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FROM KANT TO HÖLDERLIN: POETRY AND
RELIGION IN THE WAKE OF PHILOSOPHICAL
AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Hölderlin's famous quote "Thus all Religion would be poetic in its essence." (EaL 239)¹, which is taken from the *Fragments of Philosophical Letters* (1796/97, EaL 234-239)², does not represent a mere rapturous exclamation of the poet who wants to dissolve religion into poetry. It condenses Hölderlin's intensive philosophical examination of Kant's writings and Fichte's lectures which can be found in his letters and conversations with Immanuel Niethammer, Schiller, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel and others.³ This sentence summarizes a development that is still of the greatest relevance today for determining the relationship between philosophy, theology and aesthetics.

In the following considerations I will trace where the important pivots of Hölderlin's peculiar reception of Kant are and what drift he gives to Kant's conception. In contrast to an interest primarily critical of knowledge (Kant), Hölderlin attempts to determine the place of poetry and religion in the architectonics of thought. Poetry and religion prove to be related to each other and are closely related to the categories of modality, especially that of possibility, as well as to the space opened up by *aesthetic ideas* in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Hölderlin's central categories are the *sphere* as a cipher for an intersubjective, linguistically, historically and culturally mediated interaction with the world, which

¹ J. Ch. F. HÖLDERLIN, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. by Johann KREUZER, Hamburg, 1998 [below TS], 15; Friedrich HÖLDERLIN, *Essays and Letters* ed. and translated with an Introduction by Jeremy ADLER and Charlie LOUTH, London 2009 [below EaL].

² TS 10-15; Cf. Friedrich HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe in acht Bänden, ed. by Friedrich BEISSNER, Stuttgart 1946-1985 [below StA], StA 4.1, 275-279, 416f and StA 4.2, 786-793; cf. Friedrich HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtlicher Werke und Briefe*, Münchener Ausgabe, ed. by Michael KNAUPP, Darmstadt 1998 [below MA], MA III, 387-389. For a reconstruction of the text cf. Michael FRANZ., *Einige Editorische Probleme von Hölderlins theoretischen Schriften. Zur Textkritik von ‚Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität‘, ‚Über den Begriff der Straffe‘ und ‚Fragment philosophischer Briefe‘*, in: HJB 2000/01, 330-344, here: 335-344. An interpretation of the text is given by KREUZER, cf. TS XV-XVIII and 120f; ID., *Zeit, Sprache, Erinnerung: Die Zeitlogik der Dichtung*, in: DERS (Hg.), *Hölderlin-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2002/2011, 147-161; Michael FRANZ, *Theoretische Schriften*, in: Johann KREUZER (Hg.), *Hölderlin-Handbuch*, 224-246, here: 232-236; Paul BÖCKMANN, *Hölderlin und seine Götter*, München 1935, 203-210; Ulrich GAIER, „So wäre alle Religion ihrem Wesen nach poetisch.“ *Säkularisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Poesie bei Herder und Hölderlin*, in: Silvio VIETTA/Herbert UERLINGS (Hg.) *Ästhetik – Religion – Säkularisierung I. Von der Renaissance zur Romantik*, München 2008, 75-92, especially: 83-85; 91f; Charlie Louth, „jene zarten Verhältnisse“. *Überlegungen zu Hölderlins Aufsatzbruchstück Über Religion / Fragment philosophischer Briefe*, in: HJB 39 (2014/15), 124-138.

³ Cf. Dieter HENRICH, *Der Grund im Bewusstsein*; Christoph JAMME, „Ein ungelehrtes Buch“. *Die philosophische Gemeinschaft zwischen Hölderlin und Hegel in Frankfurt 1797-1800* (Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 23), Bonn 1983; Violetta WAIBEL, *Wechselbestimmung. Zum Verhältnis von Hölderlin, Schiller und Fichte in Jena*, in: SCHRADER (Hg.), *Fichte und die Romantik*, 43-69.

replaces the dichotomy between subject and object, and the *repetition* as the opening of a utopian space of possibility.

LETTERS I: "... IN THEM I WILL GO ON FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POETRY AND RELIGION"

1) When Hölderlin wrote from Jena to his brother Carl on 13 April 1795, he gave an excellent brief introduction to the significance of the moral law and the postulates of practical reason in Kant's work and developed them further towards Fichte's basic idea of the I and the non-I. Of central importance here is the motif of infinite progress. On "coming nearer to his aim of the greatest possible moral perfection"⁴ he writes:

But since this aim is impossible in this world, since it cannot be attained within time and we can only approach it in infinite progression, we have need of a belief in an infinite extent of time because the infinite progress in good is an uncontested requirement of our law; but this infinite extent of time is inconceivable without faith in a Lord of nature whose will is the same as the command of the moral law within us, and who must therefore want us to endure infinitely because he wants us to make infinite progress in good and, as the Lord of nature, also has the power to realize that which he wants.⁵

Here Hölderlin is still within the realm of practical philosophy, the matter of aesthetics is not mentioned in the entire letter. About half a year later, in a letter to Schiller dated September 4, 1795, the unification of subject and object appears as the decisive question that every philosophical system must ask itself, alongside the motif of infinite progress:⁶

I am attempting to work out for myself the idea of an infinite progress in philosophy by showing that the unremitting demand that must be made of any system, the union of subject and object in an absolute... *I* or whatever one wants to call it, though possible aesthetically, in an act of intellectual intuition, is theoretically possible only through endless approximation, like the approximation of a square to a circle; and that in order to arrive at a system of thought immortality is just as necessary as it is for a system of action.⁷

In these sentences a program for a philosophy to be developed is presented ("I am attempting to work out for myself [...] by showing [...]"), whereas in the letter to his brother Hölderlin initially only summarizes the philosophical systems of Kant and Fichte that were formative to him. At the center of the short passage, as mentioned above, there are two images, one of infinite progress or infinite rapprochement and the other of the unification of subject and object. First: The image of

⁴ Brief 97, 13. April 1795, MA II 576-579, here: 577; vgl. MA III, 481-482; StA 6.2, 731-735/EaL 48-52, here: 49.

