once we focus on human subjectivity. In contrast the divine mind must be conceived of as encompassing the many instances of finite subjectivity, which is possible only if we conceive of God as the absolute Spirit becoming transparent to itself in the transparency of finite self-consciousness.

VI. TAKING STOCK

Now it seems that Hegel's concept of God is still quite different from a eu-teleological concept of God. This impression, however, should be considered a prima facie assessment only, which is in danger to overlook much deeper

37 Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen* über *die Philosophie der Religion 2*, 410.

connections and alliances. Hegel and the euteleological concept of God have some interesting features in common:[38]

1) Questions regarding the various aspects of divine omnipotence turn out to be misguided once we see the divine self-manifestation as the innermost goal of the divine, echoed in the finite realm. Along the same lines, Bishop and Perszyk re-read divine omnipotence as having the powers that are embedded in the universe to bring about the ultimate *telos* of the universe.[39] Given that this *telos* is the driving force in these powers, there is no distinction between God's innermost aim and the universe's internal and ultimate goal.

2) Questions regarding the origin of the universe (and God's contribution to this origin) turn out to be of lesser importance since the ultimate goals of the existence of the universe is the participation in divine self-transparency and the incarnation of the divine as the participation in an all-encompassing reality. Along the same lines, Bishop and Perszyk underline emphatically that the reason why the universe originated is to realize the ultimate *telos* and the supreme good. Moreover, the existence of the universe is the presupposition for a process that also provides instantiations of the supreme good as manifestations of the divine.[40]

3) Questions regarding the inner stages of the Godhead — especially, exploring divine intentions, consciousness, and knowledge — turn out to be superfluous since God as the absolute spirit is manifest *in* finite consciousnesses and transcends them as an all-encompassing spirit that rests on the performances of finite consciousnesses. At this point, Bishop's and Perszyk proposal remains silent; but there is a

38 McCord Adams suggested some significant parallels to Aristotles' unmoved mover. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 130. I do not think that this contradicts my intuition that says that there are significant parallels to Hegel, since for Hegel, Aristotles' conception of God as *noesis noeseos* played a significant and inspiring role. What brings the euteleological concept closer to Hegel is the underlying idea of a cosmic process (encompassing the history of nature as well as the history of mind-gifted beings) that arrives at an ultimate stage and that this stage has to do with the "incarnation" of reciprocal acknowledgments among finite beings (a description that could serve as a circumscription of what *love* means — well, formally).

39 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 616.

40 Cf. *ibid*., 617.

certain hint that could be re-read in a more Hegelian way: although there is no divine mind that knows everything there is to know, there is a some sort of 'knowing-how' with regard to the ways in which the ultimate *telos* will be brought about.[41] Once finite consciousnesses plug into this kind of knowledge, they become the instruments in order to enrich the manifestations of the ultimate *telos* with their own consciousnesses — thus making the ultimate *telos* of the universe more and more transparent, i.e., knowable and reflected along the way. The backbone of finite consciousnesses could also be seen as the advancing echo of the emerging divine awareness that consists of the awareness of the divine.

4) Additionally, we are in a position to conceive of divine action as divine presence in all those instances and forms that reveal the innermost goal of the divine, i.e., which are to be regarded as the incarnation and self-manifestation of the divine. For Hegel, in a rather formal way, the infinity-grasp of the human mind as well as the goodness-grasp of the human conscience would serve as such instances. For Bishop and Perszyk, the divine is active insofar as it is present in manifestations of unrestricted love, which reveal the ultimate *telos* of the universe.[42]

These aspects do not contradict the idea of God being ultimate goodness that manifests itself as an emerging reality in the universe. Quite the opposite, once we have an expanded notion of ultimate goodness, life and spirit can be seen as layers or manifestations of divine goodness. While the euteleological conception focuses on love as the most convincing manifestation of goodness, Hegel tries to include various instances of being that display an inner value — addressing life and spirit just at the outer border of such value-oriented existence. Despite Hegel's different horizon, love still plays an important role since the grammar of being a spirit, in the most appropriate sense, is nothing less than the grammar of love. The self-manifestation of oneself in the other, while not crossing out the self-sustaining aspects of the existence of the other, is a very formal circumscription of what we can find in mutual and reciprocal love. Hegel's formal approach protects the notion of love from

