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and Barbara Santini

G. Bernard, L. Fonnesu, M. Glatzel, K. Hong,
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MITTEILUNG OF THE ABSOLUTE: PERFORMING KNOWLEDGE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

by Giulia Bernard*

Abstract. *This paper attempts a fresh approach to understanding the emergence of philosophy of religion within classical German philosophy by delving into the process through which philosophy came to critically examine its discursive forms and the ways it was performed and transmitted. In particular, the paper explores several models of philosophy of religion centered around a key concept that proves pivotal in reshaping rationality and transcending mere historical knowledge: the concept of Mitteilung. Through its examination, Mitteilung is revealed as not only the self-expression of communicated content but also as a transformative experience for both philosopher and audience, challenging the philosophical discourse itself. This investigation points out a fundamental meta-philosophical gradient of philosophy of religion, indicating its emergence within diverse endeavors to develop a cosmic rather than scholastic philosophy in the world.*

Keywords. *Philosophy of Religion; Mitteilung; Darstellung; Cosmic; Meta-philosophy*

*The waking share one common world,
whereas the sleeping turn aside each man into a world¹.*

Absolute is a crucial word for philosophy of religion. The severe divergences in the meaning of the former are though no less significant in the latter. *Philosophy of religion* raises indeed a series of issues that are not easy to resolve: its status is highly complex, and its disciplinary boundaries have long appeared disputed.

As far as its emergence in classical German philosophy is concerned, it is widely acknowledged to be rooted in the crisis of

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¹ M. Marcovich (ed.), *Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 2001, p. 99 (Fragment 89 DK).

philosophical theology and scholastic metaphysics brought out by Kant's critical project². Philosophical theology, in the form of ontotheology, aimed to explain the concept of God by means of reason. By defining God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' or as the absolutely necessary, i.e. the unconditioned of the series of conditions, ontotheology anchored the concept of God in rational cognition and its inferential activity. Its shortcomings became manifest in the critique of the conclusiveness of the proofs of God's existence and the compatibility of its attributes. If God's predicates cannot be coherently accounted and its existence cannot be demonstrated on the basis of reason alone, then philosophical theology ends up with an object which is either inherently contradictory or whose existence cannot be rationally established. Though, since ontotheology proceeded equating the thought of God – i.e. the demonstrative process of determining its essence, existence, and predicates – with the proper task of investigating the possibilities and limits of reason itself³, then its crisis was not only local but targeted rationality as such.

On the cusp of the 18th to the 19th century, amidst the remnants of this upheaval, emerged a new endeavour – one equally vested in rationality yet committed to its radical redefinition(s): the project of philosophy of religion. How did this project take shape?

² On the rise of philosophy of religion see J. Collins, *The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1967, addressing the philosophies of Hume, Kant and Hegel; M.M. Olivetti analyses the «shift from the theological object, which became doubtful, to the activity or cultural form that assumed its existence: religion» in *Filosofia della religione e teoria della società: ancora un capitolo della storia dell'argomento ontologico*, in Id., *Analogia del soggetto*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1992, pp. 223-240, here p. 227 (trans. by the author); in *Zur Genealogie der Religionsphilosophie*, «Archivio di Filosofia», LXXV (1-2), 2007, pp. 33-54, W. Jaeschke explores the genealogy of philosophy of religion contrasting it with philosophical theology.

³ Cf. D. Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis: sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1960; F. Menegoni, *Compiutezza e limiti della ragione nella critica kantiana alle prove dell'esistenza di Dio*, in *Il limite e l'infinito. Studi in onore di Antonio Moretto*, ed. by G. Erle, Bologna, Archetipolibri, 2014, pp. 139-150; G. Hindrichs, *Das Absolute und das Subjekt. Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Metaphysik und Nachmetaphysik*, Frankfurt a. M., Klostermann, 2011.

The following pages attempt a fresh approach to the problem. As several scholars have aptly pointed out, it would be hasty to understand the crisis of ontotheology as affecting only the theoretical level. Upon closer examination, the emergence of philosophy of religion was indeed accompanied by a no less radical redefinition of the demands within the practical realm, particularly concerning freedom in both moral and political contexts. As a result, the project of philosophy of religion has been understood as diverse efforts to reshape rationality and freedom across both theoretical and practical dimensions⁴. Nevertheless, something essential seems to be still missing in the understanding of philosophy of religion as a response to the challenges posed by the crisis of reason: the fact that it emerged during a period when knowledge – its production, transmission, and dissemination – underwent a profound reassessment amid a world in turmoil.

After the decline of scholastic philosophy, parallel to unsettling historical and political upheavals, reflections on knowledge not only invested the scientific nature of what should be considered knowledge, but also questioned the capacity of knowledge to be a crucial engine for understanding and remoulding a world in crisis. This need radically affected philosophy's contours, transforming the modes through which it was practiced – whether as part of *gelehrte Kommunikation*, disseminated through written and oral instruction, or communicated to broader audiences. Indeed, philosophy emerged as a realm to be re-imagined in light of evolving ideas on humanity and education, amidst broader epochal movements.

Precisely in this hectic period of scientific and historical transformation, where knowledge faced radical scrutiny, philosophy of religion came to establish itself. The aim of this contribution is to

⁴ W. Jaeschke delves into the topics of theodicy and the personality of God, as well as the divine attributes and proofs of God's existence in *Philosophy of Religion After the Death of God*, in *Philosophy and Religion in German Idealism. Studies in German Idealism*, vol 3., ed. by W. Desmond, E.O. Onnasch and P. Cruysberghs, Dordrecht, Springer, 2005, pp. 1-19, here pp. 4-6. In *Filosofia della religione e teoria della società*, Olivetti investigates the ethical path arising from the crisis of ontotheology (p. 235).

show that this ‘fact’ is not a mere external, contextual coincidence, but a necessary theoretical component for understanding philosophy of religion and its delineation as a philosophical enterprise. Furthermore, it contributes to comprehending the broader redefinition of philosophy when the investigation of religion falls within its scope.

This is not a completely novel endeavour, as the upheavals in knowledge production and dissemination are not entirely neglected in the main influential genealogies. In fact, it is not uncommon to trace the emergence of philosophy of religion as a distinct discipline back to its institutionalisation, chiefly led by Hegel’s systematic philosophy at the University of Berlin. As Walter Jaeschke rightly emphasised, since «‘philosophy of religion’ was not known to the canon of philosophy of the time»⁵, then, to consider it in the strict sense, one must consider that it is only in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century that philosophy of religion was developed for the first time «as a discipline within philosophy»⁶. While similar remarks show that the topic of knowledge production and dissemination is not entirely neglected, there are, however, reasons why I consider these remarks to be insufficient to determine the meaning of philosophy of religion, which needs to be further elaborated. First, the focus on the dimension of performing knowledge is employed to distinguish between various responses to the crisis of philosophical theology, and it is enhanced only for one option (the institutionalisation of philosophy of religion as discipline) and not for other pathways⁷. In a genealogy guided by this issue, for instance, Schleiermacher’s and Fichte’s thought are only partially addressed, and Kant is caught as anticipating a tendency towards the ascent of philosophy of religion without being a proper part thereof, since his philosophy is seen «still entirely subject to the

⁵ Jaeschke, *Philosophy of Religion After the Death of God*, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ In Jaeschke’s analysis, Hegel’s philosophy of religion distinguishes itself from other positions, such as those of Jacobi, Kant, Schleiermacher, and Schelling. Cf. W. Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion. Studien zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie Hegels*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1986.

predominance of ethical theology»⁸. Second, precisely the reduction of the question about how knowledge was performed to the process of institutionalization of philosophy of religion hinders the understanding of the role of knowledge transformation. Therefore, when the issue is recognised in a limited sense (discipline) and is excluded from different projects of erosion of philosophical theology, its relevance seems to be at best contextual: a historical dimension whose theoretical relevance remains to be investigated.

