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The Harnessed Lightning, or the Politics of Apocalypse: Hegel, Rosenzweig, Derrida

What could be the common thread linking these three very different thinkers: Hegel, Rosenzweig, and Derrida? In my essay, I will argue that this link is provided by a certain form of political theology which is polemical towards Carl Schmitt's notion of the *katechon* or the "restrainer of the apocalypse." While the political theology which they propose is also based on the idea of the *restraint*, it takes a different form than the Schmittian postponement of the apocalyptic event. Their alternative notion is *attenuation* which results in the political and philosophical practice of maintaining a distance between God and the world. Neither simply restraining it, nor simply hastening, this new formula takes a third dialectical position between the *katechon* and the *apocalyptic*, which consists in "easing the lightning to the children": the world as God's child—weak, fragile, and exposed to the infinite power of creation and destruction—must nonetheless find a way to use the revelatory power of the *eschaton* for the immanent purposes.

Keywords: Hegel, Rosenzweig, Derrida, apocalypse, law, justice, work

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind —¹



Paul Klee, *Gebannter Blitz*

And even the destructive might transform into the world.
 Rilke, *Baudelaire*

What could be the common thread linking these three very different thinkers: Hegel, Rosenzweig, and Derrida? In my essay, I will argue that this link is provided by a certain form of political theology which adopts polemical position towards Carl Schmitt's notion of the *katechon* or the "restrainer of the apocalypse."² While the political theology which they

1 Poem nr 1263 (Dickinson 1998).

2 The katechon (in Luther's translation—*der Aufhalter*, "the restrainer") derives from Paul's Second Letter to Thessalonians (2:3–2:8): "And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible* 1991). In *Nomos of the Earth*, Carl Schmitt creates a whole new political theology based on the concept of the katechon as the one who withholds the advent of the Antichrist representing the forces of lawlessness and disorder and as such is a true fulfillment of Christian religion; see most of all the chapter "The Christian Empire as a Restrainer of the Antichrist (Katechon)" (Schmitt 1999, 59–61), where Schmitt says: "I do not believe that any historical concept other than katechon would have been possible for the original Christian faith. The belief that a restrainer holds back the end of the world provides the only bridge between the notion of an eschatologi-

propose is also based on the idea of the *restraint*, it takes a different form than the Schmittian postponement of the apocalyptic event. Their alternative notion is *attenuation* or, in Emily Dickinson's phrasing: an "easing" or "slanting" of the direct impact of the Truth in its full, *panim el panim* (face-to-face) revelation, which results in the political and philosophical practice of maintaining a distance between God and the world, that is, between the all-mighty and sovereign power, which can create and destroy, on the one hand—and the weaker pole of this relation, the created world as dependent on creative force but, at the same time, striving for as much independence as it can get. This metaphysical struggle for independence, which applies the strategy of distancing, involves something more than just a defense against the infinite power: it reclaims the messianic expectation, which Schmitt excluded from his concept of the *katechon*, but not in the direct manner of such messianic apocalypses as Jacob Taubes, who avidly await God's ultimate revelation and wish to hasten the end of the world, while saying: "I can imagine as an apocalyptic: let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is" (Taubes 2003, 103). Messianic political theology, which will be my subject here, not only defers to but also feeds on the apocalyptic force of divine revelation. Neither simply restraining it, nor simply hastening, this new formula takes a third dialectical position between the *katechon* and the *apocalyptic*, which consists in "easing the lightning to the children": the world as God's child—weak, fragile, and exposed to the infinite power of creation and destruction—must nonetheless find a way to use the revelatory power of the *eschaton* for immanent purposes. This use, however, does not exhaust itself in the manoeuvre which Erich Voegelin famously criticised as the "immanentisation of the *eschaton*": a hubristic attempt of modernity to domesticate the powers of transcendence and make them serve the materialistic utopias of a "paradise on earth."³ It has a different goal: while it does not negate transcendence, it nonetheless wants to make immanence stronger—as strong as possible within the uneven relation with God.

cal paralysis of all human events and a tremendous historical monolith like that of the Christian empire of the Germanic kings" (Schmitt 1999, 61). The claim that Paul, unable to wait for the Second Coming any longer, suffered a failure of the messianic nerve and because of that turned towards the figure of the *katechon*, was also maintained by Jacob Taubes, although with opposite intention (Taubes 2003, 103). While Schmitt represents the *katechonic* wisdom of anti-messianic and anti-apocalyptic politics, Taubes constitutes the ideal type of the opposite: the messianic theopolitics staking on the apocalyptic revealment of God as putting an end to the failed experiment of the world.