41 Cf. *ibid*.

42 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 16–17.

a shortsighted romantic interpretation and blends the ethical with the metaphysical: the goodness of existence can be identified as the goodness of life and spirit. Therefore, the ultimate good is the life as the absolute Spirit; and the ultimate stage of the universe would be its full participation in absolute life and spirit.

There might be also an aspect in Hegel's picture that makes it more approachable in terms of evidence and metaphysical prerequisites. As the late Marilyn McCord Adams has pointed out (based on her in-depth knowledge of Aquinas, Scotus, and Occam) the euteleological view must address the following prerequisites:[43]

(1) There is (exists as a significant driving force) an overall goal of the universe's development, and love is the very nature of that universal aim.

(2) Animate, as well as non-animate beings and their development, are analogously (but, nevertheless, equally) subject to this same goal — despite the fact that they have (so to speak) "miniature" intrinsic goals that are based on their species and kind-related natures.

(3) To have an overall goal of the universe in place does not require an efficient will or agent to establish the forces and factors that are necessary to guarantee the realization of that very goal.

Prerequisites (1) to (3) point to an *ontological* as well as an *evidential* problem: it is not easy to defend the idea that everything that exists has in some way to contribute to the realization of love as the innermost goal of its existence. Bishop and Perszyk might respond that this ontological query rests on a fallacy: the fact that a certain whole has a certain goal does not entail that all the parts of the whole must be subject to this same goal in a similar way. It might be enough to state that the intrinsic goals of the parts in question serve the overall goal eventually or contribute to the constitution of the whole as such. However, even if this counter argument might alleviate ontological pressure, there is still the evidential problem: Does our universe really look like something that is headed towards a utopia of love as its innermost goal? Is the origin of quarks and Higgs bosons, of galaxies and stars, of a huge variety of

43 McCord Adams, "Horrors", 130–35.

species nothing other than a requisite to provide material for the universal reign of love? Would it not be too harsh to call this a grand and somewhat hyperbolic version of anthropocentrism? In contrast Hegel's assessment of the innermost goals and aims of finite entities leads to a substantial notion of *life* — life that eventually results in an awakening of consciousness and self-consciousness. Of course, love is still in the picture, but it is the peak of what self-consciousness, which has become aware of itself and its relation to the *Other*, is able to accomplish under certain circumstances. That the universal goal of the universe is to bring about life in its axiologically most valued form, insofar as life, being awakened and, therefore, aware of itself, might be easier to sell in the light of what we know about the dimensions of the cosmos, its beginning, its evolution, and the origin of species within it.

Along these lines, another problem has been uncovered by Marilyn McCord Adams: if the ultimate *telos* of the universe and the *supreme good* is not 'just' a transcendent idea (let alone a *transcendental ideal* in the Kantian sense), but is, instead, realized in the manifestations of love our universe brings about, than these manifestations or, at least, some of them (namely those which belong to the final stage of the universe) have to be identified with God. They are, in a way, the metaphysical constituents of the Godhead. However, whatever the universe may have in store for us, whatever utopia might be realized, the realizing instantiations and manifestations of unrestricted love remain finite. There is no way of altering their metaphysical fate as merely finite instantiations of something that is meant to be infinite.[44] How can the appearance of something that is the presence of unrestricted love, but, nevertheless, has all the metaphysical marks of finite existence (including the possibility that it might be annihilated or erased as time goes by) actually *be* the infinite Godhead? In Hegel, we find a somewhat easier solution, since he uses Chalcedonian Christology as a blueprint: all the finite instances of God's (and nature's) innermost goals are just incarnations and self-manifestations of the divine. They do not constitute the Godhead in all its richness and fullness, but their existence is the necessary expression of the Godhead's innermost goal: to become a self-mediated spirit and all-encompassing reality.