⁵ Brief 97, 13. April 1795, MA II 576-579, here: 577f/EaL 48-52, here: 50.

⁶ I doubt whether one should speak of the emergence of a "philosophy of unification" in view of this new central question about the unification of subject and object, as Christoph Jamme does in his outstanding study on Hegel and Hölderlin (cf. JAMME, "Ein ungelehrtes Buch", 71-98). Already at this time Hölderlin has, as can be seen in *Being Judgement Possibility*, a strong awareness of the meaning of difference which cannot be abandoned.

⁷ Brief 104, 4. September 1795, MA II, 595f/EaL 61-63, here: 62.

infinite progress recalls the central question in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as to how reason deals with the inevitably occurring figures of an infinite progressus, that are in danger of being understood as an inadmissible extension of our knowledge of objects (Kant talks about "transcendental illusion" / "transzendentalen Scheine"⁸). The idea that the immortality of the soul must be regarded as necessary not only for action (with practical intent), but also for the realization of a system of thought, is connected to this very figure of infinite expansion, namely the ego or the soul. It would be worth discussing to what extent Hölderlin differs from, or continues, Kant's thinking in this. This discussion must be omitted here.⁹

To show that every philosophical system must be concerned with the unification of subject and object in the absolute cannot mean that subject and object are directly related to one another. This would undermine the entire Kantian epistemology, which is initially devoted to the question of how potential objects of experience are constituted at all. It would make the entire intermediate space disappear, which is located between the categories of the subject's intellect and the data of perception and which is highlighted by Kant in the *Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding* (*Schematismus der reinen Verstandesbegriffe*). However, it is precisely this interspace that is of central importance for Hölderlin's reception of Kant, as will be shown below.

In his letter to Schiller, Hölderlin does not really name the point of unification in the absolute, but merely indicates it with a placeholder (*absolute ego* – "or whatever one wants to call it"), rather pointing towards a function. It becomes clear that it is not his intention to positivize something unconditional that lies before all separations – nor is it a matter of positivizing two given poles, the subject and the object, which would be related to this absolute. Rather, Hölderlin is concerned with the movement of overcoming otherwise disparate aspects of reality, which he addresses with the ciphers subject and object. He thus takes up perhaps the most fundamental dichotomy of modern philosophy (in a later letter, which will be discussed below, he enumerates further dichotomies) and suggests that overcoming the dichotomous character of the concept of reality must be the task of philosophy. The unification has an aesthetic character and is called *intellectual intuition* (*intellectuale Anschauung*). It is not conceived in terms of infinite rapprochement which decisively shapes this passage.

2) The motifs mentioned can be explained more precisely through a letter Hölderlin sent to the philosopher Immanuel Niethammer half a year later in February 1796.

In the philosophical letters I want to find the principle that will explain to my satisfaction the divisions in which we think and exist, but which is also capable of making the conflict disappear, the

⁸ Immanuel KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. by Jens TIMMERMAN, Hamburg 1998 [below KrV], KrV, B 352/Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge 1998, 385 [below CPR].

⁹ Cf. for example the statement about the three cardinal theorems about the *freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God*: "If, then, these three cardinal propositions are not at all necessary for our knowing, and yet are insistently recommended to us by our reason, their importance must really concern only the practical." (KANT, KrV, B 827f/KANT, CPR, 674)

conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world, and between reason and revelation, – theoretically, through intellectual intuition, without our practical reason having to intervene. To do this we need an aesthetic sense, and I shall call my philosophical letters *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. And in them I will go on from philosophy to poetry and religion.¹⁰

Again, the letter contains a reference to Hölderlin's project. In echo of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Hölderlin wants to write *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. He names the transition from philosophy to poetry and religion as an essential content. This transition is connected with the search for a way of dealing with the divisions with which modern philosophy operates right up to Kant. While Hölderlin had only mentioned the separation of subject and object in his letter to Schiller, he now adds the "conflict" between self and world, as well as between reason and revelation. Obviously, it is not only about the modern subject/object constellation, but about a modern development in which thinking – in various respects – falls apart in forms of a no longer mediable conflict.

For Hölderlin it is clear that there is no way (back) to a tensionless primordial unity that precedes the divisions. At first the divisions in which *our* thinking is caught have to be understood, i.e. understanding one's own time: "to find the principle that will explain to my satisfaction the divisions in which we think and exist."

Moreover, Hölderlin is also concerned with preventing the disintegration of thought into two completely separate areas that can no longer be mediated. When Hölderlin speaks of a "principle", he does not mean an unconditional principle of unity (a metaphysical principle of being) that could be objectively conceived. In this principle, reason, expressed in Kant's terminology, would fall prey to the *transcendental appearance* (*transzendentaler Schein*) that arises when one considers the conditions of thought in the subject to be something positively given.¹¹ The principle mentioned must therefore be found in a form of thinking, a function, a process; unlike Kant, however, Hölderlin does not (primarily) think of practical reason as the pivotal point of the mediation of the dichotomies and antinomies that constantly break open anew in thinking. He strives to understand and explain them from the point of view of theoretical knowledge, again mentioning the motif of *intellectual intuition*. In my opinion, at first this motif is rather a kind of cipher for an aspect beyond the dichotomies, which is nevertheless not to be found in practical philosophy, but has to do with intuition. What is the point of naming this motif at the point of transition from philosophy to poetry and religion?

3) In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the end of *Transcendental Aesthetics*, Kant emphasizes that the intellectual intuition can only be had by an "original being", but not by man as "one that is dependent as regards both its existence and its intuition"¹². For Kant it would mean a form of

¹⁰ Brief 117, 24. Februar 1796, MA II, 614f, here: 615; vgl. StA 6.2, 783-787/EaL 66-68, here: 67.

¹¹ Cf. Hans Michael BAUMGARTNER, *Kants „Kritik der reinen Vernunft“: Anleitung zur Lektüre*, Freiburg/München 21988, 101-104.