In this contribution I propose a more radical interpretation of how philosophy, as it became philosophy of religion, fundamentally challenged its own methods and performances. Such a reading, I claim, unveils the fundamental meta-philosophical gradient of philosophy of religion. In particular, it reveals the efforts to develop modes of discourse that allow for a thorough reflection of philosophy upon itself, with the aim to realize in the world a 'cosmic' rather than a scholastic philosophy. Following Kant, one can argue that while philosophy according to a scholastic concept is «a system of cognition that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge»⁹, philosophy according to its *conceptus cosmicus* is not indifferent to its ends, but rather is involved in their determination as «the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)»¹⁰. Drawing on this guiding thread, I intend to show that philosophy of religion is rooted in the critique at philosophy understood as a mere historical knowledge – i.e. knowledge of *facta* that leaves the recipients in sheer passivity and is not transformative – and aims rather at being rationally performed: to let one to be active with her own thinking,

⁸ Jaeschke, *Philosophy of Religion After the Death of God*, p. 14.

⁹ Kant's works are cited according to the *Akademie-Ausgabe* – I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (ed. by) vols. 1-22 Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, ab vol. 24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Berlin, 1900ff – with the indication of the volume and page number, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV, A and B). I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Eng. trans. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 694 (A 838/B 866).

¹⁰ Ivi, pp. 694-695 (A 839/B 867).

participate in the process of exhibition of truth, and open to transform herself accordingly. In this analysis, a strong transformative potential of philosophy is made explicit, one that should let everyone participate in a shared world, the belonging to which could no more be taken for granted at that time of crisis.

To achieve this objective – a goal often overlooked in critical literature on knowledge production in classical German philosophy, which predominantly focuses on aesthetic instances¹¹ – I will centre the analysis around a concept that shows to be largely present in reshaping rationality and overcoming a merely historical knowledge of philosophy: the concept of *Mitteilung*, *mitteilen*. The term could be at first translated in English with ‘information’, ‘transmission’, or ‘communication’. Taken in this sense, it could stand for the alleged transparent transmission of an already formed content ‘through’ language between two poles – what Walter Benjamin understood under the label of «bourgeois conception of language»¹², namely a perspective which perceives language as a mere conduit for conveying pre-formed content, indifferent to its form, where neither the author nor the recipients are actually in question.

Starting with a demonstration of the centrality of *Mitteilung* in the genesis of philosophy of religion as a response to the need for a fundamental reconsideration of knowledge production and dissemination (1), I will underscore and examine the following elements: the self-articulation of the communicated content (2), transformative experience for both philosopher and audience (3), philosophical interrogation of the philosophical discourse itself (4). These elements are not intended to comprehensively cover

¹¹ M.H. Dupree and S.B. Franzel (eds.), *Performing Knowledge, 1750-1850*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015, is one of the latest volumes addressing this topic. It delves into the influence of literature and the sciences on audiences, focusing primarily on their rhetorical efficacy.

¹² W. Benjamin, *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II-1, ed. by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 140-157, p. 144; Eng. trans. by M. Bullock, M.W. Jennings, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 62-74, p. 65.

historical details of philosophical positions, nor their development and theoretical mutual influences. The primary objective is not reconstructive¹³. The aim is to demonstrate how philosophy's reflection on religion coalesces through theoretical responses to the *shared* need of rethinking rationality, philosophy, and active engagement with truth.

By examining how religion serves as a unique 'object' for philosophy, enabling an interrogation of its own practices, and considering how a philosophical interpretation of religion contributes to the redefinition of philosophical discourse and its cosmic purpose, I will delve into the theoretical significance of *Mitteilung*. Its reassessment necessitates a reception theory inseparable from both the production of its contents and the transformation of its recipients, thus paving the way for novel approaches to knowledge dissemination that play a critical role in shaping a new world. The meta-philosophical potential of philosophy of religion becomes evident when philosophy, within this discourse, questions and reinforces its cosmic dimension, generating transformative effects on participants in the process in which truth is determined, performed and *mitgeteilt* in ways that are irreducible to a standard view on communication.

1. Mitteilung of the Absolute and its reception

1.1. Reason and communication

One hallmark of Enlightenment is a fundamental connection between autonomy, communicability of knowledge and the use of reason as a cosmic practice. After the decline of scholastic philosophy, reflections on knowledge concerned not only its scientific

¹³ My primary goal is to shed light on the complexity surrounding the issue of *Mitteilung*, focusing on the questions it raises and the *shared* interests that underlie them. To mitigate concerns about potential arbitrariness in model selection, I plan to reference relevant literature extensively. This will help to address any perceived lack of comprehensive justification for methodological and epistemological differences among the models.

nature but at the same time its capacity to be a crucial agent for understanding and transforming a world in which human beings were active as citizens. In the post-Kantian philosophical landscape, this imperative manifested in two primary ways. Firstly, there was an exploration of diverse forms of discursive presentation. A widespread emphasis on the issue of exhibition (*Darstellung*) was driven by a growing dissatisfaction with the dry, abstract modes of discourse that failed to reveal truth¹⁴. The *Darstellung* of the Absolute emerged as a challenge to apprehend and engage with truth, transcending a purely instrumental understanding of reason that divorced the Absolute, God, from concept, content, and vitality, rendering it lifeless. Simultaneously, there arose a need to redefine concepts of reason – soul, world, and God – not confined to academic circles but extending to a broader cosmic impulse to reconsider rationality and freedom. Here one can observe the emergence of a cosmic dimension that «concerns that which necessarily interests everyone»¹⁵. Such a dimension opened up a communicative dimension of knowledge that for the post-Kantian generation was not exhaustible in the Kantian *sensus communis* or the second maxim of the broad-minded way of thinking, according to which one should «reflect[] on his own judgment from a universal standpoint»¹⁶.

The association between the demand for cosmic knowledge and a crisis in communication, as identified by the Romantics in modern societies, underscored the necessity for more complex solutions. This need gave rise to the concept of a ‘new mythology of reason’, a project championed by figures such as Herder, Hölderlin, Novalis, Tieck, and Schiller. This project reached its apex in terms of universal communication within the fragment *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*, where it is said that

¹⁴ On this topic cf. V. Rühle, *Zum Darstellungs- und Mitteilungsproblem einer Philosophie des Absoluten*, «Hegel-Studien», XXIV, 1989, pp. 159-182.

¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Eng. trans., p. 695 (A 840/B 868n).

¹⁶ Id., *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by P. Guyer, Eng. trans. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 175 (AA 5: 295).