3 See Voegelin 1999, 184–186.

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Hegel, Rosenzweig, and Derrida are the true masters of such indirect messianic political theology: while they offer different solutions, deriving from their disparate philosophical and religious traditions, their common denominator is the variation on the theme of the *utilisation of the apocalypse*. In Hegel, the philosophical sublation of apocalyptic eschatology—the message of the redemptive/ annihilating “end of the world”—plays major role in his philosophy of history, particularly in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the apocalyptic *Furie der Zerstörung*, “fury of destruction,” pressing towards the end of all things—as witnessed in its full terrifying glory during the French Revolution—becomes an engine of the dialectical transformation of the worldly reality: while it undergoes a philosophical sublation, it gets tamed and disciplined to serve the process of historical work as a “delayed destruction.” The Hegelian idea of work is thus a compromise between the passive affirmation of the worldly *status quo*, which accepts the world as it is, on the one hand, and the violent negation of the world as such, which leads to the apocalyptic annihilation of all being, on the other. A century later, Franz Rosenzweig—both a great Hegelian scholar and brilliant philosopher of Judaism—will prove that this dialectical neutralization of the apocalypse in the concept of work is not Hegel’s original invention. According to the author of *The Star of Redemption*, it goes back to the very origin of the apocalyptic genre, which sprang up among the messianic Jewish sects of the Hellenistic era, and was already then used by Rabbinic Judaism as a defense against the powers pressing towards the grand finale: the works of the Law play exactly the same dialectical role as work in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. And finally, a similar mechanism will appear in the Derridean method of deconstruction which—though *prima facie* anti-Hegelian—continues Hegel’s strategy of utilising the “tremendous power of the negative.” Derrida’s notion of the “apocalypse without apocalypse,” which emerges in the essay “On the Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,” chimes perfectly well with Hegel’s dialectical attenuation of the energy of the negative, which can now be directed not towards the end/ destruction of the world, but towards the historical working-through of its substance.

What clearly unites these three thinkers is the conviction that without the apocalyptic genre there would be no concept of history at all: no sense of a grand messianic narrative, which is staked on the historical work/task and patiently transforms the worldly reality, by fostering its struggle for metaphysical independence. Their messianic political theology, therefore, tarries with the common negative: the apocalyptic *nearness of God* or the danger of coming too close to the naked divine

power, which threatens to destroy the precarious worldly existence. Yet—and this is the very gist of the messianic dialectics which they put in motion—this danger is not to be simply averted: it is also to be transformed into an energy that fuels the historical process of the world's emancipation.

Tarrying with the Apocalypse: Hegel

The title of my paper derives from the painting of Paul Klee, *Gebannter Blitz*, which can be found in the Albertina Gallery in Vienna. This little tribute to the Utopian Socialism fleshes out the secret dream of modern mankind: to harness lightning, bring it down to earth through a complex grounding device and, instead of letting it destroy the world, make it work for the sake of material reality. But the “harnessed lightning” has also a clear religious connotation: being a traditional allegory for revelation, lightning represents the absolute clash between the infinite transcendent power and the finite, fragile and weak existence. *Apocalypsis* is, therefore, simultaneously a revelation—coming to the fore of the hidden God—and a destruction, for “no one can see God face to face and live.”

But to harness lightning means precisely to go beyond the destructive antithetical nature of this clash: it is to outwit the transcendence and, in the Promethean gesture of stealing the fire, intercept its energy for worldly purposes and thus ascertain that the revelation no longer kills the world, but make it stronger instead. Hence, Klee's painting can also be seen as belonging to the long series of the pictorial allegories of the Tower of Babel, together with Peter Breughel: the lightning rod which harnesses the flash is a Babelian construction heading towards the sky to challenge its divine inhabitant. It thus offers the best pictorial representation of the Hegelian dialectics: the philosophical heir of the Promethean myth of stealing the fire, the Babelian myth of challenging God, and the myth of *Apocalypsis* as the violent end of the world.

In the interpretation of Hegel which I propose here, to tarry with the negative is most of all to tarry with the apocalyptic: with the forces of fury and destruction that can either end the world or, when cunningly harnessed, make the world stronger. Hegel, therefore, might have thought of himself as a good Lutheran till the end of his life,⁴

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⁴ On Hegel's relation to Martin Luther and the Reformed Theology, see most of all: Asendorf 1982.

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but, unlike so many other Protestant thinkers—from Soren Kierkegaard to Karl Barth—he never wished to side with God’s power against the world’s weakness and then revel in the apocalyptic imagery of the latter’s just and total destruction, according to the rule: *pereat mundus, sed fiat iustitia*. The release of pure negativity, no longer harnessed by the dialectical *List der Vernunft*—whether in the case of the sectarian beautiful soul dreaming about the triumph of righteousness over the sinful material realm, or in the case of the revolutionary unleashing unlimited *Furie der Zerstörung*—is, for Hegel, always a sign of evil: of a failure to protect the weak element of the worldly against the creative/destructive omnipotence of the otherworldly, incarnating itself in these two perverted figures of the subjective spirit—the beautiful soul and the revolutionary, both ready to punish the extant precarious reality with the furious *ungebannter Blitz*.⁵ Hegel sides firmly with the weakness of the world: its imperfection, moral lapsarianism, death-anxious finitude, care for the precarity of always endangered life. This strong ‘spiritual investment’ in the world’s initial weakness constitutes the very essence of his political theology.⁶

5 Hegel, following closely Goethe’s “Confessions of the Beautiful Soul,” forming the crucial part of *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, treats *die schöne Seele* as a synecdoche of the Gnostic intransigent negation of the external world, always and forever opposed to the superior element of Innerlichkeit, the ‘inwardness’ which consorts directly with God. The Goethean Hutherrn community of Moravian Brotherhood, centered around the count Zuzendorf, cultivates its spiritual splendid isolation and, while described by Goethe with his characteristic magnanimity, fails to deserve his ultimate praise: in the end, it is the uncle of the eponymous Beautiful Soul, who gently opposes her sectarian attitude and who takes custody of the children she does not care to raise.