¹² KANT, KrV, B 72/KANT, CPR, 192.

immediate self-knowledge that would skip the temporally structuring synthesis as which the ego (the “consciousness of itself”¹³) evolves:

If the faculty for becoming conscious of oneself is to seek out (apprehend) that which lies in the mind, it must affect the latter, and it can only produce an intuition of itself in such a way, whose form, however, which antecedently grounds it in the mind, determines the way in which the manifold is together in the mind in the representation of time.¹⁴

The ego does not intuit itself “as it would immediately self-actively represent itself, but in accordance with the way in which it is affected from within.”¹⁵ The “self-intuition of the mind”¹⁶ (“Selbstanschauung des Gemüts”) is thus characterized by a process of affection and becoming affected¹⁷ – two processes that do not coincide completely (otherwise the inner intuition would be intellectual). This hiatus, which cannot be closed, is time or emerges as time. Kurt Appel expresses this as follows:

There is an unbridgeable gap between the act of setting and the representation of it, which is why the idea is not only the active moment of affecting, but also an act of being affected. Time is precisely this moment between activity and passivity, this difference that spreads in the act of each self-affection.¹⁸

In the subject, more precisely in the synthesizing act that determines the subject, there remains a non-closing moment of displacement, of difference. What remains is a gap which can no longer be traced back to a preceding starting point and which cannot be overcome by the subject through reflection.¹⁹

Hölderlin does not go back behind this insight either²⁰, but – as will be shown later – he will determine this difference as one of *discretion and continuity*. The recourse to the *intellectual intuition* in Niethammer’s letter does not want to encompass or abolish this difference, but refers, as Johann Kreuzer points out, to the fact that the forms of antagonism, of separation, of difference must be thematization in the aesthetic experience:

“Intellectual intuition” is a necessary prerequisite for the reflection on the structure of self-consciousness as well as for the explanation of the opposites that we discover as self-consciousness or rather that we find within self-consciousness. Intellectual intuition is neither something positive and factual nor is it something that can be theoretically determined. Concerning this, Hölderlin abides by Kant’s criterion. What

¹³ KANT, KrV, B 68/KANT, CPR, 189.

¹⁴ KANT, KrV, B 68f/KANT, CPR, 189f.

¹⁵ KANT, KrV, B 69/KANT, CPR, 190.

¹⁶ KANT, KrV, B 69/KANT, CPR, 190.

¹⁷ Kant writes about „the form of intuition, which, since it does not represent anything except insofar as something is posited in the mind, can be nothing other than the way in which the mind is affected by its own activity, namely this positing of its representation, thus the way it is affected through itself, i.e., it is an inner sense as far as regards its form“ (KANT, KrV B 67f/KANT, CPR, 189).

¹⁸ Kurt APPEL, *Vom Preis des Gebetes*, in: ID., *Preis der Sterblichkeit. Christentum und neuer Humanismus* (QD 271), Freiburg 2015, 186-228, here: 209 [Translation: Philipp SCHLÖGL].

¹⁹ Cf. APPEL, *Vom Preis des Gebetes*, 208-210.

²⁰ This applies to Hegel in the same way (cf.. APPEL, *Vom Preis des Gebetes*, 210f).

is regarded as intellectual intuition, is the reality of an aesthetic experience. There is no object of intellectual intuition. (TS XV)²¹

The way in which aesthetic experience can symbolize and express this difference and this hiatus without retracing them to a preceding motif and thus dissolving them, but also how the tension in them can be balanced without turning their reconciliation into an infinite progress, is to be concretized in the fifth section of this text. Thereby the considerations “will go on from philosophy to poetry and religion.”²²

4) When Hölderlin juxtaposes the terms “theoretical” and “in intellectual intuition”, a direction is indicated that ranges from the theoretical evidence of the possibility of objective world experience (theoretical knowledge) to aesthetic experience, in Kant’s words from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *aesthetic judgement*: “To do this we need an aesthetic sense”²³, Hölderlin states. In order to trace the path taken by Hölderlin, the first question to be asked is where Hölderlin takes his starting point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and how he moves towards the *Critique of Judgement*. The next section seeks to determine one of the essential points at which Hölderlin’s reception of Kant begins and from which he also begins to distance himself from Kant.

LETTERS II: THE SCHEMATISM OF THE PURE CONCEPTS OF THE UNDERSTANDING AS STARTING POINT

In a letter of January 26, 1795, addressed by Hölderlin from Jena to his friend Hegel, who was staying in Bern, he tells of, among other things, his experiences with Fichte’s lectures and his “curious” (*merkwürdig* in the sense of remarkable) interpretation of the Kantian antinomies:

His examination of the reciprocal determination of the I and the Not-I (in his language) is certainly curious; also the idea of striving etc. I must break off, and must ask you to regard all that as good as not written. That you’re getting to grips with the concepts of religion is certainly good and important in many respects. The concept of providence I imagine you’re dealing with in exact parallel to Kant’s teleology; the way in which he connects the mechanism of nature (and so also of destiny) with its purposiveness really seems to me to contain the whole spirit of his system. Of course it is the way he solves all antinomies. In regard of the antinomies Fichte has a very curious thought, but I’d prefer to write to you about it on another occasion. For a long time now I’ve been thinking about the ideal education of the people, and because you are in the middle of dealing with a part of that, religion, perhaps I’ll choose your image and your friendship as the conductor of my thoughts into the outer world of the senses and write in good time

²¹ Translation: Sara WALKER.

²² EaL 66-68, here: 67

²³ Brief 117, 24. Februar 1796, MA II, 614f, here: 615. On the significance of Kantian aesthetics for Hölderlin cf. the note to Hegel in the letter of 10 July 1794.: “My preoccupations are pretty focused at the moment. Kant and the Greeks are virtually all I read. I am trying to become particularly familiar with the aesthetic part of the critical philosophy.” (Brief 84, 10. Juli 1794, MA II 540f, here: 541/EaL 27-29, here: 29)

what I would perhaps have written later in letters to you which you can judge and correct.²⁴

1) This is a philosophically dense, but very erratically articulated passage full of unexecuted ideas. I want to point out only a few aspects briefly: In this letter, too, the question of how to deal with the antinomic character of our access to the world plays a central role. Hölderlin considers this as a point at which Fichte remarkably goes beyond Kant. Fichte's lectures are an essential stimulus for Hölderlin's search for a way out of Kantian thought, although he does not simply adopt Fichte's concepts.²⁵ Hölderlin then sees "the whole spirit of his system" (the Kantian system; EaL 48) in teleology, i.e. the unification of the mechanism of nature and its expediency, which puts a particular emphasis on the second part of the *Critique of Judgement*. Moreover, Hegel's reflections on religion are repeatedly incorporated into the text.

