
Book Section:
Stern, R. orcid.org/0000-0003-2967-647X (2022) “This is the very essence of the reformation: man in his very nature Is destined to be free”. In: Moyar, D., Walsh, K.P. and Rand, S., (eds.) Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Critical Perspectives on Freedom and History. Routledge , pp. 45-65. ISBN 9780367532321

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003081036-4

‘This is the very essence of the Reformation: Man in his very nature is destined to be free’: Hegel, Luther, and Freedom*

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One of the many services that Terry Pinkard has performed for Hegel scholarship is in helping us to better understand the historical context of Hegel’s thought – something he has done not only through his masterful Hegel biography, but also his accounts of the development of German idealism more generally.[1] My aim in this paper is to continue with this process of contextualisation by focusing on a key Hegelian concept – that of freedom – and to put it in the context of Hegel’s relation to Martin Luther, a relation which I think deserves more attention that it has so far received.[2] Pinkard himself rightly notes in the biography, in his account of Hegel’s rectoral address on the three hundredth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1830, that Hegel took the opportunity towards the end of his life to repeat a claim that he often made, namely that the Protestant reformation should be associated with freedom, in contrast to Catholicism.[3] In this paper, I want to push this link a little deeper, to include not just the kind of religious and social freedom that Hegel had in mind in his address, but also to show how elsewhere Hegel takes up from Luther three other key ideas: freedom as grace and reconciliation, freedom as liberation from the law, and freedom as necessity. Before moving on to these three ideas, I will begin by saying something about the connection between Luther and freedom that Hegel makes in the Augsburg address and in his lectures, namely religious and social freedom.

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* Forthcoming in Dean Moyar, Kate Padgett Walsh, and Sebastian Rand (eds), *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Critical Perspectives on Freedom and History* (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 45–65.

[1] Cf. Pinkard 2000, Pinkard 2002.

[2] For some discussion of Hegel’s relation to Luther, mainly from the perspective of their theological views, see Mure 1966, Asendorf 1982, Thaidigsmann 1983, Jaeschke 1986, Merklinger 1993, and O’Regan 1994, Hoffmeyer 2011, Houlgate 2015, Farneth 2017b; Luther is also mentioned in Farneth 2017a. Because my focus in this paper is on the theme of freedom, I will not be assessing Hegel’s stated commitments to Lutheranism as a matter of his faith, which have often met with some scepticism, e.g. from Charles Taylor: ‘Whatever the sincerity of [Hegel’s] claims to be an orthodox Lutheran, it is clear that Hegel only accepted a Christianity which has been systematically reinterpreted to be a vehicle of his own philosophy’ (Taylor 1975: 102).

[3] Pinkard 2000: 627–31. With his characteristic eye for a telling and amusing detail, Pinkard tells us that Hegel prepared for the address by practising his Latin with Friedrich Förster, and ‘appropriately’ sharing with him ‘several bottles of Lacrima Christi wine…a famous Italian wine from Vesuvius made from a variety of grapes in use since Roman times’.

1. Religious and social freedom

As with the Augsburg address, in the various lecture series – on history, on religion, and on the history of philosophy – in which Luther and the Reformation are discussed, Hegel largely focuses on freedom,[4] and the freedom he mainly discusses is of a religious and social kind. On this issue, we may therefore follow Pinkard in taking the Augsburg address as typical of Hegel's treatment of this aspect of freedom, and thus as representative of these other discussions.

As Pinkard notes, the Augsburg Confession had been submitted to the Diet of Augsburg on June 25th 1530. The aim of the Diet, which was attended by the Emperor Charles V, was to achieve some reconciliation between the Catholic and Lutheran positions. Luther had been invited, but due to fears for his safety, he remained in Coburg where he was sequestered at the time, while his position was represented by his gifted younger protégé Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), who had first joined Luther in Wittenberg in 1518. Luther forwarded his strongly worded suggestions as to how the Evangelical view should be represented in his 'exhortation', but Melanchthon opted instead to present a more moderate position to the Diet, in the 28 articles which were later named after the venue for the meeting, which failed to reach any agreement between the different parties. Nonetheless, the Augsburg Confession became a founding document for the Lutheran Church, in setting out how its doctrines differed from Catholicism and from other Protestant sects.

In marking the anniversary of this document at the festivities in Berlin, Hegel begins his address by noting that one form of freedom he owes to the Reformation is the very ability that he is exercising on this occasion, namely to pronounce on religious matters even though he is a lay person. Thus, he suggests, rather than a world divided into two classes of the clergy and laity, the first of which is the free master and the second of which is enslaved, it is now recognized that all can approach God – although in a way that doubtless would have troubled Luther, Hegel suggests that it is reason that makes this possible. Hegel argues that for all to come to God in this way appeared unachievable when religious control was

[4] This not to say, of course, that freedom is the only idea that might connect Luther and Hegel: others could include dialectic, divine hiddenness, a hostility to logical formalism, as well as various theological questions that have been emphasised by those working on Hegel's philosophy of religion. For an overview see Stern 2020: §2.

exercised via the various 'obstacles' put in place by the Church that stood between human beings and God, such as indulgences, relics, and the power of the priest over communion; but thanks to the Reformation, these obstacles have now been swept aside, and with it the distinction between the clergy and the rest – even though Charles V may not have seen this himself, and still saw fit to claim he had divine right on his side because he spoke for the Church, thus failing to see that if anyone spoke for God, it was Luther who as God's trumpet 'now proclaimed the wondrous sound of Christian freedom' (Hegel 2007a: 433/1999: 189).