As I pointed out earlier, Hegel's concept of God can itself be seen as the provocation of further discussions that might as well be referred to a euteleo-

44 Cf. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 136–37.

logical concept of God. The 19th century interpreters of Hegel's theology explored the question of whether or not Hegel's God was and is a reality in God's own right. Given that, for the self-manifestation of the absolute spirit, the existence of the universe becomes a necessary requirement, even an inner goal for the divine, Hegel's God is to a certain extent *bound* to the world. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that left-leaning Hegelian and proto-Marxist adaptations of Hegel's philosophical theology insinuated that these connections between God and the world are ontologically stronger than suspected — maybe the robust realm of the Godhead is nothing else but the world or the universe. Along these lines another follower of Hegel's, Carl Ludwig Michelet († 1893), stated: the true lesson we can learn from Hegel is that God is not just another person or entity next to (or in addition to) a variety of entities or persons; and he is not just a substance in the abstract sense of being an independent entity. Instead, God must be compared to an eternal movement in which the universality of being finds a center in itself, insofar as it is becoming aware of itself and insofar as it is becoming self-conscious, but in which the self-centeredness of any kind of subjectivity (and personhood) are already overcome and opened up towards the *Other*, gaining a higher level of conscious universality along these lines. In this rather left-leaning Hegelian perspective, God is not a person but, rather, the epitome of what the real core of being a person truly means: to be conscious and to be connected to a universal consciousness which has overcome any form of self-centeredness and lack of objectivity that seems to be inescapably attached to self-centeredness. According to this view, subjectivity — seen as the intermediate stage of self-centered consciousness — is the true root and origin of anything evil, so that salvation and atonement must be achieved by repeating the process which God unfolds as an epitome: God opens himself up eternally to encompass and originate the cosmos and the universe as well as humanity and all those instances that turn a community of individuals into a true community. Thus, in this perspective, God's role is to be the absolute Spirit, having overcome the limitations of personhood and individuality. This process of overcoming is visible in the transformation of nature as well in the love of the human community that is on its way to be transformed in God's image.[45]

45 Carl L. Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel: Teil 2* (Duncker und Humblot, 1838), 646–47.

Michelet draws our attention to a second possible interpretation of Hegel's concept: God is not a person but the very *idea* of what the innermost content of subjectivity is: spirit. Thus, God's reality is the realm of an abstract entity, of an abstract universal, so to speak, which needs to be instantiated and realized in order to be manifest and to "interact" with other concrete entities. While being a person is a metaphysical problem insofar as this includes being an individual (and, therefore, being limited as an individual), God as the universal idea of subjectivity is beyond those limitations and is able to become everlastingly individuated by a community of individual, nevertheless finite, persons.

However, if Michelet is right, Hegel's God somehow seems to vanish into thin air — the air of a communal idea or of an idealized imagination of what spirit is or could be. The robust substantiality of the God of traditional theism would turn into the thinness of a mere idea. This might be the price of trading one for the other: God's closeness to the world would have to be paid for with a lesser robust metaphysical nature. This could also be true for the euteleological God: if the ultimate *telos* of the universe needs the universe as a means to be realized and "materialized," what would the nature of the *telos* be in itself? The tradition of apophatic theology, recently invoked by Bishop and Perszyk, may not help us here, because in Pseudo-Dionysius and his followers, the God beyond being is pictured as the unlimited source of goodness and being, an infinitely overflowing source that cannot be grasped by human concepts. In this case, God would be an über-entity rather than a non-entity. However, in the euteleological view, God seems to be an abstract principle, realized as a driving force of a presumed evolution of the cosmos. There is, indeed, a certain parallel between the cosmic utopia of euteleology and the left-leaning Hegelian hope in the development of human consciousness (and society).