We must have a new mythology, [...] a mythology of reason. Before we make ideas aesthetic, i.e. mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Hence finally the enlightened and unenlightened [*Aufgeklärte und Unaufgeklärte*] must shake hands: mythology must become philosophical to make people rational [*vernünftig*], and philosophy must become mythological to make philosophers sensuous¹⁷.

The new mythology of reason is portrayed as a project of communication not confined solely to philosophers. Instead, it aims to forge unity between philosophers and people, igniting an interest that resonates with everyone, as it pertains to rationality itself and the construction of a shared world. This is a participatory endeavour involving both parties, rather than a unilateral, top-down approach – a novel mode of communication and mutual engagement in shaping rationality.

The issue of *Mitteilung* is explored in a fragment from Hegel's early years in Frankfurt (1799-1800) which revolves around the active need of grasping the divine. The passage reads as follows:

Nowhere more than in the communication [*Mitteilung*] of the divine is necessary for the recipient [*Empfangenden*] to grasp the communication with the depths of her own spirit [*mit eigenem tiefem Geiste*]. Nowhere is it less possible to learn, to assimilate passively [*passiv in sich aufzunehmen*], because everything expressed about the divine in the language of reflection is *eo ipso* so contradictory; and the passive spiritless assimilation [*passive geistlose Aufnahme*] of such an expression not only leaves the deeper spirit empty [*leer*] but also distracts the intellect which assimilates it and for which it is a contradiction.

¹⁷ F. Hölderlin, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe, ed. by F. Beißner and A. Beck, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1943-85, vol. IV.1, p. 299; Eng. trans. by F.C. Beiser, *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*, in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 5.

This always objective language hence attains sense and weight only in the spirit of the reader [*im Geiste des Lesers*] and to an extent which differs with the degree to which the relationships of life and the opposition of life and death have come into his consciousness¹⁸.

Motivating those lines is the beginning of John's Gospel: in the beginning was the Logos, the Logos was with God, and God was the Logos; in him was life. The livingness of the Absolute shines through the predicates, which are «something being and living»¹⁹. Under scrutiny is the essentially analytic character of reflective thinking, whose phraseology separates what is one, God and Logos. Since it is incapable of enacting its living becoming, Hegel noted, «even this simple form of reflection is not adapted to the spiritual expression of spirit»²⁰. This marks the dawn of a new understanding of the Absolute, presenting itself as an imperative task opposed to mere passive reception. This opposition becomes clear from the distinction that Kant made in the *Architectonics of Pure Reason* between historical and rational cognition, the only philosophical one. Historical cognition is cognition from what is given, empirically given (*cognitio ex datis*). On the basis of learned data, those who have only historical cognition form themselves according to an external reason: they know and judge only as much as has been given to them and, if some of their definitions are disputed, they cannot get another one. In contrast, rational cognition requires being active in cognizing by recourse to reason and principles (*cognitio ex principiis*). Philosophical cognition, as rational cognition from concepts, demands analysis, viewing the givenness, even of its discourse, as a problem rather than a fact.

Despite this framework, Hegel's *caveat* does not end in the impossibility of learning and communicating. On the contrary: the objective is to elaborate an alternative, living way of doing it. This

¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Man kann den Zustand...*, in *Frühe Schriften*, ed. by W. Jaeschke, 2014, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, pp. 254-255; Trans. by the author.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*. Trans. by the author.

²⁰ *Ibidem*. Trans. by the author.

explains why the emphasis is explicitly placed on the recipient, who should become capable of grasping the communication with the depths of her own spirit. Spirit should not remain empty. To this aim, the *Mitteilung* of the Absolute required a more robust, still lacking reception-theory for a «philosophy of spirit» to which the «philosophers of the letter» (*Buchstabenphilosophen*) have no access²¹.

1.2. Reception of the Absolute: beyond the *historisch*

The issue of living experience of truth became one of the guiding threads of the period, one, namely, capable of not getting bogged down in the sheals of the scholastic, historical knowledge. «The living possession of the theory we have now set forth, – not the dry, dead, and merely historical [*historisches*] knowledge of it –, is [...] the highest, and indeed the only possible, Blessedness»²² – so Fichte in his 1806 *The Way toward the Blessed Life; or, the Doctrine of Religion*, which represents for him the pinnacle and the point of highest brightness among the popular writings.

²¹ F. Hölderlin, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, p. 298; Eng. trans., p. 4. In classical German philosophy, the letter-spirit binomial became a key framework for interpreting the most significant oppositions of the era. See Fichte's lectures *Ueber Geist, u. Buchstaben in der Philosophie* (1794), but also Jacobi's critical use of the same concepts against Fichte's reduction of the true to the science, through which «we necessarily extirpate spirit by striving to turn it into letters» (F.H. Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, in *Werke. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2,1, ed. by W. Jaeschke, I.-M. Piske, Hamburg, Meiner, 2004, p. 233; Eng. trans. by G. di Giovanni, *Jacobi to Fichte*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 529).

²² J.G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum seeligen Leben*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I,9, ed. by R. Lauth and R. Gliwitzky, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1995, p. 129; Eng. trans. by W. Smith, *The Way toward the Blessed Life; or, the Doctrine of Religion*, London, Chapman, 1849, p. 126. Henceforth *Anweisung*. On the *Anweisung* see F. Gilli, *Populärphilosophie und Religionslehre*, in *Der transzendentalphilosophische Zugang zur Wirklichkeit. Beiträge aus der aktuellen Fichte-Forschung*, ed. by E. Fuchs, M. Ivaldo and G. Moretto, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 2001, pp. 471-505, in particular pp. 496-497, and M. Ivaldo, *Lo statuto della filosofia della religione nella Introduzione alla vita beata*, «Fogli di Filosofia», XIV, 2021, pp. 147-167.

To explore the living experience as a potential avenue for a cosmic philosophy, Fichte undertakes a philosophical examination of religion. Among the five standpoints delineating how the Absolute manifests itself, religiosity represents, according to Fichte, the penultimate stage. In religion, as the culmination of ethical life (third stage), it becomes evident that both subjects and the world they inhabit are manifestations of God's dynamic, processual life. Recognizing that subjects are embodiments of God's life leads to the final stage, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, where one becomes capable of contemplating God's manifestation as self-manifestation.

In his analysis of religion, essential for the revision of the scholastic concept of philosophy, Fichte addresses the issue of reception, of «thorough reception» (*Innigkeit des Empfangens*)²³, as an epochal question to diagnose the participation in rationality in times of crisis. Fichte contends that the present state lacks all «in-citement towards a better» communication and «instruction [*Mitteilung*] from without»²⁴. What impedes both is the inability of embracing what is beyond the ordinary or the already known. This incapacity is though not merely passivity but rather an active resistance to new modes of communication – or, more precisely, to a re-evaluation of *Mitteilung* itself. Individuals, observes Fichte, actively resist broadening their perspectives or questioning their assumptions, viewing communication as merely a confirmation of their existing ideas. They would find it objectionable «were they to ascribe to any communication from other human being any other purpose than to repeat before them some old and well-known lesson, so that they might be satisfied that the speaker had thoroughly learned it by rote»²⁵. Against the attempts in rethinking what in the

²³ Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 175; Eng. trans., p. 203.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 132; Eng. trans., pp. 130-131. A similar diagnosis is shared by Schleiermacher in *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799). The text is quoted according to the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe: KGA I/2, Schriften aus der Berliner Zeit 1796-1799*, ed. by G. Meckenstock, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1984, p. 232; Eng. trans. and ed. by R. Crouter, *On Religion. Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 93. Henceforth *Religion*.