2) At the end of the passage, Hölderlin develops an image, perhaps nothing more than an association, of great significance. Hölderlin addresses himself to Hegel when he writes: "perhaps I'll choose your image and your friendship as the conductor of my thoughts into the outer world of the senses."²⁶ For Hölderlin, Hegel's image and friendship take on the role of a mediation of thoughts with the outer world of the senses. It is precisely this task of mediation (synthesis), which points to the centre of Kantian philosophy and which Kant is concerned with in the *Schematism of Pure Concepts of Understanding*, namely "to show the possibility of applying pure concepts of the understanding to appearances in general."²⁷

This requires a *third party* which is in a "similarity" both with the category (the pure concepts of understanding) and with appearance and which refers to time. Time does not precede the process of mediation but constitutes itself in it or rather *as* this process. The "*transcendental schema*"²⁸ plays the connecting role of the third. It is not a (timeless, externally applicable) tool and cannot be objectified, but "is rather only the pure synthesis"²⁹, activity *and* happening and thus neither active nor passive; it has a temporal, or rather time-forming, time-making, time-determining character. Outside this temporal mediation, neither the categories nor the view is valid.³⁰ There is therefore no mediation of a reality that can be fixed for itself in thought (the categories) and an amorphous material of sensuality (the view) which are to connect subsequently. Only in their temporal, time-forming, time-determining relation to each other, only in the synthesis, do the two of them become extremes of the relation. There is no possibility to go back behind the

²⁴ Brief 94, 26. Jänner 1795, MA II, 567-569, here: 569/EaL 47-49, here: 48 seq.

²⁵ Hölderlin's letter to Hegel, which unfortunately has not been completely preserved, also indicates a critique of Fichte's system, which Hölderlin might also have told Fichte, whose lectures he enthusiastically listened to. Unfortunately the letter has a gap at the place where it says "Fichte confirms my" (Brief 94, January 26, 1795, MA II, 567-569, here: 569/EaL 47-49, here: 48). On Hölderlin's reception of Fichte cf. Violetta WAIBEL, *Hölderlins Rezeption von Fichtes „Grundlage des Naturrechts“*, in: HJb 1996/97, 146-172.

²⁶ Brief 94, 26. Jänner 1795, MA II, 567-569, here: 569/EaL 47-49, here, 48 seq.

²⁷ KANT, KrV B 177/KANT, CPR, 272. In his second letter to Böhlendorff Hölderlin refers to a similar structure when he writes about the "phenomenalization of concepts" (Brief 240, November 1802, MA II 920-922, here: 921/EaL 247-249, here: 248).

²⁸ KANT, KrV B 177/KANT, CPR, 272.

²⁹ KANT, KrV B 181/KANT, CPR, 274.

³⁰ Cf. APPEL, *Zeit und Gott*, 73-76.

character of the synthesis in order to either find existing objects or subjects in themselves or to find a fixed starting point for mediation. Kant calls the *ability* to form the schemata of pure concepts of understanding the productive power of imagination.³¹

3) Hölderlin takes up this concept *associatively* and puts Hegel's image (note the proximity of *schema* and *image*) and friendship, i.e. everything he associates with his friend and his thinking, in the place of the time-forming synthesis, which connects the thoughts with the sensual world that otherwise would not exist outside this connection: "perhaps I'll choose your image and your friendship as the conductor of my thoughts into the outer world of the senses" (EaL 48).

In this, however, Hölderlin and Kant pursue different interests. Kant has the critical interest to inquire how the world can be experienced as an object world at all³², and then unfolds the schematizing activity of the mind (the time-forming synthesis) on the basis of the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality previously derived from the functions of judgement.³³ Hölderlin's question as to how any categories of thinking can be combined with the experience of the sensual sounds similar but is less epistemologically motivated than poetologically. Here the transition begins that Hölderlin described a year later in his letter to Niethammer as the endeavour to "go on from philosophy to poetry and religion". In Hölderlin's work, the critical question adopted from Kant about the mediation of concepts of understanding and intuition will develop further into the question of how this mediation can find an expression in language. For Hölderlin this synthesis will only take place if it can also be articulated in a language (and that means for him especially in the form of poetry). Outside of language the synthesis has no existence, and its extremes, the categories of thinking and the outer world of the senses, disintegrate.

POSSIBILITY AS REPETITION OF REALITY: BEING JUDGEMENT POSSIBILITY

1) One of Hölderlin's first philosophical texts, *Seyn, Urtheil, ...* (TS 7f/*Being Judgement Possibility*, EaL 231-232)³⁴, also shows that Hölderlin's reception of Kant has an essential starting point in the chapter on Schematism, but that he also distances himself from the conception developed there.

The question posed in this text, which consists of three parts (being, judgement, the categories of modality), is similar to that posed in the aforementioned letters. At the beginning of the text Hölderlin defines the

³¹ The "schema of a pure concept of the understanding, [...] is a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the inner sense in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (time) in regard to all representations, [...]" (KANT, KrV B 181/KANT, CPR, 274).

³² Cf. APPEL, *Zeit und Gott*, 76.

³³ Cf. KANT, KrV B 105f; 181-187/KANT, CPR, 211f.; 273-277.