However, as Hegel makes clear, in his view while Luther succeeded in freeing those who followed him from the authority of the Catholic Church, he did not really attempt to free them from the political authority of the princes, so that while they become freedmen [*liberi*], they were still not genuinely free [*liberti*]. Hegel thus makes the point that he makes also elsewhere in similar discussions,[5] namely that while Luther deserves credit for a first reformation, and that 'the things which our Luther set in motion were truly new', nonetheless a second reformation is also required, as 'if religion is reformed, the political, legal, and ethical system [*ratio civitas et legume morumque*] should also be reformed'. This further task is clearly one that Hegel was implicitly claiming for himself, thereby presenting himself as a 'second Luther' in this respect, in taking us from religious freedom to social freedom, which Luther himself (who notoriously ultimately sided with the princes in the Peasants' Revolt) did not manage to do.

Hegel then considers two challenges to his claim that Luther and the Reformation are vital steps towards freedom. The first is that the Lutheran cause did not represent freedom but a kind of seditious anarchism – to which Hegel's reply is that this is to ignore the religious basis for Luther's reforms, which gave them legitimacy. The second challenge is that Lutheranism betrays the cause of religious freedom because (as the Augsburg Confession exemplifies) it seeks to 'fetter' faith by laying down agreed doctrine, and to stamp out dissent – to which Hegel's reply is that while he doesn't want to get embroiled in wrangling on these issues which would be 'too melancholy a subject, inappropriate to today's joyful occasion', it may suffice to point out the flowering of intellectual inquiry and

[5] See e.g. Hegel 1970 12:504/1956: 424: '[In the Reformation] The reconciliation between God and the World was limited in the first instance to an abstract form; it was not yet expanded into a system by which the moral world could be regulated'.

discussion that followed the Reformation, which hardly suggests it served as a 'fetter' on the freedom of thought or debate.[6]

Finally, he emphasises how as a religious doctrine, the Reformation has a superior way of connecting religion to political and social life, so that rather than setting up a realm of otherworldly religious virtues at odds with the so-called 'splendid vices' of the Greek and Roman worlds, it is instead able to re-integrated the latter into a religious life, as well as replacing the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience (which he argues have always been abused by the clergy anyway) with marriage and family life, industriousness, and the freedom to understand religious doctrines for oneself and make them one's own. It is this shift, Hegel argues, that has made 'our most precious heritage – namely the free concord of the state and religion possible' (Hegel 1999: 195), which otherwise would have led to the damaging separation of church and state (as legitimate laws need a religious sanction), or the imposition of the church on the state, and thus the taking away of civic freedom and the equality between the laity and the church on which this depends.

We have seen, then, how Hegel credits Luther and the Reformation more generally with making possible a religious life that contains greater freedom, as the Church relinquishes its power over individuals in matters of faith, and as believers are given access to religious doctrines, and thus a more direct relation to God. He also argues that a same kind of reformation is needed at a political and social level, which Luther did not achieve, but which Hegel thinks is clearly ready to be ushered in, so on these issues he can present himself as a 'second Luther'. At the same time, he also makes clear that all this will require a greater commitment to rationalism and 'the concept' than Luther himself allowed.[7] Nonetheless, we have seen how at a religious and social level it seemed plausible to Hegel to make the claim in our title: 'This is the very essence of the Reformation: Man is in his very nature is destined to be free' (Hegel 1970 12:497/1956: 417).

While this connection between Hegel, Luther and freedom is relatively unproblematic and generally known, I now want to take things a little further, arguing for

[6] As Pinkard notes in his commentary on the *Phenomenology* (1996: 80), Hegel frequently connected the Reformation to the rise of modern science: see for example Hegel 2010 §7.

[7] 'What Luther inaugurated as faith in feeling and in the testimony of the spirit is the same thing that the spirit, as a more mature stage of its development, endeavours to grasp in the *concept* so as to free itself in the present and find itself therein' (Hegel 1970 7:27/1991: 22).

three additional links which are more subtle but nonetheless significant, beginning with what I am calling 'freedom as grace and reconciliation'.

2. Freedom as grace and reconciliation

The significance of grace is of course central to Luther's thinking, and to the Reformation generally, where at the heart of the issue is the question of activity vs passivity: how much can the believer do for themselves to actively earn divine assistance and justification, and how much is this purely passive, whereby grace is given to the believer regardless of their 'works'. As is well known, Luther argues vehemently for the latter view, rejecting all other options which include any role for human activity as Pelagian or semi-Pelagian, including so-called 'co-operative grace' which sees us as capable of making the effort 'to do what in us lies' (*facere quod in se est*), that is then supplemented by God. Luther had a number of fundamental concerns about making grace reliant on our efforts in this way, in particular: how could we ever know we had done enough, thus making grace uncertain; in taking ourselves as being capable of anything, this fuels a pride in our own capacities which then deepens our sinfulness; and rather than making grace a matter of God's gratuitous and unearned forgiveness, it treats grace as a matter of entitlement and thereby ties God's hands. Thus on this account, rather than securing for us some relation to God, any emphasis on our efforts puts a barrier between him and the believer, which Luther's radically passive conception of grace was designed to sweep away – therefore only by recognizing its passivity and lack of agency, could the individual's right relation to God be realised.[8]

Given the centrality of this idea to Luther's thinking, when lecturing on him, Hegel himself invariably notes Luther's opposition to 'works righteousness'.[9] But more interestingly, with an implied reference to John 8:32 ('Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'), in these lectures Hegel also often emphasises our passivity in relation to the truth that is preached by Jesus and the Church, which requires us to surrender our merely particular perspective; but this is not in a way that amounts to blind

[8] For a rather moving example of Luther's thinking here, see the end of his debate with Erasmus in *De servo arbitrio*, where Luther states: 'For my own part, I frankly confess that even if it were possible, I should not wish to have free choice given to me, or to have anything left in my own hands by which I might strive towards salvation', for otherwise 'I should nevertheless have to labor under perpetual uncertainty and to fight as one beating the air, since even if I lived and worked to eternity, my conscience would never be assured and certain how much it ought to do to satisfy God' (WA 18:783/LW 33:288–9).