Now, Michelet's interpretation is not the only possible way to understand Hegel. This time it is Göschel again — Hegel's most notorious theistic disciple — who emphasizes a more ontologically robust reading of Hegel's notion of God: for if we concede that God is the Word, meaning that he is self-manifestation, then we also admit that God can be known. However, if God can be known by self-manifestation this requires at least some kind of self-consciousness, based on a relation God has to himself as found within the parameters of conscious existence. To Göschel, if God were just an ab-

stract object, an idea of some kind, he would lack true existence and reality, remaining strange to our reasoning, even opaque. So, Göschel concludes, we cannot help but include some sort of self-consciousness in the realm of the absolute spirit, because only in this way we can ensure that God remains open to our attempts to know him, since any object of knowledge which is devoid of self-consciousness and the power of self-manifestation would be (within an idealistic frame of reference, of course) an inferior object of knowledge (being below the pay grade of our own self-conscious curiosity and intellectual endeavor).[46]

Still, for Göschel, God as the absolute spirit is a reality in God's own right, because this God can be known and must become known. God is present to our deliberations as something which inspires us and which can be addressed. As an addressable reality, this God must be a substance; but, as an inspiring reality, this God is also an idea (for Hegel, substance turning into idea and idea turning into substance, are the epitome of life and spirit). Nevertheless, it would be high treason in a Hegelian world to ask whether the divine reality is a mind-independent reality: given that spirit is the essence of God, the divine reality is the reality of the mind seeking goodness and truth. Our, as well as the universe's, place in this picture is to fulfill the divine role of God's self-revelation as spirit — which is his self-manifestation as the absolute within us.

It is this complicated connection between substantiality and ideality which could serve as a grammar for future discussions of the ways towards which the euteleological concept of God is headed: if God has to be equated — while moving away from a personal concept of God — with some kind of abstract entity, somehow comparable (but not quite identical) to the Platonic idea of the good, then Bishop and Perszyk will have to flesh out in more detail what kind of reality this ultimate goodness might have, i.e., whether or not God can be deciphered as a mere universal, being real only if instantiated in finite images or instances of unrestricted love and goodness. In her discussion of Bishop's and Perszyk's proposal, Marilyn McCord Adams is equally mystified by the rather underdeveloped account of the euteleological God's own metaphysical nature:

46 Cf. Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie,* 74–75.

> [O]ne might think that Bishop and Perszyk were opting for an Aristotelian ontology of immanent universals, according to which there is no transcendent Platonic form […], but only individual instantiations […]. In Aristotle himself, the ontology of immanent universals is combined with his commitment to the eternity of the species to yield the conclusion that, for each time, every universal has some individual instantiations or other. For Aristotle, the immanent universal would not simply be identified with the sum total of its instances, because it may be contingent that a universal is instantiated by these instances rather than those […]. But there wouldn't be anything actual over and above its actual instances with which the immanent universal would be identified.
>
> Bishop and Perszyk do want to deny both that alternative-God is a transcendent ideal and that alternative-God is '>just< the sum total of the truly good loving relationships actually achieved throughout history.' Nevertheless, they do not seem to take over Aristotle's idea that the species must be eternal […].[47] Perhaps, Hegel's view — as perceived through the lens of Göschel — could offer some help in this regard, if Bishop and Perszyk would permit us to think of the ultimate *telos* of the universe and the supreme *good* the universe as directed towards a mind-like, spirit-like reality, being the non-physical, onto-ethical ground of physical, as well as mind-gifted, existence and serving an all-encompassing reality, which fires up the engine of a cosmic development, insofar as the ultimate good reveals itself as the all-encompassing spirit in which everything is naturally inclined to participate. However, this would require that the ultimate stage of the universe be not just a utopia of loving relationships but also the consciousness-filled reality of a universal transparency of being: a reality in which all the parts are interconnected by the transparency of being mutually conscious of every other part.