6 By endorsing this position, I want to engage in a gentle polemic with the latest turn in Hegelian scholarship which revises the idea of Hegel the dialectical reformer of the world and attempts to reclaim his praise of revolution, championed mostly by Slavoj Žižek in his Lacanizing interpretation of Hegel’s message. While Žižek rejects the “common perception” according to which “Hegel condemns French Revolution as the immediate assertion of an abstract-universal Freedom” and insists on the repetition of the revolutionary *apocalypse now!* in the manner of an unstoppable *Wiederholungszwang* (repetition compulsion—A.B.-R.) pressing towards the catastrophe, I would like to emphasize the dialectical reassumption of the apocalyptic fire in the Hegelian concept of the work as “delayed destruction,” mediating forward between the apocalyptic “fury of destruction” and the passive conservation of the *status quo* (Žižek 2012, 69). In his pro-revolutionary revision of Hegel, Žižek praises Rebecca Comay’s *Mourning Sickness. Hegel and the French Revolution* (Comay 2011) for starting this vogue, by rereading Hegel under the auspices of Walter Benjamin whose apocalyptic statement—“Catastrophe: to have missed the opportunity”—serves as the motto to the whole book.

Yet, Hegel's solution has nothing to do with the katechonic gesture of avoidance, by simply restraining, evading and keeping at bay the apocalyptic fire of revelation/ destruction. He is not the Pauline *katechon*, "the restrainer of the apocalypse," as described by Carl Schmitt, who would like to postpone the thunder and lightning forever. Hegel's invention of dialectics is precisely to cut into the dualism of the restrainers and the hasteners of the apocalyptic finale. In order to protect the weaker pole of the relation between transcendence and immanence, he wants to *use* the apocalyptic fire in order to make the world stronger: to solidify its precarious *Dasein*, immunize it against the punitive furies of the divine Spirit which, in all Abrahamic monotheisms, is given the sovereign right to destroy what it created, as and when he wishes, obedient to nothing but his own lordly desire which needs no justification apart from *quia voluit*: "because He wanted that way." The world, occupying the position of the Slave in this metaphysical extrapolation of the Master/ Slave dialectics, begins as absolutely weak and dependent, but eventually outwits the Master. Yet, this cunning does not consist in imitating the Master, which Hegel ultimately rejects as a wrong ideal of *theosis*: man/ world becoming God, and, thanks to that, as strong as God.⁷ The human-worldly strategy retains its distance and separation, by relying on a utilisation of God's nihilistic and destructive attitude towards beings in a wholly different manner. This other way Hegel calls *work*, as opposed to the Master's annihilating *desire*:

Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence. Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. (Hegel 1977, 118)

⁷ Here I want to take issues with the interpretation of Hegel as the paradigmatic modern Gnostic, which was proposed by Erich Voegelin and then developed by Cyril O'Regan in *The Heterodox Hegel* (O'Regan 1994). They both understand modern Gnosticism as the doctrine of human self-empowerment which stakes on *imitatio Dei* as the means to absolute *theosis*: man-becoming-God and thus no longer in need of God. Even if the ideal of *theosis* indeed appears in the writings of the Hegelian Left (most of all Ernst Bloch), it should not be attributed to Hegel himself, who envisages a different path of human/ worldly emancipation, leading through the works of the Slave.

According to Hegel's distinction, desire—for which the apocalyptic desire of the world's annihilation serves as the paradigmatic case, just as God constitutes the paradigm of the simple "unalloyed self"—negates its object purely and disregards its independent existence, aiming at its immediate consumption as something weak and destined only to enhance the lordly power. Work, on the other hand, as desire mitigated, "held in check," subdued and cooled down, delays the destruction of its object and due to this postponement gives it shape and form, in this manner bestowing on it objectivity and permanence. Instead of destroying the world altogether, work, still utilising the negative energy of desire, manages to destroy it methodically and partially—that is, to transform it. Work, therefore, is also a force of negativity (for pure positivity would merely issue in a passive contemplation of the world's beauty), but "held in check" and deferred, and because of that played out in the ongoing process of transformation that constitutes a dialectical compromise between simple affirmation and equally simple destruction of its object. In other words, also Hegelian, it is the *negation of negation*, which has a creative-transformative effect: the immediate destruction, resulting from the desire, becomes negated in its immediacy and thus "staved off" in its gratification. In consequence, the object is challenged in its current weak form and given a new, more stable one with a specific purpose. Hegel then extrapolates this model of creative destruction to the whole world, as still not fully formed and lacking purpose; from this moment on, Spirit in all its avatars—subjective, objective, and becoming-absolute—will "form and shape" the material realm with a redemptive *telos* in mind. The *eschaton*—the end of the world—will no longer threaten the world as a verdict/ judgment hovering about it, but will be drawn into the very dynamic of the historical process. Instead of rushing towards apocalyptic destruction, the world will *develop* towards its "objectivity and permanence."⁸