[9] See e.g. Hegel 1990: 12:495/1956: 415.

obedience (as in Hegel's criticisms of Catholic authority discussed previously), because in so doing we come to a truth in which we can find ourselves, and with which we can identify. For both Luther and Hegel, therefore, a certain overcoming of the self is required, before the self can find itself again in the relation to the truth in which genuine freedom is to be attained:

> Subjectivity therefore makes the objective content of Christianity, i.e. the doctrine of the Church, its own. In the Lutheran Church the subjectivity and the conviction of the individual is regarded as equally necessary as the objectivity of truth. Truth with Lutherans is not a finished and completed thing [*nicht ein gemachter Gegenstand*]; but the subject should become a true subject [*sondern das Subjekt selbst soll ein wahrhaftes werden*], surrendering his particular being in exchange for the substantial truth, and making that truth his own. Subjective spirit comes to itself through this self-negation because it is absolutely at home with itself (*bei sich*).[10] Thus subjective spirit gains freedom in the truth, negates its particularity and comes to itself in its truth. In this way Christian freedom is actualized. (Hegel 1990 12:496/1956: 416)

Even though for truth, like grace, to come *to* the self, the stance of the self must be passive, this is not mere coercion or obedience, as the self can find itself again in what it undergoes or finds to be thereby revealed, in this way achieving the freedom of being 'at home with itself' in what would otherwise be entirely 'other'. In his lectures on Luther, Hegel thus associates the latter's conception of grace with a way in which freedom can be achieved through reconciliation, as a finding of oneself in the other, namely of what lies beyond one's active control, but is nonetheless not alien.

Moreover, as Stephen Houlgate has emphasised,[11] Hegel takes this model up into his philosophy more generally, and in particular in his own account of the philosophical method in the *Logic*, where Hegel again underlines the passive stance that is required from the philosophical inquirer, as in the following passages which Houlgate cites:

> [Pure knowing] must stand back from its content, allowing it to have free play, and not determining it further. (Hegel 1970: 5:72/1969: 73)

[10] This sentence is taken from the 1822–3 lectures: see Hegel 1996: 500/2011: 505.
[11] See Houlgate 2006: 60–66, and also Houlgate 2015 where he discusses Hegel's relation to Luther.

> This vanity [of clever argumentation [*das Räsonieren*]] is expected to make the effort to give up this freedom, and, instead of being the arbitrary [*willkürlich*] principle moving the content, it is supposed to let this freedom descend into the content and move itself by its own nature, which is to say, to let it move itself by means of the self as its own self and then to observe this movement. (Hegel 1970 3:56/2018: §58, 36–7)
>
> Philosophical thinking proceeds analytically insofar as it merely takes up its object [*Gegenstand*], the Idea, giving the latter full play [*dieselbe gewähren läßt*], and as it were merely looking upon its movement and development. To this extent, philosophizing is completely passive. (Hegel 2010: §238 A)

As in the passages on Luther we have been discussing from the lectures, Hegel also makes clear that in giving up one's control and hence one's self-hood in this sense, nonetheless there is a kind of reconciliation as one finds oneself 'at home with oneself' in this process, in which freedom is to be attained; for while the process of thought is not controlled by the self, it is not alien to it either:

> In logic, thoughts are considered in such a way that they have no other content that that which belongs to and is generated by thought itself. In this way, the thoughts are *pure* thoughts. Thus spirit relates purely to itself and is therefore free, for freedom is precisely this: to be at home with oneself in one's other [*in seinem Anderen bei sich selbst zu sein*], to be dependent on oneself, to be the determining factor for oneself. In all my urges [*Trieben*] I start from something other than myself that is for me something external. Here, then, we speak of dependence. Freedom exists only where there is no other for me that I am not myself. The natural human being who is determined only by his urges is not at home with himself. However self-willed [*eigensinning*] he may be, the *content* of his willing and believing is still not his own and his freedom is merely a *formal* one. When I think, I give up my subjective particularity, immerse myself in the basic matter [*in die Sache*] and let thought follow its own course; and I think badly whenever I add something of my own. (Hegel 2010: §24 A2)[12]

[12] Cf. also Hegel 2010: §23 R: 'For thinking is true in terms of content only if it is immersed in the *basic matter* at hand [*die Sache*] and in terms of form only if it is not a *particular* instance of being or doing of the subject, but instead is consciousness conducting itself precisely as an abstract "I", *liberated* from *all the particularity*

Thus, just as Luther would argue that the passivity of grace does not undermine but enhances our freedom, as through being passive one can find oneself more connected to the God who is no longer alien to the believer, as this God is now a forgiving source of love rather than a forbidding source of law, so Hegel is arguing here that our passivity in relation to thought does not undermine but enhances our freedom, as it is through being passive that the self follows a process in which it also finds itself at home. And, just as Luther chose to change his name to reflect this discovery of a kind of freedom in passivity,[13] which brought about a reconciliation between himself and God, who prior to this re-thinking of grace had felt 'alien' to Luther, so Hegel's conception of freedom in his account of the methodology of the *Logic* reflects this key Lutheran idea, that through passivity it is possible to achieve the freedom of reconciliation, of finding oneself in the other.

Moreover, Hegel's discussion of these issues also reflects a further complexity that can be traced back to Luther's conception of grace: namely, while it is clear that on Luther's view one can do nothing to *earn* grace and thus compel God to offer it to you, nonetheless it seems he also held that this grace requires *faith* from the believer, namely a basic trust or confidence in God's promise, so that there is some role for the subject in *receiving* grace, or conversely turning it away. At the same time, faith itself is not something one can simply instil in oneself, through any action of the will – indeed, the more one tries to do so, the less faith is likely to be achieved. On this account, therefore, faith in Luther might be thought of as a *medio-passive* phenomenon, as such phenomena have been called by Béatrice Han-Pile, which require not mere activity, but not sheer passivity either – but a kind of 'giving up' of oneself that has elements of both.[14]

Now, as Houlgate has also discussed, a similar complexity can equally be found in Hegel's account of the methodology of the *Logic*, for Hegel too does not treat that method as merely passive: for while philosophical thinking involves being taken up within the activity of the concept itself, for this to happen 'requires, however, the strenuous effort of holding off on one's own notions [*Einfällen*] and particular opinions which are always trying

[*Partikularität*] that attaches to qualities and conditions otherwise, and only enacting the universal through which it is identical to all individuals'.