However, the left-leaning Hegelian 'Michelets' are already waiting in the shadows and wondering whether the euteleological Godhead isn't just another metaphor for an *idealized humanity* or an *idealized cosmic utopia*. To stop the euteleological God from falling into the Feuerbachian lava stream, we need to see the ontology of the absolute good explained, which is allegedly the ultimate *telos* of the cosmos and its inner developments.

47 McCord Adams, "Horrors", 135–36.

VII. THE BACKLASH OF PERSONAL THEISM?

Presumably, every further adjustment of the euteleological proposal will be closely monitored by another camp — by those who are still eager to defend the concept of a personal God. Immanuel Hermann Fichte († 1879), the famous son of the notorious first-person perspective philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte († 1814), suggests that Hegel and his followers might have taken the wrong turn in dismissing the concept of a personal God, and introduced an interesting, still-Hegelian line of argument in order to strengthen the notion of God as person.

To I.H. Fichte, the conclusion we have to draw is clear: (1) If God needs to have a robust metaphysical nature; and (2) if God needs to have an identity that makes him as distinguishable from the world as it makes him connectable to the world, then; (3) we need to conceive of God as an absolute spirit, metaphysically revolving around an absolute first-person perspective.[48]

I.H. Fichte's argument is based on two crucial premises:

1) If God is just an abstract object, his becoming realized by being instantiated in the cosmos would lead to some kind of self-diffusion, even a dissolving of God's true nature.[49]

2) If God has some kind of initial and non-dissoluble identity, we need to find an ontological concept that helps to grant God such an identity.[50]

I.H. Fichte worries that God has the status of a mere idea, being doomed to find his mode of existence solely in the hearts and heads of mind-gifted beings. In this way, God would be somehow dispersed among finite entities, ultimately rendering him finite as well. This can be avoided only by sticking with divine transcendence. However, within a monist worldview, such a position would be equivalent to saying that, although the history of the universe is on its way to an ultimate *telos* and towards the incarnation of the supreme good, there is never a final stage and a perfect incarnation. So, if we don't want to fall back into the problem of traditional distinctions between God

48 Cf. Imanuel H. Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer* (Dyk'sche Buchhandlung, 1855), 90–96.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, 52.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, 87–91.

and the world, and if we insist that God still has some crucial ontological role to play, the absolute Spirit God would have to be, as I.H. Fichte points out, the ground of being;[51] therefore God needs to have a more *substantial* nature beyond the status of a mere universal.

I.H. Fichte's approach to support his premise is more complicated, as he seems to work with a more or less neo-platonic vocabulary, including, nevertheless, some Hegelian concepts. Thus, God, as the ground of being, has to be regarded as a supreme unity, as the one which comprises in its Godself a difference we perceive to be manifold and finite within the mundane realm. That said, this is not just a dogmatic viewpoint Fichte is proposing. Rather, the notion of oneness follows from Hegel's own perception of God as an absolute spirit: if God is an all-encompassing reality, the mode of encompassing the manifold cannot be a simple iteration of the manifold ways of being, but has to reveal itself as a *unifying principle*. To serve as the grand unifier, God would have to be *supreme oneness in itself*, which, as such, opens up a huge distinction between God on the one hand and whatever exists within the cosmos on the other.[52] Whatever connection there might be between God and the world, once God is perceived as supreme oneness and ground of unity, then, God needs to have a substantial relation to the realm of the manifold — a substantial relation which apparently presupposes that God has to be regarded as a substantial form of being in himself.[53]

Additionally the ascription of a first-person perspective to God — of the notion of self-consciousness — is, in Fichte's eyes, a prerequisite to explaining not only the value of things and the appreciation of their intra-mundane developments in the light of their goodness, but also their intelligibility as such.[54]

While Fichte still conceives of God as the epitome of supreme unity and infinity, the incorporation of his first-person perspective into the concept of God is the building block that eventually results in a personal concept of God.[55] Although it is a matter for further discussion whether the incorpora-