³⁴ Cf. Michael FRANZ, *Hölderlins Logik. Zum Grundriß von 'Seyn Urtheil Möglichkeit'*, in: HJb 1986/87, 93-124; here especially: 118-123; Michael FRANZ., *Einige Editorische Probleme von Hölderlins theoretischen Schriften. Zur Textkritik von 'Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität', 'Über den Begriff der Straffe' und 'Fragment philosophischer Briefe'*, in: HJb 2000/01, 330-344, here: 330-333; Michael FRANZ, *Theoretische Schriften*, in: *Hölderlin Handbuch*, 224-246, here: 228-232; KREUZER, TS XIII-XV and 119.

concept of being precisely through the connection between subject and object: “Being – expresses the connection of subject and object.” (EaL 231). He then connects the intellectual intuition with this “absolute being” (EaL 231). Here, too, it is not a matter of theoretical knowledge or the substantiation of a primordial existence before all separations, but rather of the text itself disintegrating into the parts *Seyn* (unification) and *Urtheil* (separation) – considering the first two sections –, thus reflecting the inevitable division. Speaking of *absolute being* is not possible without speaking of separation. However, Hölderlin notes: “The concept of division itself contains the concept of a reciprocal relationship between object and subject, and the necessary premise of a whole of which object and subject are the parts.” (EaL 231) This necessary precondition for thinking (here Hölderlin follows Kant’s criticism) must not be regarded as something given or as the object of knowledge.

The categories of modality (possibility, reality, necessity) can be regarded as a function of the union of union and separation, of the union of *Seyn* and *Urtheil*, which can no longer be objectified now.³⁵ The synthesis of subject and object (or of *Seyn* and the separate) is, as will be shown below, not determined by the categories of modality with regard to content, but as it regards its character. It shows itself as possible, real or necessary. The three categories of modality do not enable the determination of the content which the subject attributes to the object associated with it in the synthesis, but rather focus the perspective on the space between the two poles in which they relate to one another. They introduce a form of distance, delay, deceleration into the union of subject and object that does not take place immediately, but under the perspectives of possibility, reality and necessity. These are, as it were, inseparable from the process of synthesis (or *mitgängig*³⁶).

2) When Hölderlin refers to the three categories of modality in the last section of *Being Judgement Possibility*, he adopts them by the terms Kant uses in the chapter on Schematism: possibility, reality and necessity. In the first mention of the categories of modality when describing the table of categories, however, Kant speaks of possibility, existence (*Dasein*) and necessity.³⁷

It is important that Kant distinguishes the categories of modality from the categories of quantity, quality and relation, which becomes clear in the specific manner of the temporal synthesis of categories of understanding and phenomena that the process of schematization is about. Synthesis as a form of becoming temporal of the *I think* (*Ich denke*) has, in relation to modality, the character of the *concept of time*, i.e. the way in which time correlates with the determination of an object: *Possibility* means the notion of an object *at any arbitrary time*, *reality* means its existence *at a certain point in time*, and *necessity* means its existence *at all times*. Thus, the schemes of modality open up the possibility to relate the possible objects to time; as

³⁵ Cf. The beautiful formulation by Michael Franz: “Under the condition of (the) ‘Ur-Teilung’ (primal-separation), the categories of modality constitute a relationship between the separated parts – subject and object.” (vgl. FRANZ, *Theoretische Schriften*, in: *Hölderlin Handbuch*, 224-246, here: 232 [Translation: Sara WALKER]).

³⁶ I adopt this term from Dieter Mersch.

³⁷ Cf. KANT, *KrV* B 105f; 184/KANT, *CPR*, 211f.; 275.

already indicated, this does not contribute anything to the determination of the object itself:

The principles of modality are not, however, objective-synthetic, since the predicates of possibility, actuality, and necessity do not in the least augment the concept of which they are asserted in such a way as to add something to the representation of the object.³⁸

The categories of modality do not refer to an objective, i.e. object related, but the subjective-synthetic relation, which (mediated by the respective way of correlation between the determination of the object and time) indicates the corresponding “cognitive faculty” in the subject³⁹: “The principles of modality therefore do not assert of a concept anything other than the action of the cognitive faculty through which it is generated.”⁴⁰ Hölderlin summarizes this recapitulatory statement from the end of the chapter on *Die Postulate des empirischen Denkens überhaupt* in a concise, perhaps somewhat simplistic form, when at the end of *Being Judgement Possibility* he states that the concept of necessity applies “to the objects of reason” – and further: “The concept of possibility applies to the objects of the understanding, that of reality to the objects of perception and observation.” (EaL 232)⁴¹

3) Two points are to be pointed out here. Firstly, Hölderlin gives the category of possibility a peculiar drift in *Being Judgement Possibility*; secondly, there is a way which leads from here to the *Critique of Judgement*, the significance of which for Hölderlin has already been pointed out.

First: In *Being Judgement Possibility* there is a decisive passage which makes a new accentuation: “If I think of an object as possible, then I am only repeating the prior consciousness by force of which it is real. There is for us no conceivable possibility that would not be a reality.” (EaL 231-232) The three categories of possibility, reality and necessity do not stand side by side on the same level and do not only refer to different ways in which time and determination of the object correlate, but possibility and reality are put into a direct relation. However, they do not function in such a way that possibility becomes reality (is realized), but vice versa. What is possible refers to a reality that precedes it and that is being repeated. Hölderlin thus sets himself apart from a powerful tradition of philosophical thought that focuses on transforming the ambiguity of the space of possibility into the unambiguity of reality; *dýnamis* is completed in *enérgeia*.

Reality and possibility neither stand side by side without connection, nor are they related to each other in the mode of fulfilment (of possibility

³⁸ KANT, KrV B 286; cf. B 74 and B 286f/KANT, CPR, 332; cf. 193 and 332f.

³⁹ Thus, although nothing is added to the determination of the objects, the categories of modality do not merely lead to analytical judgments that must merely correspond to the principle of freedom from contradiction, but to synthetic judgments relating to possible experience, i.e. „to go beyond a given concept“. (KANT, KrV B 194/ KANT, CPR, 281).

⁴⁰ KANT, KrV B 287/KANT, CPR, 333.

⁴¹ Cf. FRANZ, *Theoretische Schriften*, in: *Hölderlin Handbuch*, 224-246, here: 232. A detailed description of the postulates of empirical thinking can be found in Giuseppe MOTTA, *Die Postulate des empirischen Denkens überhaupt. KrV A 218-235 / B 265-287. Ein kritischer Kommentar* (Kantstudien Ergänzungshefte 170), Berlin / Bosten 2012.

through reality), but are constituted around the distance, the difference, the displacement that occurs with repetition.