8 The metaphor of the Master and Slave dialectics as the best way to approach the evolution of Western metaphysical thought appears very strongly in Adorno's series of lectures devoted to metaphysics, where he presents Aristotle as the precursor of Hegel, i.e. the first thinker to emancipate worldly beings from the service to Platonic Ideas and to give them "permanence and objectivity": "Aristotle, in the first truly metaphysical work of literature—the one which gave that branch of philosophy its name—criticizes the Platonic attempt to oppose essence to the world of the senses, as something separate and absolutely different from it. Above all, he criticizes the Platonic hypostasis of universal concepts as a duplication of the world. In this he makes a very strong and legitimate case, based on the argument that all the attributes of the Ideas are derived from the empirical world, on which they live, rather as the rulers lived on the work of their servants or slaves.

Work as the transformation of the worldly *status quo*, therefore, changes being without destroying it wholesale. It works through it in the process of purposeful *Durcharbeiten*, the goal of which is the final affirmation of the worldly reality as pervaded by “objectivity and permanence,” so far attributable only to the divine Absolute and its “unalloyed feeling of the self.” No longer just a Pauline “passing figure of the world”—a realm of pitiful transience and ontological weakness—the material reality will have become as real and metaphysically strong as the Spirit which created it, and, because of that, immune to its destructive apocalyptic interventions. This is what modern theology calls the principle of the univocity of being: Duns Scotus’s promise that the existence of the world will be no longer dependent on the existence of God, realizes itself fully in Hegel’s dialectical notion of work. At the same time, however, although containing an element of rivalry—the Lutheran *Anfechtung Gottes* clearly persists in Hegel—work does not belong to the strategies of *theosis*, the aim of which is to imitate God and become *sicut Dei*. According to Hans Blumenberg, who, similarly to Hegel, criticised the motif of ‘man-becoming-God’ as the false *telos* of history, work is the means of human self-assertion in the world always already endangered by the uneven relationship with its Creator: its goal is not self-deification, but ontological autonomy in regard to the divine.⁹ It is only work, therefore, which is capable of creating a safe distance between God and the world, and of securing the latter the desired emancipation: by harnessing the apocalyptic *Blitz*, work *incarnates* the energy of the Spirit into the texture of material reality and, in this manner, assists its struggle for recognition.

Hegel makes plenty a room for *kenosis in creation*—a Christian-kabbalistic variant of *tsimtsum* or God’s contraction taking the form of the original *Entäußerung*/ exteriorisation/ self-voiding of God into the

At the same time, however, he then seeks in his turn to extract an essential being from the sensible, empirical world, and thereby to save it; and it is precisely this twofold aim of criticism and rescue which constitutes the nature of metaphysics... Metaphysics can thus be defined as the exertion of thought to save what at the same time it destroys” (Adorno 2001, 20).

9 Comp. Blumenberg 1985, 545: “It is just this (the rivalry—A.B.-R.) that Luther (...) translated into monotheistic terms: He who wanted to be God and it was naturally self-evident for him that man had to want this could only want to be it in place of the one God. Where no equivalence is possible, thinking has to take the form of the desire to annihilate”—which, following Hegel, would be the desire to annihilate the Master: this is precisely what the Slave is not supposed to do.

world¹⁰—but he also postulates a parallel *kenosis in destruction*: an attenuating diminution of the apocalyptic finale which, harnessed and disciplined, metamorphoses into the historical work. While the creative *kenosis* makes the whole world the arena of divine incarnation as “the Golgotha of the Absolute Spirit”—the de(con)structive *kenosis* allows the ideal of truth and justice to be incarnated, by transforming the immediate desire for apocalypse into a mediated process of work which defers and diffuses the moment of self-annihilating satisfaction. It is worth noticing that the same scheme will return in Lacan’s theory, where the system of pleasure, chained to the reality principle, defers and diffuses the advent of *jouissance*. Unlike Hegel, however, Lacan (and subsequently Žižek in his Lacanizing take on Hegel) openly protests against such “diminution” and neutralising dispersal: his slogan is a modified version of the old dictum—*pereat mundus, sed fiat jouissance*. Hegel, on the other hand, makes his procosmic position absolutely clear, when stating in *Philosophy of Right* in critical reference to Kant and his intransigent position on justice: “*Fiat justitia* ought not to have *pereat mundus* as a consequence” (Hegel 2001, 130).