51 Cf. *ibid.,* 83.
52 Cf. *ibid.*, 88.
53 Cf. *ibid.*, 89.
54 Cf. *ibid.*, 97.
55 Cf. *ibid.,* 97–100, esp. 99.

tion of any equivalent to self-consciousness[56] into the notion of God necessarily results in an invigoration of personal theism, instead of (and this would be my assessment) just moving a Hegelian-colored concept of God closer to classical theism, there is something the euteleological concept of God can learn from these 19th-century discussions. If it is true that the supreme idea of the good is meant to be realized and instantiated in the world while not being identical to the world, we may wonder upon what the divine self-identity is built. To be more precise, there are three things worth noting for the future development of a euteleological notion of God: (1) an argument against a so-called "dissolution" of identity, (2) an argument for the robust self-identity of the divine; and (3) an argument for the power to initiate reciprocal relationships as a sign of divine perfection. All three arguments can be derived from I. H. Fichte's coping with Hegel's notion of the absolute spirit and can be transferred to Bishop's and Perszyk's euteleological concept of God:

The first argument can be presented in the following way: (1) If an entity has to be non-dissoluble, it must not have a weak kind of identity; (2) the absolute spirit and the ultimate *telos* of the universe are non-dissoluble; (3) therefore, it must not have a weak kind of identity.

To I.H. Fichte, the criteria of identity of the above-mentioned kind must take into account that the absolute spirit (or the ultimate *telos*, as in Bishop's and Perszyk's case) is also supremely perfect. Although divine perfection might be restricted to an ethical aspect only, at least at first glance, we are back in the ballpark of an ontological notion of perfection once we admit that to exist in a self-sustaining and robust way is an instantiation or realization of goodness (which implies that a non-existent idea of supreme goodness or a non-existent ultimate *telos* would be a contradiction). If this is true, we can move on to the argument for a robust divine self-identity, which presupposes a broadening of the notion of perfection to include the area of ontological constituents as well:

56 We could instead imagine God to be a stage of unlimited cosmic consciousness in which finite self-consciousnesses has transcended its limitations and has become transparent to its Godself. Such notions of the divine as one can find in Bradley to Sprigge — would enable us to ascribe a more robust metaphysical role to God, would also bring back consciousness as somehow an identity-safeguarding factor, but would not allow expressions of personal theism.

1) Anything that is perfect, especially an entity that has the highest form of perfection, must possess perfect criteria of identity.
2) Only robust criteria of identity can serve as perfect criteria of identity.
3) An abstract entity does not have robust criteria of identity.
4) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) possesses the highest form of perfection.
5) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) has robust criteria of identity (in order to fulfill its role as Godhead *axiologically*).
6) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) cannot be an abstract entity.

We can build the third argument on much the same foundation; again, in the same way in which the additional argument presupposes a wider view of divine perfection. One crucial ingredient of this argument is included in the idea that reciprocal relationships are more perfect than one-sided relationships. However, it is of utmost importance to note that this emphasis on reciprocity does not suggest that the relations in questions must be of the same kind in each and every case. Rather, the intuition leading up to this argument may be expressed as some sort of truism: it is of higher value to be related to a being that is capable of (ontologically significant) relations (in a self-sustaining and self-initiating manner) than to be related to a being that lacks those capacities (right from the start). It is easy to see that neither an abstract absolute spirit nor a monolithic ultimate *telos* of the universe will count as the most perfect being we can conceive of if measured against these standards. The argument runs as follows:

1) If an entity is not capable of reciprocal relations, this incapacity has to count as a lack in perfection.
2) Whatever possesses the highest form of perfection cannot be incapacitated in a way that leads to a lack of perfection.
3) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) possesses the highest form of perfection.
4) The absolute spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) cannot be incapable of reciprocal relations.

To I. H. Fichte, the overarching conclusion that almost naturally flows from these arguments is the inclusion of a strong first-person perspective into the concept of the divine.[57] For, based on idealistic presuppositions, whatever has a first-person perspective is also blessed with considerably strong, even unsurpassably perfect, criteria of identity. Furthermore, whatever has a first-person perspective cannot be an abstract entity, and whatever has a first-person perspective also possesses consciousness and self-consciousness, which allow for having (at least cognition- and intention-based) relations to other entities and to those instances that serve as the presuppositions to engage in reciprocal relations.