[13] Around 1517, Luther started signing himself 'Eleutherius' (meaning 'the freed one' in Greek), rather than the family name of Luder, one assumes mainly to mark the liberating effects of his 'Reformation breakthrough', but perhaps also to escape the rather scurrilous implications of his original name.

[14] See Han-Pile 2020.

to assert themselves' (Hegel 2010: §238 A). Thus, just as Luther holds that we cannot do anything to earn the grace in which we have faith or trust, but also need to prevent ourselves blocking that grace through undermining our faith, and so allow ourselves to be taken over by faith instead, likewise Hegel holds that we need to treat the categories of thought as developing themselves, but also need to prevent ourselves blocking that process, and thereby allow this development to unfold. In both thinkers, therefore, for the freedom of reconciliation to be achieved requires a complex mix of active and passive elements which can be associated with the Lutheran conception of grace.

Finally, it is also arguable that a giving up of agency is for both thinkers a necessary part of avoiding a kind of entrapment in the self that Luther associates with sin (*incurvatus in se*), as the self asserts itself in a prideful and controlling manner and so focuses in on itself, rather than letting this go in an openness that liberates the self from itself. For Luther, this means no longer 'wanting to be God' and trying to put ourselves in his place (Luther WA 1:225/LW 31:10), while for Hegel it means not allowing our preconceptions to be imposed on '*what is there before us*' (Hegel 1970: 5:68/2020: 47).

3. Freedom as liberation from the law

I turn now to a third aspect of freedom which I think can be traced back to Luther, namely freedom as liberation from the law. In Luther, this issue strongly relates to the previous issue of grace, as one problem with 'works righteousness' from Luther's perspective was that it encouraged a kind of legalism: namely, that grace could be earned by complying with what the law requires of us. For Luther, however, this does not go far enough in its re-thinking of the Christian's relation to law, which he takes to no longer act on them as a constraint, who as a result of grace is able to act from love and not from a sense of duty or obligation, and who thus in this respect no longer stands under the law.

One text which reflects Luther's position here is *The Freedom of the Christian*, with its famously dialectical claim: 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none', in so far as the Christian is freed from following the law in an instrumental manner and out of fear for its penalties; on the other hand 'A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all' (WA 7:21 (German), 7:49 (Latin)/LW 31:344), as the Christian feels a gratitude to God and to Christ that also allows them to see what they owe to their neighbour, who

they serve in love.[15] In his Preface to the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans, Luther thus claims that the Christian lives not under the law but under grace in a way that makes them free, and explains the difference by appeal to Paul:

> [Paul] explains that to be without the law [but to be under grace] is not the same thing as to have no laws and to be able to do as one pleases. Rather, we are under the law when, without grace, we occupy ourselves with the work of the law. Then sin certainly rules [us] through the law, for no one loves the law by nature; and that is a great sin. Grace, however, makes the law dear [*lieblich*] to us; then sin is no longer present, and the law is no longer against us, but is one with us.
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> This is the true freedom from sin and from the law. He writes about this down to the end of the chapter [i.e. chapter 6], saying that it is a freedom to do good with pleasure [*Lust*] and to live well without the compulsion of the law [*wohl leben ohne Zwang des Gesetzes*]. Therefore this freedom is a spiritual freedom, which does not overthrow [*aufhebt*] the law but supplies [*darreicht*] what the law demands, namely pleasure [in the law] and love [for it], whereby the law is quieted and no longer drives people or makes demands of them… Our freedom [as Christians] is, therefore, no carefree fleshly freedom which is not obligated to do anything [*die nichts tun soll*], but a freedom which does much and in fact everything, and is free of the demands and obligations of the law. (Luther WA DB 7:20-21/LW 35:375–6)

As Luther makes clear here, he is not claiming that the Christian is somehow exempt from the law, and so can simply 'do as one pleases'; but rather, the Christian's relation to the law is fundamentally changed, for as a result of their relation to God through grace, they are freed from its obligatory or constraining force, as they can now relate to their neighbour in love, which has no place for law in this sense.[16]

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[15] Cf. Luther WA 7:66 (Latin)/LW 31:367: 'I will therefore give myself as Christ to my neighbour, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbour, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ'.

[16] Cf. also the *Second Disputation Against the Antinomians*, 1538, where Luther speaks of the law being 'empty' (*lex vacua*) when the law no longer presents itself in an accusatory form — which is how it is experienced by 'the angels and saints in heaven' who 'do with joy the things of the law' (WA 39.1:433/2008: 91–92). And see: And *Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter*, 1523, WA 12:331/LW 30:77: 'Christians…are not obligated to do anything more than serve and help their neighbour with all they have, just as Christ helped them. All their works are performed without compulsion and for nothing; they flow from a happy and cheerful heart, which thanks, praises, and lauds God for all the good things it has received from him. Thus St. Paul writes in 1 Tim 1:9 that "the law is not laid down for the just"; for of their own accord they do without recompense and unbidden everything God wants.'