²⁵ Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 132; Eng. trans., p. 131 modified. In this regard Schleiermacher notes that the «common conversation [*Gespräch*]» is not the

time of crisis was no more living and not yet fully disclosed in its new form, what they do is to reduce everything to their own language. By constantly translating new ideas into old ones, individuals hinder the possibility of receptivity to the divine and prevent such reception from being transformative.

This diagnosis, for which popular lectures are intended as a remedy, underscores the significance of reflecting on religion for understanding the current state of knowledge. In highlighting the need for a different reception of the Absolute, it shows the inseparability between a philosophy of the Absolute and a reflective method which asks philosophy to account for its own discourse. Philosophy, in addressing its own time and the way it is performed, cannot be reduced to historical instruction (*Belehrung*), where individuals passively rely on memory and remain subject to authority. To avoid «spiritual Non-Existence»²⁶, philosophy must radically reconsider its form. A theory of reception in the communication of the Absolute must therefore acknowledge the need for personal inquiry and develop discursive forms capable not only of facilitating it but also of making it constitutive.

2. Mitteilen *and the genesis of the content*

2.1. Truth creates itself by its own power

In the revision of philosophy's communicative forms, a fundamental role is assigned to guiding others to experience the Absolute in ways that are always individual²⁷, i.e. to address the

adequate medium for performing «religious communication»: here people «have an answer ready immediately for every question» no actual transformative *Mitteilung* is at stake (*Religion*, p. 180; Eng. trans., p. 74).

²⁶ Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 133; Eng. trans., p. 132. Schleiermacher echoes a similar statement when he claims that «only when religion is expelled from the society of the living must it hide its varied life in the dead letter» (*Religion*, p. 179; Eng. trans., p. 74): «the effect [*Wirkung*] on the whole of humanity» is lost (*ibidem*).

²⁷ Cf. Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 160; Eng. trans., pp. 177-178: «No one can [...] deduce it by way of inference from any other truth [...]. He to whom his especial Higher Vocation has revealed itself, knows it as it is revealed to him; and he may

recipients and invite them to actively participate in a shared transformative experience. Before delving into this issue, which will be addressed in Part 3, it's essential to consider that effective communication is not solely about the recipients; it also interrogates the very content being communicated. What comes to the fore is the awareness of the fact that, even when lectures envisage someone who has had the experience of the Absolute and can set herself up as a guide, as we will see, the *content* in question cannot be presupposed as given, i.e. cannot be a mere repetition of something already gained elsewhere. Rather the content is articulated in that exchange in a genetic way.

This is particularly evident in Fichte's lectures, starting from the attitude he requires to follow the exhibition of the Absolute. His audience – predominantly laypeople – is required only to pay attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*)²⁸, not to possess philosophical expertise or technical skills. If they could fully engage in the performance proposed by Fichte, then the participation to truth reveals to be not something «strange and artificial» as «it is commonly supposed», but rather proceeds «in a quite simple and natural manner»²⁹. In this active attention, where one is in the position of examining the structure of experience without leaving it, what one experiences is that the system constructs itself, as Fichte already wrote in *The Science of Knowing* of 1804:

The knack for grasping these lectures is the knack of full, complete attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*], which throws itself into the present object with all its spiritual power, puts itself there and is completely absorbed in it, so that no other thought or fancy can occur [...]. [First] we are required to construct a

conclude by analogy how it is in general with others to whom their Higher Vocation has also become clear and intelligible».

²⁸ On the role of attention, I find convincing (and I am indebted to) the reading proposed by M. Nini, *Bildung as Standpoint. Philosophy of Religion as Philosophy of Culture in Fichte's Middle Period*, «Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente», XII (19), 2020, pp. 327-341, in particular p. 333s, which serves as a crucial reference for my analysis of Fichte's philosophy of religion.

²⁹ Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 142; Eng. trans., p. 146.

specific concept internally. This is not difficult: anyone just paying attention to the description can do it; and we construct it in front of him. Next, hold together what has been constructed; and then, without any assistance from us, an insight will spring up by itself, like a lightning flash. [...] For we do not create the truth, and things would be badly arranged if we had to do so; rather, truth creates itself by its own power³⁰.

By paying attention to the exposition of the Absolute, participants discover that «they were always already within this system, not as *I*, [...] but as *We*, the multitude of *Wissenschaftlehrers* who perform the system repeatedly»³¹. According to Fichte, this cosmic task is open to all, signifying that truth «creates itself by its own power»³². A misunderstanding should be prevented. What is generated is, according to Fichte, not something merely subjective. On the contrary, truth is objective: it constitutes itself in the same process in which it is exhibited and *mitgeteilt*. In this insight, popular and scientific expositions cannot be separated, since «every good description [...] ought to be genetic, and gradually unfold the matter described before the eyes of the beholders»³³. It is in the participation to this experience that the content exhibits itself.

An analogous line of thought, though within a quite different conceptual framework, can be found in *On Religion. Speeches to its*

³⁰ Id., *Die Wissenschaftslehre II. Vorträge im Jahre 1804*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. II, 8, ed. by R. Lauth and H. Gliwitsky, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1985, p. 67; Eng. trans. by W.E. Wright, *The Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, Albany, SUNY, 2005, pp. 47-48. In this contribution, I do not delve into the relationship between the *Anweisung* and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. On this cf. H. Verweyen, *Fichtes Religionsphilosophie*, «Fichte-Studien», VIII, 1995, pp. 193-224, in particular p. 210s.

³¹ Nini, *Bildung as Standpoint*, p. 328. On the novel conception of the subject in 1806 by Fichte – no longer as the first principle, but as a transcendental image through which the stream of Life flows – see G. Rametta, *La philosophie fichtéenne de la religion*, «Laval théologique et philosophique», LXXII (1), 2016, pp. 7-20.

³² Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre II. Vorträge im Jahre 1804*, p. 67; Eng. trans., p. 48.

³³ Id., *Anweisung*, p. 141; Eng. trans., p. 144.

Cultured Despisers (1799) by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher posits religion as something from which a concept can be formulated about which one can argue, even by its cultured despisers, and that needs to be redetermined in its own nature. Its object is the Absolute, the universe. This object, claims Schleiermacher in the *Second Speech*, is common also to both metaphysics and morals. Is religion then reducible to them? Schleiermacher's answer is negative. «Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling»³⁴. Metaphysics proceeds from finite human nature and strives to define consciously, from its simplest concept, how we necessarily must view the universe. Morals, in turn, proceeds from the consciousness of freedom; it wishes to extend freedom's realm to infinity and to make everything subservient to it. Religion, rightly understood, is more original than both metaphysics and morals. For it does not «use the universe in order to derive duties»³⁵, nor does it produce an empty game with formulas to which nothing would ever correspond. Religion connects to the essence of the universe, which exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to the subjects every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, is an action of the same upon the subjects.