Schiller’s line, often quoted by Hegel¹¹—*Die Weltgeschichte ist die Weltgericht*, “the history of the world *is* the judgment over the world”—should thus be read literally: the history of the world is indeed the judgment over the world, but delayed, deferred, and suspended. While Schiller’s aphorism wholly belongs to nominalist Protestant theology, which praises the ultimate manifestation of God’s infinite power in the apocalyptic execution of the Last Judgment over the worldly reality—Hegel changes its meaning, by introducing a motif of deferral, attenuation, and gradual diminishment, which derives from the alternative theological paradigm of *tsimtsum* as the divine self-contraction, here taking the form of generalised *kenosis*—Spirit making itself small—operative at all levels of divine revelation, both creative and destructive. The apocalyptic judgment, therefore, no longer *hovers* over the world as a threat, but, cunningly intercepted, *works* through the worldly reality as “the infinite in the finite.” The world, therefore, will eventually reach its end—but it won’t be a blow of divine punishment ending the *stasis*

10 On the influence of the heterodox religious motives deriving from the so called Christian kabbalistic milieu on Hegel, see my “God of Luria, Hegel, Schelling: The Divine Contraction and the Modern Metaphysics of Finitude” (Bielik-Robson 2017, 32–50).

11 Hegel quotes Schiller’s poem *Resignation* in Section 340 of the *Philosophy of Right*: “The history of the world is the world’s court of judgment” (Hegel 2001, 266).

of hopeless fallenness, weakness, and mere transience, as Schiller's sentence originally suggests. It will rather be a long "staved off" fulfilment in which the world will have achieved "objectivity and permanence" that even the most nominalist God, immersed in his infinite "unalloyed desire," would be forced to recognise.

The Law as the Lightning Rod: Rosenzweig

But, as I have already indicated, this surreptitious use of the apocalypse is not exactly Hegel's original invention: it has its antecedent in the non-philosophical language of the late-Hellenistic rabbis who tarried with the apocalyptic negative in a fully developed dialectical manner *avant la lettre*. According to Franz Rosenzweig, it is precisely the rabbinic concept of the Law which offers the dialectical possibility of "working" as a functional transformation of the creaturely realm over against the direct revelation which always threatens to annihilate the world. The Law, therefore, works as a necessary defense mechanism: a mediator of the "endurable portion" of the original violent flame of revelation, precisely as in Dickinson, "eased to the children." The Law emerges here as the delayed destruction of the world, which it patiently transforms, but always on the side of the world as the weaker pole to be defended in the asymmetrical relation with God. And it is precisely this delay and partial neutralization that allows the apocalyptic energy, contained within the Law, to be more precise in the act of targeting its object; instead of exploding the whole of creaturely reality, deemed to be fallen in its entirety and unworthy of, in Taubes's words, any "spiritual investment," it provides a more subtle ethical missile which destroys only those aspects of worldliness which hinder its process of achieving "objectivity and permanence." Just as in Hegel, therefore, work continues the act of creation by different means; if God has the power of *creatio ex nihilo*, human beings must resort to *continuous creative destruction*. Whether these are the works of the Slave or the works of the Law, the mechanism is roughly the same: they destroy the world in its current "passing figure" and transform it, by giving it a new—ethical—form. The Law, therefore, is a bridge that connects transcendence with immanence, by simultaneously preserving the contrast between them and attenuating the destructive effect of this contrast. Rosenzweig approaches this contrast as the tension between the world as it is and the world as redeemed or, as Adorno would have it, contemplated from the standpoint of redemption:

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The fact that the world, this world, is created and yet is in need of the future Redemption, the disquietude of this twofold thought, is *quieted in the unity of the Law*. The Law... therefore, in its diversity and power that puts everything in order, the entire “outside,” namely all this-worldly life, everything that can draw up some worldly law or other, makes this world and the world to come indistinguishable. According to rabbinic legend, God himself “learns” in the Law. *In the Law, everything that can be grasped in it is this-worldly*, all created existence is already immediately endowed with life and soul for becoming content of the world to come. (Rosenzweig 2005, 429)¹²

The Law is “this-worldly,” “no longer in heaven” (*lo bashamayim hi*) and God himself “learns in it”: while the Law is studied and developed here on earth by the rabbinic hermeneutic community, God’s power becomes limited or even “defeated” in confrontation with his “learned children.” The Law thus evolves from the codex originally revealed in the act of *matan Torah* (giving of the Law), when it serves as a means of easing the flash of transcendence to the children of immanence, into a complex system of grasping all the aspects of the worldly existence, which lifts it up to the level of the world redeemed—perfect “objectivity and permanence”—able to challenge God himself and, in a typically Hegelian manner, demand recognition.¹³

12 There are, obviously, huge differences between Rosenzweig’s and Adorno’s references to the *olam ha-ba*, the world to come: while the former accentuates the uniting and reconciling role of the Law as already reflecting the future world of redemption, Adorno emphasizes the negative contrast between what is and what could be. But Adorno’s contrastive “inverse theology” can also be regarded as a variant of the Hegelian ‘tarrying with the apocalypse,’ which wishes to use the Light of the Last Judgment as the only possible medium of any meaningful critique of the worldly *status quo*: “The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique” (Adorno 2005, 153). This, as we shall see in a moment, will also be Derrida’s view on knowledge as enlightenment.

