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LOVE AND MEMORY AS LEITMOTIFS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL AND LEVINAS

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Memory and Love: Introductory Remarks

Philosophy begins with the soul's agitation, with pain, trauma, rage, disgust, fear, desire and the memory of all these conditions. If we accept this hypothesis, we must also be aware that these rubrics entail a series of questions that constitute not only a basis for philosophical traditions but also for innovations, breaks and transformations.¹ A philosopher writes not only as an autonomous philosopher but *into* existing philosophical traditions, traditions bound not only to continuity and establishment of existing arguments but also to departures and new orientations for new events. Memory acquires meaning not only in the process of departure or rejection but in a process of new orientation. Accordingly, it acquires novel significance for the genesis of a philosophical thought—whether this thought is occupied with the past, present or prospective future. By the same token, memory constitutes a negotiator between reason and the soul's agitation; memory touches on the elementary roots of humanity and simultaneously constitutes subjective knowledge. It possesses a non-intentional orientation, its connection to its object is real and also laden with (determined by) the insignia of the past. During the process of memory, the past event is intervoven with subjective impressions, feelings and moods. Precisely through this cognitively flawed aspect of human memory, the theme of love attains an outstanding significance. In Hegel's view², love and memory are in a reciprocal relationship:

What we love, we remember, and what we remember, we love.

In the question of what role love and memory play in the epistemological process of reason, Hegel and Levinas exhibit an important difference. Where Hegel emphasizes the orientation of love towards good and recollecting conscience, Levinas emphasizes love's orientation

¹ Compare with Jacques D'Hondt: „Die Brüche in der europäischen Philosophietradition“, in: Michael Fischer / Paul Hoyningen-Huene (Hg.): *Paradigmen – Facetten einer Begriffskarriere*, Wien / Frankfurt a. M. 1997, 43.

² I will discuss the relationship between memory, love and ethics—as marked by Plato—in Section III. For now, it can be assumed that both memory and love for another constitute a foreign experience with the questioning of self-centered inclinations. Iris Därmann is correct in pointing out that from the depth psychological perspective, this relationship can be illuminated by the Freudian path; Iris Därmann: *Fremde Monde der Vernunft. Die ethnologische Provokation der Philosophie*, München 2005, 607. For the Platonic and Aristotelian view on memory, see for example Peter Gilgen: *Lektüren der Erinnerung – Lessing, Kant, Hegel*, München 2012, 13-21. Gilgen emphasizes the constitutive relationship between love and memory in Plato's philosophy, but does not further consider it in his further deliberations: see footnote 17.

towards bad conscience³. For Levinas, a non-objectified, non-intentional connection to the object⁴ is a necessary precondition for the relation to an Other. In contrast to Hegel, for Levinas love does not occur as a unification, but as a withdrawal, a withdrawal declaring the unbridgeable difference between love's object and its subject as a necessary precondition for the manifold empirical nature of the topic love. This unintentional connection to an object occurs in primary form through the "love for text"⁵ and in awareness of the Other, in the face-to-face encounter. Levinas comprehends the love for an Other and the "love for text" as central features of his understanding of ethics and philosophy.

The difference here to Hegel could not be greater. When Hegel, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, formulates his critique-- „Daran mitzuarbeiten, daß die Philosophie der Form der Wissenschaft näherkomme – dem Ziele, ihren Namen der *Liebe* zum *Wissen* ablegen zu können und *wirkliches Wissen* zu sein –, ist es, was ich mir vorgesetzt“⁶--his program entails that philosophy unfolds knowledge according to our understanding of reality, within which the understanding of love could in fact even constitute a hindrance. In contrast, Levinas contends that philosophy is not love of knowledge (as the conventional translation would have it) but "knowledge as wisdom in the *service* of love"⁷. This "wisdom of love, in the service of love" possesses a double orientation towards truth, which Levinas describes as the "ambiguity of love"⁸ and, accordingly, as the ambiguity or manifold significance of history: „Truth is something promised. Always promised, always future, always loved, truth lies in the promise and the love of wisdom, even if it is not

³ From the author: „Urteil und Gewissen – Hegel und Levinas im Vergleich“, in: Sandra Lehmann / Sophie Loidolt (Hg.): *Urteil und Fehlurteil*, Wien / Berlin 2011, 154.

⁴ „Das Menschliche, oder die Innerlichkeit des Menschen, ist die Rückkehr zum Innen des nicht-intentionalen Bewußtseins, zum schlechten Gewissen, zu seiner Fähigkeit, Ungerechtigkeit mehr zu fürchten als den Tod, das erlittene Unrecht dem begangenen Unrecht vorzuziehen und das, was das Sein gerecht macht, dem was es sichert. Sein oder Nichtsein, das ist wohl nicht die Frage par excellence.“ Emmanuel Levinas: „Das nicht-intentionale Bewußtsein“, in: ders.: *Zwischen uns – Versuche über das Denken an den Anderen*, übers. von Frank Miething, München / Wien 1995, 166.

⁵ Michael Wetzol: „Nachwort“, in: Emmanuel Levinas: *Stunde der Nationen. Talmudlektüren*, translated by Elisabeth Weber, München 1994, 168f. [*L'heure de la nation*, Paris 1988, 181].

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), in: ders.: *Werke in 20 Bänden*, hg. von Eva Moldenhauer / Karl M. Michel, Bd. 3, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, 14; im folgenden zitiert mit GW III.

⁷ E. Levinas: *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*. The Hague 1981. Translation of the 2d ed. (1979) of *Autrement qu'être*, 29 [37] Emmanuel Levinas: *Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht*, Freiburg / München 1998, 353 [*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Paris 1974, 207]. 8 Jahre später betrachtet Levinas im Gespräch mit Raúl Fornet und Alfred Gómez den Begriff Liebe deutlich distanzierter: „Das Wort ‚Liebe‘ mag ich nicht so sehr, es ist so abgegriffen und mißbraucht. Lassen Sie uns von einem Aufsichnehmen des anderen Schicksals sprechen.“ Emmanuel Levinas: „Philosophie, Gerechtigkeit und Liebe“, in: ders.: *Zwischen uns – Versuche über das Denken an den Anderen*. München / Wien 1995, 132.

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas: *Totalität und Unendlichkeit. Versuch über die Exteriorität*, Freiburg / München 2002, 370-372 [*Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, La Haye 1961, 232f.].

forbidden to catch sight, in the time of disclosure, of the structured work of history and of a progression in the successive up to the limits of non-philosophy“.⁹

When we inscribe ourselves into tradition, accordingly setting ourselves into a relationship with an Other, this implies the capacity to remember—which is connected with the theme of love. Regarding the concept of memory, Hegel and Levinas demonstrate both accordances and breaks: as divergent as their treatment of love’s content and its unfolding is, both philosophers underline the necessity of a remembering, recollecting love as well as a loving memory, as answer to the soul’s agitations. However, Levinas—in contrast to Hegel—does not see loving memory as an answer to *historical* agitations. This discrepancy will serve as a point of departure to bring Hegel and Levinas into dialogue.

⁹ E. Levinas: *Otherwise Than Being*, 29.