Religion is thus to accept everything individual as part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite. This being so, the impression of sheer passivity of reception could legitimately arise: the more the universe (as content of the intuition) is active, the more, it seems, we are in a position of passivity. Schleiermacher is aware of this concern. To rule it out, he addresses in the *Second Speech* the opposition between the passivity of feeling and the activity of thinking and doing, while in the *Third Speech* the personal formation, i.e. the relationship between inward appropriation of truth and outer forms (language). Both issues find their solution in the intuition of the universe. This is the concept Schleiermacher wants his readers to become familiar with. If one

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 50; Eng. trans., p. 22.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 43; Eng. trans., p. 20.

considers what an intuition *per se* is, then it is right that «[a]ll intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former»³⁶. In the intuition of the universe, the Absolute is active, it creates its own observers, admirers. Nevertheless, so Schleiermacher, it is «then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one's own nature»³⁷. The universe's action is not imposed on inert matter. Rather, it finds an active matter to impress – a matter that is always differentiating. Even this is proper to the essence of the universe itself, not something merely subjective. For the universe, according to Schleiermacher, cannot be resolved in just one apprehension. It rather articulates itself in plural apprehensions³⁸, since

it can be something in the universe only through the totality of its effects and connections; [...] To know of only one point of view for everything is exactly the opposite of having all points of view for each thing; it is the way to distance oneself directly away from the universe³⁹.

The universe, its intuitions, are not something merely preexisting somewhere. They are articulated in the exchange, as a self-organizing content that radically transforms the recipients involved. This explains the discursive form of the *Speeches*, where Schleiermacher describes himself in the process of communicating the self-articulation of the universe. Such a form is meant to awaken a reader's sense of the universe by speaking at deeply

³⁶ Ivi, p. 55; Eng. trans., p. 24. On this issue cf. C. Ellsiepen, *Anschaung des Universums und Scientia Intuitiva. Die spinozistischen Grundlagen von Schleiermachers früher Religionstheorie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2006.

³⁷ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 55; Eng. trans., pp. 24-25.

³⁸ Cf. ivi, p. 62; Eng. trans., p. 27: «Religion is infinite [...] in all respects, an infinity of matter and form, of being, of vision, and of knowledge about it. [...] Each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own».

³⁹ Ivi, pp. 152-153; Eng. trans., p. 62.

personal levels of human self-awareness⁴⁰, thereby presenting the genesis of something happening there, to which one takes part. This is not something presupposed: it is generated – though not in the sense of something arbitrarily constructed⁴¹ –, it unfolds organically in the exchange, shaping the content and the participants alike.

2.2. Spirit and objectivity

In reflecting on religion, philosophy of religion underscores the necessity for philosophy to undergo a radical questioning of its own form, inseparable from its content. The process of active reception, as alluded to in Hegel's Frankfurter fragment, reveals inseparable from the exhibition of a self-articulating content. It shows that spirit (*Geist*) is not just the recipient's attitude, but this whole process of redetermination.

This theme lies at the heart of Hegel's philosophical reflections on religion, as exemplified in his Berlin Lectures (1821, 1824, 1827, 1831), as one reads in the *Nachschrift von Griesheim* 1824:

⁴⁰ On this cf. W. Gräb, *Predigt als kommunikativer Akt. Einige Bemerkungen zu Schleiermachers Theorie religiöser Mitteilung*, ed. by K.-V. Selge, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1985, in particular pp. 643-660, 648, and C. Richter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Symbol Theory, Hermeneutics, and Forms of Religious Communication*, in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology. A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. by B.W. Sockness and W. Gräb, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 375-389. On the literary form of the *Speeches* see M. Sauer, *Rede und Unendlichkeit: Modelle der Religionskommunikation zwischen Literatur, Rhetorik und Predigt bei Friedrich Schleiermacher*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2021, a volume that, employing a methodological approach similar to that attempted in this contribution, delves into religious writings as both the theoretical development and the literary-rhetorical realization of religious communication.

⁴¹ Jacobi's position is pivotal in identifying true rationality, conceiving the true not as something produced but rather presupposed and perceived (*Vernehmen*), actively disclosing freedom. Cf. B. Sandkaulen, *Fürwahrhalten ohne Gründe. Eine Provokation philosophischen Denkens*, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie», LVII (2), 2009, pp. 259-272. For Jacobi's critique of speculation's constructivism leading to nihilism, see his *Letter to Fichte*.

The single self-consciousness finds the consciousness of its essence in it; hence it is free in this object, and it is just this freedom that is spirituality, and this, we say, is religion, i.e. spirit is now object. Only the relationship of spirit to spirit is religion, then religion has now become what is objective in that the object of finite consciousness is known as spirit by spirit; it is known inasmuch as the universal absolute power, in which everything is posited as organic, is not only as substance but as subject. The freedom of self-consciousness is the content of religion, and this content is itself object of the Christian religion, i.e., spirit is its own object. This absolute essence distinguishes itself at one and the same time into absolute power and subject; it communicates itself [*sich mittheilt*] in what is distinguished from it while at the same time remaining undivided, so that the other is also the whole – all this, along with its return to itself, constitutes the totality of spirituality, it is the very nature of spirituality. The absolute spirit is hence object, spirit is identical with spirit⁴².

Spirit is for the spirit. In religion, according to its concept, spirit is objective to itself, wherein religion manifests spirit's self-recognition. The content of religion, the Absolute, is redefined as spirit and subjectivity, reflecting an inseparable unity between the universal and the individual, the infinite and the finite. This is the content that is communicated. In this sense, 'objectivity' is not the same as knowing God as an 'object' separate from subjectivity. To say that spirit has become object is for Hegel rather in polemic with the claim that «one knows God only as an object that stands over and remains so»⁴³. This was what theology, and scholastic philosophy did, when they recognized God as an external object. On the contrary, in philosophy of religion it is a matter of showing that objectivity is that in which one recognises oneself, and

⁴² G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion und Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes*, ed. by W. Jaeschke and M. Köppe, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 29,1, Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, 2017, pp. 387-389. Trans. by the author.

⁴³ *Ibidem*. Trans. by the author.

precisely this progressive recognition is performed by religion, when grasped philosophically: the process of recognising the Absolute not as something standing beyond, but as subjectivity. ‘Subjectivity’, in turn, means the modern right of recognizing oneself in the objectivity. The point is to ensure that such a right does not involve the elimination of objectivity, but rather implies its articulation beyond the separation between subjectivity and objectivity.

In this regard, it seems relevant that Hegel in the *Science of Logic* develops the category of the *Mitteilung* precisely in the section on *Objectivity*. Its use is meant to signify the process of determining the relation between individual and universal starting from the overcoming of a consideration of the object in a merely deterministic sense.

Now in the region of the spirit there is an infinitely manifold content capable of communication [*mitteilungsfähig*], for by being taken up into intelligence the content receives this *form* of universality in which it becomes communicable [*mitteilbares*]. [...] Laws, morals, rational conceptions in general, are in the region of the spirit communicable entities [*Mitteilbare*] of this kind; they pervade individuals unconsciously imposing themselves on them⁴⁴.