13 The rabbinic rule of “no longer in heaven,” which places the Torah-Law on earth in the safe distance from God’s miraculous interventions, derives from the Talmudic story, told in the tractate Baba Metsia 59b. As a non-philosophical narrative form of reasoning, it must be cited in its entirety; only then does it reveal the true meaning of the Law as a bridge between its Giver and human subjects who use it as a means of self-empowerment in the uneven relation with God, without resorting to any strategy of self-deification: “On that day Rabbi Eliezer brought forward all the arguments in the world, but they were not accepted... He said to them (the other rabbis—A.B.-R.): »If the Halakhah agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven.« Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying:

Gershom Scholem—the great historian of Judaism, but also a speculative thinker with his own philosophical-messianic agenda—felt no sympathy for Rosenzweig’s project, which he saw as far too mellow, too “quited in the unity of the Law,” but it was nonetheless he who spotted the crucial role of the Rosenzweigian concept of the Law as a defense mechanism producing the effect of delay and distancing—a sort of stopping device designed to interrupt, arrest and attenuate the apocalyptic fire, to prevent both the subject and the world from instantaneous annihilation. In order to explain the functioning of this defence, Scholem introduced two useful metaphors. One, the traditional metaphor of lightning, symbolizes the vertiginous moment of revelation as an antagonistic clash of the transcendent in the immanent: an infectious fire that, when unstopped, burns down the soul and the world to ashes. The second metaphor, of his own making, is that of a “lightning rod”: the device that both uses and tames the divine energy of absolute justice, by directing it towards the ground of the creaturely condition, thus making it separate, “no longer in heaven” and thanks to that operative in the creaturely realm. Between revelation itself and the ethical works of the Law functioning as the “lightning rod,” there appears a moment of non-identity—a very Derridean *différance* indeed, in terms of both “difference” and “deferral.” The following fragment refers to Rosenzweig, but it could just as well be targeting Hegel:

Here, in a mode of thought deeply concerned for order, it (the anarchic element) underwent metamorphosis. The power of redemption seems to be built into the clockwork of life lived in the light of revelation, though more as restlessness than as potential destructiveness. For a thinker of Rosenzweig’s rank could never remain oblivious to the truth that *redemption possesses not only a liberating but also a destructive force*—a truth which only too many Jewish theologians are loath to consider and which a whole literature takes pains to avoid. Rosenzweig sought at least to neutralize it in a higher order of truth. If it be true that the lightning of redemption directs the universe of Judaism, then in Rosenzweig’s

»Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer? The Halakhah always agrees with him.« But Rabbi Joshua arose and said (Deut. 30:12): »It is not in heaven.« What did he mean by that? Rabbi Jeremiah replied: »The Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai (and is thus no longer in Heaven—A.B.-R.). We pay no heed to any heavenly voice, because already at Mount Sinai You wrote in the Torah (Exod. 23:2): One must incline after the majority. Rabbi Nathan met the prophet Elijah and asked him: »What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do in that hour?« He replied: »God smiled and said: My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me.« (in Scholem 1991, 130–131).

work *the life of the Jew must be seen as the lightning rod whose task it is to render harmless its destructive power.* (Scholem 1991, 323)

We could easily paraphrase Scholem's words as critical of Hegel's reformist timidity (and thus chiming well with Comay and Žižek): "If it be true that the lightning of apocalypse directs the universe of modernity, then in Hegel's work the life of the modern man must be seen as the lightning rod whose task it is to render harmless its destructive power." Scholem himself, personally more prone to apocalyptic solutions, is critical toward Rosenzweig's cautious ways; he criticizes him for his general intention to appease "the anarchic element" in the clockwork mechanism of ritualised life. This assessment, however, is neither completely true nor fair: the lightning rod of the work and the Law does not serve to render the destructive power of apocalypse-revelation completely "harmless," but to make it operative and effective in the world and for the sake of the world as the dialectical bridge between the world as it is and the better world to come (*olam ha-ba*).¹⁴ In Rosenzweig's post-Hegelian rendering, the rabbinic political theology does not merely create a distance between God and the world, by simply neutralising the revelatory energy: rather, precisely as with the lightning rod, it directs this energy towards the ground, so it can truly acquire transformative power and, as Levinas aptly puts it, "jolt the Real." *Meaningful movement jolts the Real*: the Torah as the *gebannter Blitz* works through the very structure of the world in order to make it less determined by natural laws and more enlightened by the laws of ethics.¹⁵

14 Rosenzweig is very well aware of the pitfalls of the total neutralization of the apocalyptic fire, which he calls "Jewish dangers" (Rosenzweig 2005, 429): one of them consists in "squeezing it into the cozy domestic space between the Law and its, the Law's, people" (Rosenzweig 2005, 430). Thus, while the Christians are endangered by an excessive expansion, which may contaminate their messianic work of the transformation of the worldly reality and make it forget its roots—the Jews are endangered by an excessive contraction of the divine "heat" which they overly domesticate and, indeed, render useless for the world: "Christianity, by radiating outwards, is in danger of evaporating into isolated rays far away from the divine core of truth. Judaism, by glowing inwards, is in danger of gathering its heat into its own bosom far distant from the pagan world reality" (Rosenzweig 2005, 430). The right concept of the Law, as the dialectical bridge between the transcendent heat/fire and the immanent world reality, is to counteract both Jewish and Christian dangers.