Unlike the other two aspects of freedom we have discussed in the previous sections, where Hegel makes a clear reference to Luther on those issues, in this case there is no explicit reference by Hegel to Luther's conception of freedom with respect to the law (or none I have been able to identify). However, I would suggest that a case can still be made that there is a distinctly Lutheran cast to Hegel's thinking on these issues, most obviously in his early writings.[17] For, particularly in *The Spirit of Christianity* which focuses on the Sermon on the Mount, Hegel draws a clear distinction between Kantianism as an ethics of law, and Christianity as an ethics of love, which seems modelled on the Lutheran contrast discussed above. While in the earlier *Positivity of Christian Religion*, Hegel was happy to embrace the Kantian language of self-legislation,[18] in *The Spirit of Christianity* Hegel makes clear his dissatisfaction with the Kantian model from this perspective, as falling short of what Jesus has in mind. For, he argues, Jesus did not merely want to move from a positive conception of law to one grounded in Kantian reason, whereby the law is 'a product of a human power (i.e., of reason as the capacity for universality)' and so 'loses its objectivity, its positivity, its heteronomy, and the thing commanded is revealed as grounded in an autonomy of the human will'. Rather, Hegel argues, Jesus wanted to go further, as '[b]y this line of argument, however, positivity is only partially removed', as while the agent is no longer a slave to a lord outside themselves, on this Kantian model they remain a subject to a lord within, so that 'at the same time each is their own slave', as universal reason is seen to command and constrain what is particular – 'impulses, inclinations, pathological love, sensuous experience, or whatever else it is called' (Hegel 1970 1:323/1971: 211). It is at this point that Hegel contrasts the 'spirit of Jesus' with that of Moses and the legalism of Judaism which he had been discussing previously, which is also a contrast that Luther draws[19] – and uses it to critique the Kantian picture also:

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[17] As is often noted, Hegel is more circumspect in his references to love in his later writings; but as this comment from his lectures on Logic of 1831 suggest, his basic view on this issue did not change significantly: 'Love is completely speculative. Commonsense is speculative in the same way, but in reflection upon itself it forgets its true speculative character. In law I assert myself, my personality with all its singular interests. Law is a field in which the difference of persons is held fast in their respective rigidities. Within love, within the form of the concept, this whole field as found in law has disappeared. Blessedness is the actuality of the feeling of being in complete harmony, the feeling of satisfaction and of this peace' (Hegel 2001: 174/2008: 172).

[18] See Hegel 1970 1: 189–90/1971: 144–5. The first two parts of *The Positivity of Christian Religion* were composed in 1795–6 (where this material on self-legislation comes from the end of Part I), while *The Spirit of Christianity* was probably composed in 1798–99, and Part III of *The Positivity* after that, around 1800.

[19] As McGowan 2019 notes, Pinkard's claim in Pinkard 2000: 684–5, note 47 that this critique of Judaism is inspired by Kant seems questionable, as Hegel's critique of the latter parallels his critique of the former, so I

> This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality, is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form. The Sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfils the law but annuls it as a law [*aber als Gesteze aufhebt*] and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous. (Hegel 1970 1:324/1971: 212)

As an alternative to this Kantian morality of law, Hegel then goes on to propose instead the model of love, as involving 'a unification of inclination with the law whereby the latter loses its form as law' (Hegel 1970 1:326/1971: 214), as in love, obligation and constraint drop away, so that 'in love all thought of duties vanishes' (Hegel 1970 1:325/1971: 213). Hegel thus summarizes his position as follows:

> To complete subjection under the law of an alien Lord, Jesus opposed not a partial subjection under a law of one's own, the self-coercion of Kantian virtue, but virtues without lordship or submission, i.e. virtues as modifications of love. (Hegel 1970 1:359/1971: 244)

Hegel thus takes the Lutheran idea that love involves a kind of liberation from the law, and incorporates it into his critique of Kantian morality, a critique that was to go on to have significant implications for his view of ethics moral generally.

In emphasising this parallel between Luther and Hegel, I am not claiming Luther to be the only possible source for Hegel's thinking on this issue, and nor am I denying that there are difference between them: for example, Luther's account obviously gives a role for grace that is not mentioned at all in Hegel's more secular treatment, while Hegel brings in the virtues in a way that Luther would doubtless have resisted given his suspicion of all such Aristotelian notions. Nonetheless, as offering a model for the way in which law and love are to be contrasted, and how the latter can involve a kind of freedom from the law that is said to be importantly distinctive of a Christian outlook, Luther would appear to be of significance to this key element of Hegelian thinking, and the resulting turn away from Kant.

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agree with McGowan when he writes: 'It is Hegel's turn away from Kant that leads him away from Judaism and its commitment to the law. Kant's own hostility to Judaism has nothing to do with Hegel's' (p. 108). However, McGowan fails to note that in moving to this criticism of Judaism for its legalism, Hegel was returning to a familiar Lutheran trope, rather than developing a new position of his own.

4. Freedom as necessity

Finally, let me turn to a fourth aspect in Hegel's view of freedom which I suggest can be associated with Luther – though again, this is not a connection Hegel himself draws explicitly. It concerns Luther's much debated treatment of freedom and the will in *De servo arbitrio*, which is a text that (as far as I know) Hegel never mentions by name, and he also hardly ever mentions Erasmus, who is the target of Luther's argument in that text. Nonetheless, I want to claim that if we dig a little beneath the surface, and in particular look at Hegel's treatment of *Willkür* we can find Hegel implicitly siding with Luther in his debate with Erasmus on a key issue, which may suggest some influence.

Erasmus entered into his debate with Luther by responding to some of the latter's earlier pronouncements concerning free will,[20] publishing his *A Diatribe or Discussion on Free Will* (*De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio*) in 1524 – where 'diatribe' here is used not in the modern sense, but in the earlier sense of looking for a consensus on probable opinion through discussion. Luther, however, replied a year later to Erasmus's intentionally measured and urbane effort with what amounts to a diatribe in the modern form, entitled *De servo arbitrio*, which may be translated 'On the bondage [or slavery] of the will [or free choice]'. Luther's invective shocked and offended Erasmus, who responded with his two volume *Protector of the Diatribe* (*Hyperaspistes diatribae*)[21] in 1526 and 1527, in which Erasmus's language is almost as intemperate as Luther's own. As Luther emphasised, at the heart of this dispute lay issues that were central to his thinking, concerning grace, human agency, and divine knowledge and power, played out against the background of Augustine's earlier disputes with Pelagianism. More particularly, Luther's text is directed against Erasmus's defence of free choice: while Erasmus sought to avoid Pelagianism, he also sought to defend a limited place for free will, and to argue on the basis of various biblical texts (many involving divine commands) that this can be supported by scripture (for why would God command us to do things, unless we had the ability to do so, and how can he

[20] For example, in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) Luther had written that 'Free will, after the Fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin' (WA 1:354/LW 31:40).