The term *Mitteilung*, first used as a general name for the interaction of mechanical objects, refers also to spirit. Spiritual communication occurs when the universality of laws, customs, and rational conceptions permeate the individual consciousness. The communicable is not something that has the mark of subjectivity and arbitrariness; yet, neither is it the abstract form of universality that remains alien to the individual. On the contrary, what is communicable is the objective universal: the truth of the individual as

⁴⁴ Id., *Wissenschaft der Logik, zweiter Band, Die subjektive Logik. Die Lehre von Begriff (1816)*, ed. by F. Hogemann and W. Jaeschke, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, 1981, p. 138; Eng. trans. by G. di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 636.

that which animates it and in which objectivity is articulated. In contrast to a form of determinism, communication is no longer entirely external to the objects, but ran through them, insofar as universality is always already a moment of the individual objects themselves. As universality has thus emerged as an immanent moment of the objects, the object is no longer an immediate one: it has reflected the process in itself and is not separated from universality. What gradually emerges – through Mechanism, Chemism⁴⁵, and Teleology⁴⁶ – is the way in which the concept coincides with the structure of freedom, as the forming and creating power, i.e., the concrete way in which free communication operates. The concept is such because it is able to contain within itself the hardest opposition, to find itself in its opposite. It is pervasive, but not as an external violent force:

The universal is therefore *free* power; it is itself while reaching out to its other and embracing it, but without *doing violence* to it; on the contrary, it is at rest in its other as *in its own*. Just as it has been called free power, it could also be called *free love* and *boundless blessedness*, for it relates to *that which is distinct from it as to itself*; in it, it has returned to itself⁴⁷.

This, which will be articulated in the *Subjectivity* section of the *Science of Logic*, relates to the work of active reflexivity indicated in the *Geist* of Hegel's Frankfurter fragment: the relation to something objective, which has value, and yet does not remain

⁴⁵ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 149-150; Eng. trans. pp. 646-647: «Since each is posited within it as self-contradictory and self-sublating, they are held apart from [...] their reciprocal complementation only by *external violent force*. [...] their absolute unity is also a still formal element that concretely *exists distinct* from them – the element of *communication* wherein they enter into external *community* with each other».

⁴⁶ Cf. *ivi*, p. 164; Eng. trans. p. 661: «*universality* is the *connection* of purposiveness and the means. This means is object, *in itself* the totality of the concept; it does not have with respect to purpose any of the power of resistance that it initially has against another immediate object. To the purpose [...] it is utterly penetrable, and it is receptive to this communication because it is *in itself* identical with it».

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 35; Eng. trans., p. 532.

extraneous because it is indeed the work of self-transformation and recognition that occurs in the philosophical exposition itself and cannot be ascertained before its development, nor be assumed elsewhere.

3. Mitteilungsimpuls: *transformative experiences*

The need to elaborate a different rationality for a living *Mitteilung* of the Absolute – in the objective as well as subjective sense of the genitive – leads to questioning the participants in the discourse. Significantly, for many of those who reflect philosophically on religion in classical German philosophy, the theoretical device of *Mitteilung* is linked to a precise determination: an impulse that invests all participants in the exhibition of the Absolute, bringing into play the theme of the passivity of reception and the activity of communication, thereby questioning their presumed separation, and opening the singularity to an essentially communitarian dimension.

«Once there is religion, it must necessarily also be social»⁴⁸, says Schleiermacher. Religion is «mutual communication»⁴⁹, where hearing and speaking are at the same time involved for everyone and none can remain passive, for there is «the duty incumbent upon every human being who is penetrated by this higher knowledge to exert all her powers to communicate that knowledge, wherever possible, to the whole brotherhood of humanity; presenting it to each individual in that form in which she is most open to its reception»⁵⁰. Communication is thus the means of

⁴⁸ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 177; Eng. trans., p. 73.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 179; Eng. trans., p. 74.

⁵⁰ Fichte, *Anweisung*, p. 70; Eng. trans., p. 25, modified. Cf. also Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 178; Eng. trans., p. 73: «How should he wish to retain within himself that which most strongly forces him out of himself and which, like nothing else, impresses him with the fact that he cannot know himself in and of himself alone. Rather, his first endeavour, when a religious view has become clear to him or a pious feeling penetrates his soul, is also to direct others to the object and, if possible, to communicate the vibrations of his mind to them».

disseminating one's religious views to others, of continuing the religious experience of rightly intuiting the Absolute in its differentiated apprehensions. The intuition of the universe – as opening individuals to the All – is something that structurally moves toward its sharing. Since the Absolute cannot be reduced to just one of its apprehensions, then a strongly transformative potential and openness towards the otherness is pivotal: the principle that prompts us to express what is our own is connected with that which «inclines us to join what is unfamiliar, and thus action and reaction are inseparably bound up with one another»⁵¹. Mutual communication as open process is thus the ideal discourse in which all give and receive.

In this process, where the analysis of religion falls within the scope of philosophy, emphasis is put on two poles of formation (*Bildung*): philosopher (3.1) and audience (3.2). They both must become subjects of the Absolute's articulation, communication.

3.1. *Bildung* of the philosopher

The issue of *Bildung* regards the cultivated person (*Gelehrter*) in the process of her professionalisation, as it is clear in the revision of the lecturing practice. According to *The Way toward the Blessed Life* and Fichte's 1806 lectures *On the Nature of the Scholar*, the cultivated person serves as a model for others in realizing their capacity to manifest the Absolute. In these lectures, the Absolute is described not as a Hidden God, but rather as divine idea, a self-knowing and self-communicating Absolute. The scholar's own aspiration should be to become a living example for the recipients since her vocation is the idea. To be a scholar is to seek to make the divine idea discursively transparent and to elicit the recipients' attention. The prerequisite for this is that she knows the idea and is gripped by it. This is not something self-referential. The cultivated person does not study for herself at all, her aim is not a purely self-referential occupation. Rather, it is directed to others.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 193; Eng. trans., p. 79. See Ellsiepen, *Anschauung des Universums*, pp. 296-310, on the 'darstellendes Handeln' as re-productive dimension of religion.

Communication to others is not something accessory to the philosophical theory or a merely ancillary duty that can be performed or not. The impulse to communicate implies that as much as one can make an experience of the Absolute, she *must let other participate in it*.

In this task, at stake is not only the purely cognitive transfer of knowledge demands. The scholar and the recipients become part of a process that is also personally transformative⁵². The mission of the scholar is indeed to initiate the recipients into an experience of Absolute that allow them to penetrate it themselves. By distancing herself from the distractions of the world and looking within herself, the scholar elicits others' attention while systematically guiding them. Those willing to follow the example, can offer their attention to the exercise proposed, thereby understanding that the contents experienced in the lectures belong to the Absolute itself. The systematic exhibition of the Absolute allows then for an active reconstruction: being attentive to one's own life ultimately is to reflect on the manifestations of the Absolute itself. In this sense, the self-reflection of the scholarly life, the cultivated person as content and subject of the communication, and the discursive form, are thus strong related to each other in a multi-layered whole⁵³. Furthermore, the scholar's description is not separated from the process through which listeners and readers are formed as subjects. Rather, it is the same path.