15 See Levinas' description of the Torah as the trace of the transcendent justice from without, which challenges the ontological order here and now: "Being receives a challenge from the Torah, which jeopardizes its pretention of keeping itself above or beyond good and evil. In challenging the absurd »that's the way it

Eucalyypse, Now: Derrida¹⁶

The thinker who managed to synthesize both Hegel's concept of work and Rosenzweig's emphasis on the ethical transformation of the world, by enhancing the dialectical thrust of work as simultaneously using and taming apocalyptic energy, is the father of deconstruction: Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction is, in fact, nothing but *destruction deferred*: it simultaneously wards off the apocalypse and utilizes its destructive energy to subvert the *status quo* of the worldly reality in order to keep itself in a constant ethical vigilance. In the essay on the "apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy"—which directly refers to Kant's famous prototype, but indirectly to all the contemporary Helpers/ Hasteners of the Apocalypse (Derrida mentions here Heidegger, Blanchot, and Lacan, but we could now also add Žižek to this ever growing list)—Derrida defends deconstruction as a form of enlightenment which uses light against light. While it may be true that, in Heraclitus words, "the lightning steers all"—this flash of light must also be steered itself: harnessed and made to work for the sake of the world, not against it.¹⁷ The apocalyptic frenzy has to be partially *covered/ calyptos*: if it is to bring light and *not* destruction, it must be, in the Hegelian manner, "held in check."

For Derrida, enlightenment is not a fully secular formation, but a form of political theology which maintains a complex relation with the apocalyptic lightning of revelation:

It is difficult to separate the concept of secularization from the concept of *Lumières*, *Illuminisimo*, Enlightenment, or *Aufklärung*, and from the link between the Enlightenment (*Lumières*) of reason (according to Kant, for example) and the light, which is the very element in which revelation, revelations, and above all Judeo-Christian revelation have been announced and advanced. This connection between the light (*la lumière*) and Enlightenment (*les Lumières*) is already the site of secularization (*sécularisation*). This is already the analogy that

is« claimed by the Power of the powerful, the man of the Torah transforms being into human history. Meaningful movement jolts the Real" (Lévinas 1990, 39).

16 The title of this section alludes in reverse to Derrida's essay on nuclear danger: "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)" (Derrida 1984a).

17 In Hermann Diels' *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, this is fragment no. 64: translation slightly altered after Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar* (Heidegger and Fink 1993, 4–11), where this aphorism is thoroughly discussed. According to Heidegger and Fink, the Heraclitean lightning is at once fire and logos which governs the rhythm of nature: its *genesis kai phthora*, coming-forth-into-being-and-perishing.

Deconstruction is, in fact, nothing but destruction deferred: it simultaneously wards off the apocalypse and utilizes its destructive energy to subvert the status quo of the worldly reality in order to keep itself in a constant ethical vigilance.

permits *the passage between religion and the world (le siècle), between revelation and the world.* (Derrida 2020a, 139)

As Enlightenment, deconstruction is always on the side of justice—Derrida famously claims: “deconstruction is justice”—but this is not the otherworldly absolute justice which wishes the world to vanish according to the rule *pereat mundus, sed fiat iustitia*, enthusiastically affirmed by Kant¹⁸: it belongs to the *saeculum* or the world (*le siècle*). Voegelin’s critique of the Hegelian procedures which “immanentize the *eschaton*” could thus also be extrapolated on the Derridean deconstruction, which indeed immanentizes absolute justice in order to turn it into mundane justice, working in and through our every ethical and political decision, but, pace Voegelin, Derrida does not perceive this passage as a distortion or error. Justice is “no longer in heaven,” *lo bashamayim*, which means that it must offer a mediation between the transcendent ideal and the immanent real—without giving in into too much of a betrayal. Betray we must, says Derrida, but the enlightenment lets in precisely the right amount of light to vigilantly watch over the process of mediation. Derrida’s slogan of his political theology could thus be a paraphrase of Beckett’s famous line on failure: *betray, betray again, betray better.*

The first stage of this process is the dismantling of the apocalyptic discourse of absolute light as *blindly* following the never questioned desire to reach naked truth and see it in all its beaming glory, *sonnenklar* and crystal-clear. Derrida continues here Nietzsche’s precursorial project of “gay science,” which can remain gay only at the cost of giving up the desire for absolute truth—but also Hegel, who restricts the apocalyptic “fury of destruction” in such a manner that it begins to work within the creaturely reality, not against it. Deconstruction is thus to apocalypse what Hegel’s working dialectics is to the “rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with absolute knowledge, and makes short work of other standpoints by declaring that it takes no notice of them” (Hegel 1977, 16). Instead of this violent rapture Hegel proposes a different type of *jener nüchhterner Rausch*: “the revel in which no member is not drunk” (Hegel 1977, 27), but which, when regarded as “the whole movement of the *life of truth*” and contrasted with “rapturous enthusiasm,” appears almost as a “state of *repose*”: the True, no

18 While commenting on Kant’s ethics, Michael Rosen does not hide his fear of the apocalyptic terror which it openly endorses: “The austere slogan of retributivism was always: let justice be done although the world perishes (*fiat justitia, pereat mundus*). Kant’s position seems even harsher—let justice be done even if we have to create a hell for it to be done in” (Rosen 2014, 13).