Second: *Repetition* – understood in Hölderlin’s sense – opens reality up to a space of possibility that eludes any immediate conceptual definition. Starting from here, Hölderlin can take the transition to the *aesthetic ideas*, as Kant determines them in the *Critique of Judgment*. In this, the concept of repetition (“then I am only repeating the prior consciousness”, EaL 232) is decisive.⁴²

In the first paragraph of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes the judgment of taste from the judgment of cognition. The judgment of taste, which indicates whether something is beautiful, does not refer to an idea of the object in order to determine it more accurately, but refers the idea to the “subject [which] feels himself, [namely] how he is affected by the presentation.”⁴³ What the categories of modality and the judgments of taste have in common is that they do not convey any knowledge about the object, but rather open up the space of the subject’s respective relationship to the notion of an object – be it with regard to the subject’s corresponding cognitive faculty (modality), be it in its affection by the imagination (judgment of taste) – as a moment that is *accompanying* (*mitgänglich*) the cognitive process, the process of the constitution of the object.

Special attention should be paid to the turn of phrase that in the judgments of taste, the subject, affected by the imagination, feels itself. As in the representation of the inner sense, i.e. of time, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a hiatus, a difference, a distance, which cannot be closed by conceptual knowledge (logical judgements), is also shown here through the affection in the subject. Hölderlin also sees this difference in the transition from reality to possibility. The repetition corresponds to this distance, this difference, this displacement. According to Hölderlin, poetry (art) and religion, which (as shown below) are conceived on the basis of repetition, are symbolizations or forms of dealing with and shaping this opening moment.⁴⁴

4) What needs to be clarified now is what Hölderlin’s strange determination of the category of possibility is all about as a repetition of what really is. In my opinion, the key to this lies in paragraph 49 of the *Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant unfolds the meaning of *aesthetic ideas*: “by an aesthetic idea I mean a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought

⁴² Hölderlin talks about his own version of aesthetic ideas in a letter to Neuffer dated 10 October 1794: “Perhaps I’ll be able to send you an essay on aesthetic ideas; [...] In essence it is to contain an analysis of the beautiful and the sublime in which the Kantian analysis will be simplified and also, from another perspective, varied and extended, as Schiller has already done in part in his treatise on ‘Grace and Dignity’, though he has ventured a step less beyond the Kantian borderline than he should have done in my opinion.” (Brief 88, 10. Oktober 1794, MA II, 548-551, here: 550f/EaL 31-35, here: 34) On the significance of the term aesthetic ideas for Hölderlin cf. Violetta WAIBEL, “Wenn der Dichter einmal des Geistes mächtig ...”. „Leben. Geist. Bewegung. Tätigkeit“. *Anmerkungen zum Geistbegriff der Dichterphilosophen Hölderlin und Hardenberg*, will be published in 2019.

⁴³ KANT, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Werkausgabe Band X, hrsg. von Wilhelm WEISCHEDER, Frankfurt am Main 2014 [below KdU] § 1, 115/KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, translated, with an introduction, by Werner S. Pluhar, with a foreword by Mary J. Gregor, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1987, 44. The judgment on taste does not state that the object x is objectively beautiful and that this determination is part of its characterisation.

⁴⁴ I owe this consideration to Kurt Appel.

whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] *concept* can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it."⁴⁵ And a little later he adds as an explanation: "For the imagination (in its role as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it."⁴⁶ The productive power of imagination, which has already been present in the chapter on schematism and which, in Kant's case, in a certain way represents the heart of the process of cognition (because it allows the categories to be applied to perception), is thus not merely a tool, but "creative"⁴⁷.

It is not exhausted in its logical function, which serves the acquisition of knowledge (the determination of the object).⁴⁸ The power of imagination has an anarchic moment in itself which cannot be grasped in a certain concept and which does not (directly) contribute anything to the (scientific, logical) knowledge of an object, but which accompanies the process of application of the categories of understanding to perception, and therefore does not merely originate from imagination. The power of imagination is "very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it."⁴⁹ Thus the point is reached which is decisive for Hölderlin. He interprets this capacity of imagination (the creation of another nature from the material that the real one gives to it) as a *repetition* of the real nature. This corresponds to his definition of the category of possibility: "If I think of an object as possible, then I am only repeating the prior consciousness by force of which it is real." (EaL 231)⁵⁰

POETRY AND RELIGION: FRAGMENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL LETTERS

1) In the *Fragment of Philosophical Letters*, Hölderlin defines this character of repetition more precisely, which proves to be central to his understanding of religion. In contrast to a mere "mechanical *connection*" (TS 11/EaL 235), the "machinery" course (TS 10/EaL 234), i.e. a mere repetition, he speaks of spiritual life, "where he [man], as it were, repeats his real life" (TS 12/EaL 235-236). This form of repetition has a free character in analogy to the aesthetic intention of imagination,⁵¹ which, however, must not be reduced to arbitrariness. The relation to real nature and its conceptual definition (Kant) or the relation to real life (Hölderlin) is preserved. The free repetition that characterizes life is furthermore not

⁴⁵ KANT, KdU § 49, 249f/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 182.

⁴⁶ KANT, KdU § 49, 250/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 182.

⁴⁷ KANT, KdU § 49, 251/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 183.

⁴⁸ "When the imagination is used for cognition, then it is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the restriction of adequacy to the understanding's concept. But when the aim is aesthetic, then the imagination is free, so that, over and above that harmony with the concept, it may supply, in an unstudied way, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding which the latter disregarded in its concept. But the understanding employs this material not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely, to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this does serve cognition too." (KANT, KdU § 49, 253/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 185.)

⁴⁹ KANT, KdU § 49, 250/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 182.

⁵⁰ The category of possibility is therefore of decisive importance. Dieter Henrich, however, has a different view on the unusual classification of the categories of modality in *Being Judgement Possibility*: "It [classification] seems to aim at minimalizing the role of the concept of possibility" (Dieter HENRICH, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795)*, 709, cf. also 715 [Translation: Sara WALKER]).