3.2. *Bildung* of the audience

In distinguishing itself from a historical understanding of God, philosophy of religion requires a significant transformation

⁵² On self-transformation in classical German philosophy cf. G.A. Bruno, *Post-Kantian Idealism and Self-Transformation*, in *Transformation and the History of Philosophy*, ed. by G.A. Bruno and J. Vlasits, New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 205-222.

⁵³ The thesis is argued by A. Sell, *Menschliche Bildung und göttliche Idee. Über Struktur und Gedankengang von Fichtes Erlanger Vorlesungen 'Über das Wesen des Gelehrten'*, in *J.G. Fichte: Über das Wesen des Gelehrten. Interpretationen und Quellen*, ed. by A. Denker, C.J. Kinlaw and H. Zaborowski, Freiburg-München, Karl Alber, 2020, pp. 99-110. In my interpretation, the thesis extends beyond the 1806 lectures and encompasses Fichte's broader approach to rethinking philosophical communication.

of the attitude of the recipients. They cannot remain passive, but rather must actively engage in a process of exposition of a content that articulates itself. Thus, *Mitteilung* becomes strongly transformative. However, this transformation should not lead to a form of total domination akin to historical learning, which stifles recipients' ability to use their own reason. Rather, communication should foster a form of consistent freedom, enabling recipients to critically engage with their own judgment. Even if the theoretical proposals of the exponents of classical German philosophy are strongly differentiated, and elaborate both forms of pluralism (there is a multiplicity of choices) and non-pluralism (the proposed vision is the only liveable one, because the alternatives are self-refuting), the shared goal is to avoid a state where one is not active in judging, even in refuting what is presented. Only under such conditions can self-transformative experiences occur.

This emphasis on active engagement is particularly evident in the explicit demands placed on the recipients to actively participate in the genesis of meaning in communication, both in written and oral instruction. Regarding the first, Schlegel's project of complete communication serves as a model, advocating for dialogue involving everyone, poets, critics and philosophers and, in principle, the entire universe in *symphilosophiein*, using Plato's Symposium as a model where the participants are directly engaged. In this interaction not only other writers, but also the readers are invited to take part⁵⁴. Moreover, attention to the performative dimension of writing aims to unsettle readers, generating shock and irony⁵⁵ intended to inaugurate new spaces of freedom beyond the writer's or lecturer's control. The effects of disorientation, of 'estrangement' on the listeners and the readers are not simply ancillaries to the

⁵⁴ On Early Romanticism as communication-project cf. M. Mergenthaler, *Zwischen Eros und Mitteilung. Die Frühromantik im Symposion der 'Atbenaeums-Fragmente'*, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012. On readers' freedom to understand the author even better than she herself, cf. M. Dornbach, *Receptive Spirit: German Idealism and the Dynamics of Cultural Transmission*, New York, Idiom Inventing Writing Theory FUP, 2016, in particular pp. 140-172.

⁵⁵ Cf. M. Cometa, *Incomprendibilità e ironia. Filosofia e letteratura in Friedrich Schlegel e Paul de Man*, «Rivista di estetica», LXX, 2019, pp. 31-48.

process, for they are the way in which the discourse is philosophically articulated: through them the *Mitteilung* of the Absolute is shaped as a form of radical revision of rationality; in this same process recipients are actively subjectivized.

Against this backdrop, Schleiermacher underscores the process of individualization and self-transformation in a non-solipsistic manner. The success of his discourse hinges on the willingness to freely appropriate communicated content and communicate one's own transformation. Through this process of appropriation, spiritual content is modified as it enters a new context, that of another individuality. Consequently, there is no perspective-indifferent, supra-individual content, as all content is inherently tied to individual spiritual constellations. However, the individual is not the ultimate sovereign touchstone; by integrating a new idea into the context of her previous spiritual life, the individual transforms herself epistemically and personally. This radical redefinition allows Schleiermacher to describe individual spiritual development as «self-formation» (*Selbstbildung*)⁵⁶, where individuality and universality are no more opposed:

The more each person approaches the universe, the more he communicates himself to others, and the more perfectly do they become one; none is conscious of himself alone, but each is simultaneously conscious of the other. They are no longer merely people, but also humanity⁵⁷.

This interplay aims to create a common world open to participation and transformation, the belonging to which cannot be taken for granted in a time of radical crisis. The «true church»⁵⁸,

⁵⁶ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 9; Eng. trans., p. 6.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 234; Eng. trans., p. 94. Cf. ivi, p. 60; Eng. trans., p. 27: «When you have persuaded another person to join you in drawing the image of the Big Dipper [...], does he not nevertheless remain free to conceive the adjacent worlds in contours that are completely different from yours?».

⁵⁸ Id., *Religion*, p. 191; Eng. trans., p. 78.

the «city of God»⁵⁹ or the kingdom of God⁶⁰, become the guiding threads to radically rethink the relations between individual and universal, for «the communication of religion must occur in a grander style, and another type of society, which is especially dedicated to religion, must arise from it»⁶¹. In this world, effective communication fosters willingness to be transformed by objectivity and to overcome presuppositions, opening possibilities.

4. Mitteilung and philosophy of philosophy

The falling of the investigation of religion within the scope of philosophy does not neglect the communitarian, political dimensions inherent in both religion and philosophy; rather, it brings them into focus. In classical German philosophy, philosophy engages in a continuous dialogue with religion, as it represents a space where community, education, and participation in a shared universe of meaning intersect. Philosophy seeks to justify its role in the world by developing its discourse as a living, non-scholastic form of cognition, thereby establishing a particular continuity with religion. This is portrayed in Hegel's 1818 *Inaugural Address, Delivered at the University of Berlin*. While discussing the current state of philosophy and its teaching, Hegel claims that

In actual [*wirklichen*] life some individuals devote themselves to the class [*Stand*] of religion in order to stimulate other [...]. Formerly there was also a class which, without teaching others, devoted itself merely to the service of the Eternal, – human beings who were excluded from the rest of society and sacrificed in order that the useless life, the service and occupation in the Divine exists [...]. This class [*Stand*] has more or less disappeared – but science, – likewise this

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 181; Eng. trans., p. 75.

⁶⁰ On this topic in Kant and Hölderlin cf. B. Santini, *Morale e religione. Hölderlin interprete di Kant*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2023, pp. 43-48.

⁶¹ Schleiermacher, *Religion*, p. 181; Eng. trans., p. 74.

disinterested free activity, has in part begun to take its place, and the completion of what the state has to establish in actual reality also includes that for the existence [...] of philosophy a separate class [*Stand*], a separate existence is dedicated. But this complete separation can only be partial – reason requires a broader, more ramified actual reality for its existence⁶².

Two moments are at stake. First, a passing of the witness from one class (the religious one) to another (the philosophical) is taking place, both of which are «disinterested»⁶³, i.e. interested only in their own activity without reference to any other external end beside truth.

Alongside this first moment, which regards the objective existence of philosophy in the state, a second one is portrayed. Philosophy is hence depicted as not limiting itself to a separated class dedicated to the Absolute. Such a separation from the rest of the actual life cannot be total nor definitive. This impossibility lies in rationality itself, for «reason requires a broader, more ramified actual reality for its existence»⁶⁴. Such a move is though not breaking with what has occurred in the religious realm. Rather it continues what the Christian religion (the protestant, not the catholic one)⁶⁵ has already brought into the world: namely, the gradual disappearance of the distinction between laity and clergy

⁶² G.W.F. Hegel, *Berliner Antrittsrede (1818)*, in *Vorlesungsmanskripte II (1816-1831)*, ed. by W. Jaeschke, 1995, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 18, Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, pp. 26-27. Trans. by the author.