[21] Erasmus's title is multi-layered, as Smith (2011: 24 note 2) observes: 'The very title, "Hyperaspistes", gives an indication of the kind of philological play and bitter sarcasm that often permeated these exchanges. The term derives from the adjective meaning "protected by a shield" and implies that the work is Erasmus's self defense. However, there is more to the term than that. Luther had occasionally referred to Erasmus as a "viper" (vipera in Latin, ἀσπίς in Greek), and Erasmus seems to imply that he is playing the role of a "super snake".'

justly condemn us if we cannot determine our actions for ourselves?). There are many different strands to Luther's reply, not all of which need concern us here (such as his challenge to the way Erasmus assumes that 'ought implies can', and his insistence that Erasmus remains guilty of a kind of semi-Pelagianism). Of more relevance to us is what Luther says about freedom itself – or more particularly 'free choice' (arbitrio).

Luther starts the main part of his response to Erasmus with the latter's definition of free choice:

> By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them. (Luther WA 18:661–2/LW 33:102–3, citing Erasmus 1524 [1969: 47])

Luther then complains about the indeterminacy of this definition:

> [T]he following are like blindfold gladiators: 'to apply', 'to the things which lead', and 'to turn away'. How are we going to divine what this applying and turning away means? (Luther WA 18:662/LW 33:104)

And Luther presents his view of what Erasmus could mean:

> I take it, then, that what is meant by 'a power of the human will' is a capacity or faculty or ability or aptitude for willing, unwilling, selecting, neglecting, approving, rejecting, and whatever other actions of the will there are. Now, what it means for that same power to 'apply itself' and to 'turn away' I do not see unless it is precisely this willing and unwilling, selecting, neglecting, approving, rejecting, or in other words, precisely the action of the will. So that [on Erasmus's account] we must imagine this power to be something between the will itself and its action, as the means by which the will itself produces the action of willing and unwilling, and by which the action of willing and unwilling is itself produced. Anything else it is impossible either to imagine or to conceive here. If I am mistaken, let the author be blamed who has given the definition, not I who am trying to understand it. (Luther WA 18:662–3/LW 33:104)

The crucial issue for Luther is that on Erasmus's account, the will does not simply will (as it were), as when I will to lift my arm, or to eat an apple; the will is also said to involve an element of *choice*, where the will also controls what it is that it then wills to do, by willing to direct itself one way or another – so that on this account, the will also decides whether to

lift my arm or not, or eat an apple or not, and it is in this choice or decision that the freedom of the will is said to reside.

Having set out what he takes Erasmus's position to be, Luther then offers various arguments against it, where the one of most interest to us may be outlined as follows:

1. Left to itself without God's grace, the will is unable to perform the good, only the bad.
2. A will that can only perform the bad is not really free to choose, as it really only has one option (namely the bad).
3. Therefore there is no free will qua free choice.

Luther's argument for the first premise is based on his anti-Pelagianism, which he can assume Erasmus's shares – though he thinks Erasmus does not clearly see its implications. Thus he often quotes Erasmus's own statement that 'in those who lack grace…it is probable that in them…the power of the will was not completely extinguished, but that it was unable to perform the good' ((Erasmus 1969: 49). Luther's argument for the second premise is simple:

> If anyone told you that a thing was free which could operate by its own power only in one direction (the bad one), while in the other (the good one) it could of course operate – though not by its own power, but only by the help of another – would you be able to keep a straight face, my friend? (Luther WA 18:665/LW 33:109)

He therefore concludes that there is no free will understood as a capacity to choose between the good and the bad. Either the will is doing the good, in which case it is doing so through God's grace, and so not exercising its own power; or it is without God's grace, in which case it is doing the bad and has no other option, in which case it is not free to choose. So, it is either acting under its own power, but then has no free choice (as only has one option, namely the bad); or it is not acting under its own power, but then has no free choice either (as it is acting through God's grace).

But, Luther recognizes, Erasmus might reply as follows: Isn't there still a point at which the will might *choose* whether to go along with God's grace and so opt for the good, as opposed to the bad? So isn't there still a point at which it can choose between good and bad, even if it will need God's help to get to actually attain the good? If this is possible, then those who lack grace cannot 'perform the good' in the sense of realise the good and fully achieve it, but they can still *choose* between good and bad, and so have free choice in this

sense – which is why the power of the will might be said to be not 'completely extinguished'.

Luther then gives an interesting response to this reply, which is as follows: Erasmus's position here depends on the idea that the will can be a 'mean' or 'middle-term' between willing the good and willing the bad, which is willing in the 'absolute sense'. But Luther has three arguments against this view: First, if (as Erasmus admits), as a result of sinning the will has lost its liberty, how can it remain in this neutral position? Second, Luther also denies the will *can* be 'neutral' in this sense, as to will is to be committed to something one way or another: unless one is so committed, no willing is going on, so the will cannot rest in some middle position:

> Nor, again, can desire and endeavor be a merely abstract willing, since desire must strive and endeavor in some direction – toward the good, for instance – and cannot either be a movement towards nothingness or a mere inactivity. (Luther WA 18:669/LW 33:114–5)

And finally, this supposedly neutral position between good and bad is not really normatively neutral, as if one is not willing the good, one is willing the bad:

> It is, moreover, a mere dialectical fiction that there is in man a neutral [*medium*] and unqualified [*purum*] willing, nor can those who assert it prove it… The truth of the matter is rather as Christ says: 'He who is not with me is against me' [Luke 11:23]. He does not say: 'He who is not with me is not against me either, but neutral [*in medio*]'. For if God is in us, Satan is absent, and only a good will is present; if God is absent, Satan is present, and only an evil will is in us. Neither God nor Satan permits sheer unqualified willing [*merum et purum velle*] in us… (Luther WA 18:670/LW 33: 115)

Luther thus endorses Augustine's view, 'that free choice avails for nothing but sinning, which is why… [he] calls it an enslaved rather than a free choice'. As Augustine himself puts it in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 3.5: 'A man's free will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth'. Luther seems to be reading Augustine here as follows: either an agent knows the way of truth, but then there is no room for choice, for to truly know that way is to will it; or the agent does not know the way of truth, so they also have no room for choice, as the only option thereby left to them is to sin. Thus, all that is left to the will is to bring about action; it has no additional capacity to choose which way to act, for

if it appears to it that it can choose between good and bad, it has been cut off from the good and gone down the path of the bad, so that its direction has already been determined, rather than having the capacity to choose from a neutral position, which Luther thinks is an illusion.[22]

Having outlined Luther's view, we can now relate Luther's argument to Hegel's position, beginning with a significant passage from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion:*

> In reference particularly to the statement that the will [*Wille*] is free choice [*Willkür*], which can will [*wollen*] good or evil, it may be remarked that as a matter of fact, free choice is not will [*so ist in der Tat diese Willkür nicht Wille*]; it is will only in so far as it comes to a decision, for in so far as it still might will one thing or the other, it is not will [*denn soweit er noch dies oder jenes will, ist er nicht Wille*]. (Hegel 1970 17:255–6/1974 3:50)

Hegel seems to agree with Luther here, that the will and free choice are different things, as the role of the will [*Wille*] is to bring about action, and consequently it only comes into play once things are already settled, and so it should not be identified with the capacity for choice or decision making. To say that the will is free because it incorporates some capacity for free choice is thus to misunderstand the nature of the will and what it does – which is to bring about action, rather than to choose.

But still, this in itself does not show we do not possess free choice: even if it is not to be *identified* with the will, could we not still have a capacity that can *direct* the will in different directions however it sees fit, based on a choice that it is free to make? As we have seen, this is how Luther understood Erasmus's position, to which he responded: if the agent thinks it can direct its will towards either the good or the bad at its discretion, it has already taken the path of the bad, so it does not really have two options present to it, but only one – so there is no place here for free choice. Does Hegel think the same?

To see that he does, consider the following argument which I will suggest Hegel would endorse, based on his conception of reason:

1. The rational will is guided by what is rational to do.

[22] As the editors of *The Bondage of the Will* note, Luther's position here has some affinities with debates concerning the 'liberty of indifference' (*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*): see Luther LW 33:115 n. 29. For further discussion of Luther's position which sets it in a wider context, see Løgstrup 2020: 51–71.

2. What is rational to do is determined by what the agent has most reason to do.
3. What the agent has most reason to do is settled by the intellect, not the will.
4. Therefore, what is rational to do leaves the will with no room for free choice about what to do.
5. Therefore, the agent who exercises free choice is failing to be a properly rational agent, and so not acting freely.

I take the first premise to be part of what Hegel has in mind when he insists on the unity of 'theoretical mind' and 'practical mind', and thus on 'the thinking will'.[23] The second premise then claims that what such a thinking will should will is what reason tells it that it has most reason to do. In this way, what the agent has most reason to do settles how a subject should act. Therefore, this leaves that subject with no choice or decision about what to do, as this is settled by what the subject has most reason to do, and once thought qua practical reason has worked out what this is, there is then no space left for some further choice; if in this circumstance the agent nonetheless thinks they have a space in which to make a choice, they must have already pulled back from what they have most reason to do, and so acted irrationally, in a way that undermines their freedom rather than realizing it.[24]

Thus, for Hegel, as for Luther, if free choice comes about in this way, something has gone wrong, so by exercising that choice one is only ever opting for the bad and not the good – and so not really exercising a choice at all. Conversely, to be free in a positive way, is not to be exercising free choice at all, but following the necessity of reason where it leads – just as for Luther, to be free of sin, and thus to be free in a Christian sense, is not to be exercising free choice, but to be guided by grace. Of course, there are important differences

[23] Cf. Hegel 2007b, §469 and §469 R: 'This concept, freedom, essentially takes the form of thinking; the way of the will by which it makes itself *objective* mind is to rise to the thinking will – to give itself the content that it can only have as a will that thinks itself. *True* freedom is ethical life, where the will has for its purpose a universal content, not subjective, i.e. self-centred content; but such content is only possible in thinking and through thinking; it is nothing less than absurd to want to exclude thinking from ethics, religion, lawfulness, etc.'

[24] '[T]he concept of freedom must not be taken in the sense of the arbitrary *Willkür* of an individual, but in the sense of a rational will, of the will in and for itself… Freedom is just thought itself; he who casts thought aside and speaks of freedom knows not what he is talking of. The unity of thought with itself is freedom, the free will. Thought only as willing [*wollend* – rather that *Willkür*] is the drive to sublate one's subjectivity, the relation to existence [Dasein], [and so] to realize oneself, since in that I am endeavouring to place myself as existent [*Existierendes*] on a par with myself as thinking. The will is only free as thinking [*Der Wille ist nur als denkender frei*]' (Hegel 1970 20:307–8/1995 3:402). Cf. also Hegel 1970 13:136/1975 1:98: 'Caprice [*Willkür*], of course, is often equally called "freedom"; but caprice is only non-rational freedom, choice [*Wählen*] and self-determination issuing not from the rationality of the will but from fortuitous impulses and their dependence on sense and the external world'.

between being determined by reason and being determined by grace, but on this issue of how freedom leaves no room for free choice in this context, they are structurally akin.