⁵¹ Cf. KANT, KdU § 49, 253/KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, 185.

in opposition to necessity or unconnected to it: Hölderlin speaks of “more infinite, more than necessary relations in life” (TS 12f/EaL 236). It thus has an excess of meaning over that which can be represented in necessary reference to or entanglement with one another. In extension of the determinations from *Being Judgement Possibility* one could say about the connection of the categories of modality: possibility is a free repetition of reality and a transgression of necessity; thus, reality and necessity can appear in a new context.

It is decisive that this free repetition (or, as Hölderlin will later say, free imitation of art, *freie Kunstnachahmung*, TS 34) of real life “can, admittedly, also be thought, but not merely thought” (TS 13/EaL 236). Hölderlin names two deficits of this: On the one hand, the intuition lacked only in thought the moment of particularity, i.e. the non-determinable way in which the general would become a “peculiar case” (TS 13/EaL 236). The consideration remained in the realm of necessity and could not express the “more than necessary relations in life” (TS 13/EaL 236). On the other hand, the indication of the conditions of possibility for the act of repetition, the indication of its logical structures must not be confused with repetition itself: The laws of “that more than infinite connection” are only “the conditions which make that connection possible, and not the connection itself” (TS 13/EaL 237). The repetition of reality, which exceeds necessity, thus refers to an excess of meaning, which as such only exists if it finds a form of representation.

A first consequence of this is that repetition itself, in order not to remain merely in thought, requires a space in which it can take place, for which Hölderlin coins the concept of the *sphere* in the *Fragment of Philosophical Letters*. It functions as a counter-concept to the subject-object relation, which contrasts a recognizing subject with an object as an object of knowledge or processing. In contrast to this, the sphere stands for an approach to the world as an intersubjective, linguistic, historical and cultural mediation, i.e. for a spiritual access to the world. The point is to regard the relations (things, objects ...) “not so much in themselves”, that means at this point abstractly, merely in thought, “as with regard to the spirit that governs the sphere in which those relationships take place” (TS 13f/EaL 237). In contrast to a finite perspective, the spirit points to a “more infinite connection” (TS 14/EaL 237), to an intuition of the “tender and more infinite relationships” (TS 14/EaL 237), i.e. to a perception of shadings and infinite (living) differentiation, as the “iron concepts” (TS 13/EaL 237) of Enlightenment, but also of morality and etiquette, are not able to get into view. In Kantian diction, one could say that this complexity cannot be grasped either by judgements of knowledge or by moral judgements; it is about the space of the representations that are, in the aesthetic ideas, associated with them and can never be depicted exhaustively. With the concept of the sphere, Hölderlin has also found an answer to the question of the unification of subject and object, as it preoccupied him in the letters quoted above. The unification cannot take place abstractly, but always takes place in intersubjective-historical mediation and must find a language.⁵²

⁵² Bruno Liebrucks talks about a *subject-subject-object-relation* („Subjekt-Subjekt-Objekt“-Beziehung; Bruno LIEBRUCKS, *Einleitung. Spannweite des Problems. Von den*

2) For Hölderlin, religion is the place where this form of perception takes place in a particular way. It can take on this role because it is able to give an expression, a symbolisation to the difference around which the subject is constituted instead of determining and reducing it to unambiguity. Hölderlin sees this difference as an indissoluble tension between the discreet and the continuous. He speaks of “intellectual moral legal relationships on the one hand, and on the other hand, physical mechanical historical relationships” (TS 14/EaL 238). The first series of concepts stands for man in his individuality, personality and morality, i.e. in his discretion, the second series of concepts for his involvement in general relations, contexts, determinations, i.e. for nature or continuity. These two areas never coincide – individuality repels itself again and again from the general and cannot be fully represented in it; contrarily, individuality cannot produce the side of its natural constitution, continuity and integration out of itself in autonomous self-activity. The subject exists as the difference or delay of those moments that never coincide synchronously: in the union of the two series, Hölderlin defines religion as “intellectual-historical, that is, *Mythical*” (TS 14/EaL 238). It is able to balance the two elements in their tension without dissolving them into a comprehensive point of unity.

The intellectual-historical, which constitutes religion, or which is able to unite religion, expresses itself *mythically*, i.e. in a certain form (Gestalt), language, narrative.⁵³ This narrative is able to aesthetically unite those two logically separated aspects, that of singularity and continuity, as well as that of the separation of morality/freedom and nature (which echoes in it). However, this unification does not take place in the sense of an addition of existing parts, or in an outsourced point that is able to represent both, but in their repetition. On the one hand, man remains an empirically determined being and is subject to the causality of nature, and on the other, he acts morally freely and refers to a causality of freedom. Hölderlin’s point is that in religion he sees the repetition of *both* of these moments, of nature and morality. Religion is neither part of being (Sein) nor of ought (Sollen), i.e. it is neither an evolutionary-biologically explainable function (a mere part of nature) nor derivable from the realm of its moral action (subordinated to the freedom of its self-legislation), but their *opening to possibility* in which they remain preserved.⁵⁴ In the repetition of these two sides, religion is their *utopian* moment that leads beyond their necessity.

From Hölderlin’s point of view, two aspects are thus essential for religion. To come back to Kant, both have their intellectual background in the multiplicity of aesthetic ideas that accompany logical judgment and cannot be restricted by a determined concept: Firstly, the motif of the *sphere* points to an infinitely differentiated form of living mediation, which cannot be grasped either in the stringency of logical judgements about reality or in the absoluteness of moral judgements. Secondly, the

undialektischen Gebilden zur dialektischen Bewegung (Sprache und Bewusstsein, Bd. 1), Frankfurt am Main 1964, 3).

⁵³ This has nothing to do with a form of re-mythologization in the sense of abandoning rationality and a decline towards narratives that cannot be questioned.

⁵⁴ One could also speak with Hegel in mind of a relationship of *Aufhebung* in the threefold sense of overruling, preserving and elevating to a higher level.

motif of *repetition* points to the opening of this living space of mediation to a more than necessary, utopian future.