⁶³ *Ibidem*. Trans. by the author.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*. Trans. by the author. On the multi-faceted role of philosophy in comprehending the world, as well as its relationship with religion in Hegel's 1818 *Inaugural Address*, see G. Bernard, *Der erhabenste Begriff, der der neuern Zeit und ihrer Religion angehört: note sul concetto hegeliano di moderno*, «Archivio di Filosofia», XC (1), 2022, pp. 187-200.

⁶⁵ Even though classical German philosophy acknowledges the necessity of a historical understanding of determinate religions, a noticeable appeal to the Protestant tradition and a Christian bias in universalistic accounts of religion are undeniable. I won't delve into this issue here as it extends beyond the thesis I aim to argue.

understood as the exclusive recipients of divine communication and the only ones authorised to interpret religious contents. Precisely in this continuity lies a further step, which marks a critical moment of philosophy in the process of proving its cosmic aspect without presupposing it but rather elaborating adequate transformative forms that must be part of the philosophical justification. The idea in the project of re-founding philosophy as cosmic discourse – which does not presuppose forms, contents, nor even the poles through which the participation of truth takes place – is to exhibit a form of rationality even more pervasive than the religious, representative one: one that is truly universal, for all. This is not something granted. It implies a complication, even inversion, in the relationship between religion and philosophy.

The diversity of forms between religion (representations) and philosophy (concepts), albeit on the basis of a communality of contents, makes religion, for Hegel, the way in which truth is for all, while philosophy is for the few, i.e. for those who decide to undergo conceptual labour. This is not a definitive declaration of the impotence of philosophy but rather an acknowledgment of an ongoing task. Stating that philosophy cannot be confined to a class in its cosmic task implies that philosophy must engage with the communicative differences. It must also ensure that reason gains a broader actual reality, while avoiding unjustified narrative forms and being philosophy. To be such, philosophy must focus on its definiteness alone, by virtue of which, for Hegel, it becomes «*intelligible, communicable [mitteilbar], and capable of becoming common property [Gemeingut]*»⁶⁶.

Such a work entails critically taking up every givenness – even that of philosophical discourse – as a problem and developing discursive forms whose transformative potential is not external to the articulation of contents but rather integral to it. As observed earlier, the experiences of transformation vary significantly among the representatives of classical German philosophy. However, even when, contrary to Schleiermacher and Fichte, the emphasis is put not

⁶⁶ Hegel's letter to Friedrich von Raumer, 2.8.1816, *Briefe von und an Hegel. Band II*, ed. by J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, Meiner, 1953, p. 100; Eng. trans. by C. Butler and C. Seiler, *Hegel: The Letters*, Bloomington, Indiana Uni Press, 1984, p. 340.

primarily on intuition, attention, or judgment of the recipients but rather on the study, remains crucial for the philosophical *Mitteilung* the transformative confrontation with the objectivity of a content and a form that submit themselves to criticism, in which one recognises oneself as a participant in the critique of the known. In this light, philosophy of religion emerges fundamentally in philosophy's need to justify its being in the world by avoiding the risk of being an argued but abstract knowledge, unaware of its worldly essence, or a voracious form of immediate transformation of the world, blind because it lacks guidance from the redetermination of rationality and freedom. Philosophy of religion hence turns out to be inseparable from the meta-philosophical question.

5. *Conclusions: Philosophy of religion and Mitteilung inside out*

In this contribution, I have aimed to demonstrate how the philosophical discourse on religion serves as a crucial lens for understanding the transformations philosophy underwent following the decline of scholastic philosophy and the crisis of onto-theology. The redefinition of rationality, articulated through the radical reinterpretation of *Mitteilung* – self-articulation of communicated content, transformative experiences of subjects, and philosophical questioning of the philosophical discourse – not only highlights the emergence of the term *philosophy of religion* at the end of the 18th century coinciding with the onset of classical German philosophy⁶⁷. Furthermore, its discussion points out to what extent the issue of *performing knowledge* is not a contextual ingredient, but rather a constitutive theoretical aspect of the problem of *philosophy of religion* as such.

The proposed reconsideration of philosophy of religion through the theoretical framework of *Mitteilung* carries implications for a deeper understanding of its meta-philosophical potential as it emerges in classical German philosophy. Furthermore, it sheds light on the semantics of *Mitteilung* itself and its genealogical

⁶⁷ Cf. W. Jaeschke, *Religionsphilosophie*, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 8, ed. by J. Ritter and K. Gründer, Basel, Schwabe Verlag, 1992, p. 748.

connections with various theoretical positions. The analysis reveals that the concept of *Mitteilung*, as elaborated, from time to time differently, in classical German philosophy, defies reduction to a standard view of communication, as criticised by Benjamin's «bourgeois conception of language»⁶⁸. According to this label, communication would be the simple, transparent transmission (i) of a factual content, indifferent to the form of its being communicated, (ii) through language understood as a mean at our disposal, (iii) by an author who is not involved in the process of exhibition of the content, (iv) to addressees immune from transformations. In the philosophy of religion, viewed through the lens of performing knowledge, nothing is taken for granted – neither the content nor the form, nor even the addressees and the authors.

This perspective aligns with the pursuit of a cosmic philosophy, which neither presupposes its ends nor remains indifferent to them – something that recalls the scholastic concept of philosophy which «is regarded only as one of the skills for certain arbitrary ends»⁶⁹ or a strategic rationality. The present contribution aimed to elaborate on this theoretical perspective⁷⁰, emphasizing that the experimental discursive forms in classical German philosophy serve not merely expressive purposes, presupposing a positive outcome of communication. On the contrary, precisely in questioning the content, the subjects, and the discourse, *Mitteilung* unveils novel problems for investigation. Communication is not guaranteed as the transparent exhibition of self-articulating content, nor as a mean for transformation; rather, it presents an ongoing risk of lapsing into historical discourse incapable of fostering critical self-

⁶⁸ Benjamin, *Über Sprache überhaupt*, p. 144; Eng. trans., p. 65.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Eng. trans., p. 695 (A 840/B 868n).

⁷⁰ The alignment of this viewpoint with Benjamin's «other conception of language», which «knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication» and «in the name, the spiritual being of human being communicates itself to God» (Benjamin, *Über Sprache überhaupt*, p. 144; Eng. trans., p. 65, modified) is only hinted at here as a line of research, a development of which lies beyond the scope of this text. The same applies to a further analysis of the Habermasian critique to the strategic rationality in the communicative action.

reflection and active participation. It is upon this recurrent risk that philosophy unfolds.

Philosophy's need to philosophically justify its being in the world while critically reassessing its modes of reproduction, dissemination, and engagement – manifested prominently in the philosophy of religion in classical German philosophy – provides a legacy for contemporary thought. Embracing this legacy is essential precisely because, rather than in spite of, the profound transformations that have occurred in the world since then⁷¹.

⁷¹ I would like to thank Luca Illetterati and the two anonymous referees for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this contribution.