At the end of the day, we are left with the question of whether or not Bishop's and Perszyk's concept of God can incorporate what the above-mentioned arguments suggest: a significantly robust metaphysics of the divine nature that explains the non-dissoluble, perfection-related self-identity of the Godhead. That the result of such an endeavor might be a notion of God which is adjacent to classical theism[58] and that might still be lightyears away from any form of personal theism (as it is presented nowadays by *open theists*, *agapeic theists*, or *developmental theists*) might be of benefit in encouraging future research.

VIII. CONCLUSION

For I. H. Fichte, getting rid of the God who has some personal attributes (at least in the way of possessing a first-person perspective), comes at high costs: it also undermines the value of being an individual self — a consequence which can be studied in Hegel's unresolved struggle with making sense of individual immortality. If God is just the universal idea of goodness vanishing into the thin air of ideality, the inner goal of human existence could also be nothing more than a an idea vanishing into the thin air of universal existence — remaining a necessary piece or ingredient in the history of the universal and divine idea's self-manifestation, but deprived of any hopes for the continuation of the first-person perspective that makes persons as unique as they

57 Cf. again Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen*, 97–100.

58 For a taxonomy and a first draft of the principles required for distinguishing between classical theism, personal theism and (Platonist) non-standard-theism see McCord Adams, "Horrors", 139–40.

are special. To Fichte, our belief in personal immortality is a consequence of our appreciation of the first-person perspective; and this appreciation is mirrored in our concept of God only if we include a first-person perspective in the concept of God's divinity.[59]

For Bishop and Perszyk, the question of personal immortality could become a crucial litmus test of their proposal: from the perspective of religious psychology and of the soteriological relevance of religious convictions, it could become unavoidable to include the concept of personal immortality into a concept of God that regards itself as religiously significant, adequate and, moreover, redeeming, given that 20th-century theology has always underlined that salvation remains halfhearted, even cruel if the so-called "victims of history" remain lost and forgotten eternally. As such, the salvific stage of the universe's history would be a *dance macabre* on the graves of those who did not make it to the stage of ultimate realization of the overall *telos*. It might turn out that the emphasis on the predominantly salvific role of God and implied soteriological standards cannot be met by a hope based on a this-worldly utopia only.[60]

In order to strengthen the soteriological and, therefore, religious relevance of their proposal, Bishop and Perszyk could move into two different directions: either they might consider including (to meet I.H. Fichte halfway) a robust basis for divine self-identity in the form of some kind of consciousness or awareness in the concept of the Godhead (indicating, for instance, that this very *telos* of the universe is transparent to itself, which results in some kind of self-conscious divinity); or they could try to disentangle the notion of God from the assessment of the value of individual human persons (and their survival of death) entirely. To follow the second, more (right-leaning) Hegelian (and less Fichtean), route would not only help their own concept of God, in order to appeal to the religious heart, but it would also do a great intellectual service to non-standard theism as such. This, because to disconnect the dignity and value of human persons and their (perhaps immortal or indestructible) first-person perspective from the supra-personal nature of the divine would be a major step in lowering the costs of an alternative concept of God — costs which are not so much based on metaphysical price tags as on what the religious point of view

59 Cf. Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen*, 129–146, 173–178.
60 Cf. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 138.

perceives as being essential for a religious form of life. In other words, if it is imaginable that the emergence of finite first-person perspectives is itself a realization of the ultimate *telos* of the universe and if the continuation of such first-person perspectives (beyond the destruction of their physical constitution-bases) is another realization and manifestation of this very *telos* (in order to bring about a real utopia of love — which includes love beyond the grave), then I.H. Fichte could be proven wrong: one could have eschatological salvation without a self-conscious, personal Godhead.

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