The Lutheran context to Hegel's treatment of these questions is strongly suggested by an important section of *The Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel discusses *Willkür*.[25] Like Luther, presents *Willkür* as a kind of 'stepping back' or neutral position, as the agent reflects away from what it is they should do, to give themselves the space to feel that regardless of this, it is still open to them to do 'as they please', which seems necessary to make the content of the action 'theirs'. But, Hegel suggests, the opposite is really the case, as the agent is no longer determined by what they have most reason to do, which then makes their choice empty and arbitrary: what the agent does is based on what they happen to desire and hence on a given contingency, rather than following necessarily from what they have reason to do. The discussion in the Addition to this section thus famously concludes:

> The ordinary person thinks he is free if it is open for him to act by exercising free choice [*willkürlich zu handeln*], but precisely this free choice means he is not free [*aber gerade in der Willkür liegt, daß er nicht frei ist*]. When I will what is rational, then I act not as a particular individual but in accordance with the concepts of ethical life in general: in an ethical action, I do not assert myself, but follow the matter at hand [*in eine sittlichen handlung mache ich nicht mich selbst, sondern die sache geltend*]. But in doing a perverse action [*etwas Verkehrtes*], it is my particularity that I bring onto the centre of the stage. The rational is the high road, where everyone travels, where no one is conspicuous… If you stop at the consideration that, having a free choice [*Willkür*], a human being can will this or that, then of course his freedom consists in this ability. But if you keep firmly in view that the content of his willing is a given one, then he is determined thereby and in this very respect no longer free. (Hegel 1991: §15 A, translation modified)

Hegel is arguing here that true freedom does not consist in free choice (*Willkür*), as freedom consists in willing what is rational, which leaves no room for free choice, though it does leave room for freely assenting to what reason requires, in seeing that it is rational. If in a rationally determinate situation you insist on trying to exercise free choice, then you will

[25] For a more general discussion of Hegel's conception of *Willkür* which covers some similar themes, see Englander 2020.

turn away from what is rational and be acting perversely – just like the mediocre artist who wants us to see their personality in the art-work as against the great artist who has followed what is determined by the art-work itself (ibid). So, if choice is operative in this situation, it in fact only goes one way, towards the bad – and thus is not really free.

However, just as Luther in *The Bondage of the Will* allows a limited place for *libero arbitrio* insofar as God has left us dominion over the natural world (WA 18: 671–2/LW 18: 118–9), which enables us to exercise choice without turning against God, so Hegel allows a limited place for *Willkür*, where reason leaves options open to us which we can decide between without turning against reason, as here reason is silent. Hegel thus gives *Willkür* a subordinate place in his *Philosophy of Mind*, where it comes in only at the point of choosing between which inclinations the subject decides to satisfy. But, because the subject has no reason to prefer one of these inclinations to the other (as if it did have such a reason, it would not take itself to have any such choice), whatever decision it makes will seem purely contingent and capricious to the subject, and so will appear as a 'nullity' to them, so any satisfaction they may feel in acting on that inclination 'is at the same time left behind'.[26] Likewise, Hegel allows a place for *Willkür* at several points in the *Philosophy of Right*, for example in the discussion of private property (Hegel 1991: §§45–6), and of civil society (§§182, 185, 189, 206).[27] However, like Luther, he clearly holds that we need to be careful not to take this as anything more than a limited model of freedom which only arises when reason leaves matters open, arguing for example that education is all about the 'hard work' of overcoming *Willkür* (Hegel 1991: §187 R).

[26] Hegel 2007b: §§477–8. Cf. also Hegel 1991: §17, and 2010: §145 A, where Hegel discusses *Willkür* in the context of his discussion of contingency: 'Now, overcoming the contingent, so construed, is generally the task of knowing [*Erkennens*], on the one hand, as much as in the domain of practice, on the other, it is a matter of not resting content [*stehenzubleiben*] with the contingency of willing [*Wollens*] or *arbitrary choice* [*Willkür*]'.
[27] Some might suggest that the monarch should be added to this list, e.g. Marx 1981: 227/1975: 25, translation modified: 'In the state the *monarch* is the element of *individual will*, of groundless self-determination, of arbitrariness [*Willkür*]'. However, while Hegel does seem to give the monarch a role in cutting short inconclusive debate between advisors which fits the model of legitimate *Willkür* in cases where reason leaves matters indeterminate (Hegel 1991: §279 R), in general Hegel comments that this is not the situation so that the monarch's '"I will"…does not imply that the monarch may act arbitrarily: on the contrary, he is bound by the concrete content of the advice he receives, and if the constitution is firmly established, he often has nothing to do than to sign his name' (1991: §279 A). This suggests that the monarch's will is not groundless because arbitrary, but groundless because he is not fully aware for the reasons for his willing, which are given to him by his advisors, which is what makes his self-determination abstract – he just knows that given his role in the constitution, this is what he is to will, though he does not fully understand why.

Thus, in a way that leads us back to the themes of §1, and the rectoral address on the Augsburg Confession with which we began, it is now less surprising that when in the remark to §124 of the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel famously associates Christianity with 'the right of *subjective freedom*' and thus of 'the subject's *particularity* to find satisfaction', he is not here talking about the freedom of *Willkür*; rather this is the right to insist 'that whatever [the subjective will] is to recognize as valid should be *perceived* by it *as good*' (§132). It is this right that Hegel took Luther to stand for in his opposition to the Catholic Church in a way that ushered in modernity. But our discussion in this section suggests that Luther also perhaps taught Hegel not to confuse subjective freedom in this genuine sense with a view that sees freedom as the capacity to step back from the good, and instead make some sort of arbitrary choice; and for Hegel, this lesson may have been equally important in shaping his thinking on the nature of what it is for us to be free.[28]

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[28] I am grateful to the editors and to the fellow contributors to this volume, who provided very useful feedback on an earlier draft, and also to the audience of a Hegel Society of Great Britain conference in 2019.

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