3) In order to explain this structure in more detail, we have to look at how the connection between religion and poetry (art) is structured in this understanding. Hölderlin gives the two areas of poetry and religion a more precise definition, by always reverting to the other: poetry can be differentiated more precisely by referring to the ability of religion to balance the two aspects of the singular and the continuous. Depending on the form of the relationship between the two poles, it is defined as the “epic myth”, the “dramatic myth” (TS 15/EaL 238) or the “lyrical-mythical”⁵⁵ (TS 15). In the *Fragment of Philosophical Letters* Hölderlin gives some brief hints as to what this means, but without elaborating more precisely. One would have to pursue this question further by including Hölderlin’s poetological writings in the narrower sense, thereby including the crucial connection between poetry and religion which can especially be found in the *Fragment of Philosophical Letters*.

Conversely, the lively differentiation that Hölderlin associates with religion (sphere), and the repetition associated with it as an opening to new possibilities must be “not merely thought” (TS 13/EaL 236); it must find an expression that art, especially poetry, is able to grant. Hölderlin uses the terms “Stoff” (“subject-matter”) and “Vortrag” (“presentation”, TS 14f/EaL 238) for this purpose. Religion cannot be reduced to its content, its *subject-matter*, but always requires its execution, the *presentation*. This is never pure expression of content, but always already cultural-artistic mediation. Religion represents a *repetition* and free adoption of gestures, motifs, elements of art, poetry, narration, painting, sculpture, music and architecture. It transforms these elements and, conversely, lets itself be transformed by them. Its subject-matter or its content is exactly in this transformation.

This reference of religion to art, i.e. this repetitive adoption of its elements, is summarized by Hölderlin in the beautiful sentence: “Thus, all religion would in its essence be poetic.” (TS 15/EaL 239) It is thus not replaced by art or traced back to it, but it is *essentially* connected to it. In the repetitive adoption of its elements, religion places them in a new tension and opens them up to further turns and interpretations. In this art is not functionalized as if it had merely to serve religion to symbolize its contents; rather, the anarchic potential of art is capable of breaking any functionalization.

TO HONOUR GOD “IN POETIC REPRESENTATIONS” – THE QUESTION OF GOD

The question of God cannot be thought beyond the cultural-artistic mediation shown by the referentiality of religion and art to each other. Hölderlin therefore speaks in echo of the *mythical*, i.e. intellectual-historical character of religion, of the “*God of the myth*” (TS 15/EaL 238) – “where everyone honours his own god and all honour a common one in poetic representations” (TS 15/EaL 239). In the last chapter it is

⁵⁵ Translation: Philipp SCHLÖGL.

attempted to interpret these brief statements about God taking the previous considerations into account.

1) In a thinking of the sphere, which instead of unilinear causal subject-object relations seeks to take into account an intersubjective, linguistically, historically and culturally shared space of mediation, it would be obvious to think of God, the Absolute, as the continuous and complete mediation, thus as the totality of all relations. This is certainly not wrong, but it is only one moment.

Hölderlin, referring to the higher or divine laws, speaks of “more infinite, more than necessary relations in life” (TS 12f/EaL 237). Thus, the necessary relationality of all components of the sphere, the totality of its conditions and its necessity, is not the ultimate dimension to think the absolute. The “infinite connection” of life rather adopts the totality of its conditions in itself and arranges them in free repetition – contingently. Hölderlin gives an indication that the closedness of a network of references (totality) is not the ultimate horizon of intuition where he notes that every general that does not particularize itself (*sich besondern*), does not limit itself and does not go down in contingent history, remains abstract (cf. TS 13/EaL 237). God is not only the symbol of complete mediation in itself, necessity and thus unity of the sphere, rather he stands precisely for the contingent particularization and a radical individualization, and thus for reality: “everyone honours his own god and all honour a common one in poetic representations” (TS 15/EaL 239).

But also this individualization, which has nothing to do with indifference, but with the emergence of a moment that repels itself from the generality of the law and the continuous mediation into the contingency of reality, does not have the last word and must not be fixed. A “human being can indeed also put himself in the place of another, can make the sphere of the other his own sphere” (TS 10/EaL 234). Hölderlin speaks of the need of men that

their different kinds of representation of the divine join one another, and thus to give the limitedness which every single kind of representation has, and must have, its freedom, in that it is contained in a harmonious whole of kinds of representation (TS 11/EaL 235).

The particularization of the absolute does not represent an end point, but rather leads to processes of translation that are able to suspend the limitation of the particularization without dissolving the particular or again subjecting it to an abstract general. These forms of translating the spheres into one another also represent a form of free repetition. No translation is mechanical repetition or transmission according to a functional tool. It always requires the moment of “free imitation of art” (TS 35/EaL 272). The translations can therefore be associated with the utopian aspect of possibility.⁵⁶

2) The absolute finds its discursive representation in the moments of totality, particularization/limitation and translation. In the sense of the categories of modality, totality corresponds to necessity, restriction

⁵⁶ I owe the reference to the importance of translation as an integral moment of the question of God to Isabella Guanzini.

corresponds to reality and its repetition in processes of translation corresponds to possibility. In a (Christian) theological discourse this tripartite development of representation of the absolute should be translated into addressing oneself in the name of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

3) The present considerations have their pivotal point in the central meaning of the category of *possibility* as the dynamizing moment of the categories of modality. In repetition, it proves to be an opening of *reality* to an unforeseeable future and unpredictable meanings. It allows the infinite wealth of ideas to emerge, which transcend the stringency of the logical and the *necessity* of moral judgements without destroying them.

However, this opening must not be “merely thought” (TS 13/EaL 236), but requires free expression each time anew (“presentation”, TS 15/EaL 238). “Thus, all religion would in its essence be poetic” (TS 15/EaL 239) and therefore would not exist before and independently of its poetic and artistic (one could add: liturgical) forms of expression. At this point, these reflections would have to be continued on the basis of Hölderlin’s poetry in the form of the interpretation of some concrete poems.