longer “regarded as something on the other side, positive and dead” (Hegel 1977, 27)—the truth-saying *vere-diction* of the apocalyptic Last Judgment hovering over the world—begins to permeate the realm of appearances and, with this act of incarnation, acquires life. The doubly negative attribution—*no member not-drunk*—oscillates between total abandon and sobriety: the whole point of the living and life-affirming revel is to have a sip from the intoxicating fountain of the Last Judgment/ Verdict/ Ultimate Truth, but no more than that—just a *pharmakonic* amount. While rupture explodes with the immediacy of the “pistol shot” and indeed kills and poisons everything around, the revel eases the revelation of Truth, so it can be received by the fragile vessels of appearances and then chained to the works that would foster and sustain the worldly *life* of truth. When revelation/ *apocalypsis* remains outside the world, it is not only dead but also *deadly*. But when it is fused with the course of the world, it begins to live: it awakens to life and to the Slave’s choice of “permanence and objectivity.”¹⁹ This mechanism of “amortization” applies *a fortiori* to Derrida: the deconstructive *revel* is the methodical use of *revelation*, only slowly and gradually “secreted” from the central, “held in check,” desire to tear all the veils and face the whole truth in “the imminence of the end, theophany, parousia, the last judgment” (Derrida 1984b, 22).

There are many differences between Hegel and Derrida, especially with regard to the historical *telos*, but the dialectical mechanism mediating between affirmation and negation remains similar in both. Seen as a politics of the apocalypse, deconstruction is a process of *différance*: it is destruction “held-in-check” and apocalyptic desire “staved off,” partly

19 The notoriously complex figure of the Hegelian *Rausch* can perhaps be elucidated by poetic imagination: it is what Hart Crane, in his vision of the Brooklyn Bridge, calls *fury fused*—an oxymoronic image of the congealed fire, energy stored and condensed, which does not explode as if in a pistol shot, but can be utilised in a methodical pursuit of truth and justice. For Hegel, the abiding truth of the French Revolution, itself an apocalyptic terror, is the Napoleonic codex as precisely “*fury fused*”: the cooled down dialectical product of the *fury* of destruction unleashed by revolutionary forces as a new institution of the objective spirit, bestowed with “objectivity and permanence.” Interestingly, there is a historical connection between Hegel and the Brooklyn Bridge. Its designer, Johann August Röbling, was Hegel’s student who wrote a 1000 pages long dissertation on the concept of the world, but later on found his vocation in bridge engineering. Could it be that Röbling indeed gave us an example of the Hegelian sublation in the iron construction of the famous bridge in which the poetic genius saw a “*fury fused*”? (I am grateful to Bartosz Wójcik for making me aware of this association).

covered and repressed in order to turn into methodical works of enlightenment, understood literally as *letting-in-light*, i.e. as an *il-lumination* which mediates between full exposure to the “light of lights” and total darkness. Or, in Derrida’s own terms, *deconstruction is destruction en-crypted*: it carries within itself the crypt full of eschatological energy as the counter-worldly apocalyptic element of both destruction and revelation, but allows only for its controlled “secretion”/ expression. In that sense, Derrida may be seen as an heir not only to Adorno’s negative dialectics as Hegelianism without teleology (although not “without reserve”²⁰), but also his “inverse theology” which insists on turning the lamps of the Last Judgment on the world here and now: not in order to destroy it, but to see it critically as still lacking truth and justice, yet not to be totally condemned because of that deficiency.

The Light of Lights, therefore, must be *well hidden* in order to be of use to us, the worldly creatures who “betray” revelation in its blinding purity for the mundane practice of enlightenment in the impure, always contaminated and messy, world. Hence, against Kant’s denunciations

20 Derrida was always critical of Hegel, perhaps to the point of being “unfair to Hegel”—especially in the 1960s when he wished to inscribe the post-structuralist turn into the anti-dialectical rebellion of the students of Alexandre Kojève, most of all Georges Bataille, but also later, when he fell under the influence of Emmanuel Levinas, who saw in Hegel the destroyer of transcendence and the main source of the historicist error in 20th century philosophy. Yet, already Derrida’s concept of difference, coined in the 1960s, is a paradigmatic example of the post-structuralist “dialectics beyond dialectics” which constantly taries with the Hegelian legacy under the auspices of the Bataillean dictum that opens Derrida’s essay on “Hegelianism without reserve”: “Hegel did not know to what extent he was right” (Derrida 1978, 317). In what *prima facie* appears as sympathetic reported speech, Derrida laughs with Bataille at Hegel’s thrifty ways of economising every bit of negativity in the process of work and creating the “slavish” world of meaning: “The notion of *Aufhebung* (...) is laughable in that it signifies the busying of a discourse losing its breath as it reappropriates all negativity for itself, as it works the “putting at stake” into an investment, as it amortizes absolute expenditure” that aims at “the absolute sacrifice of meaning: a sacrifice without return and without reserves” (Derrida 1978, 324). Yet, the more he matures, Derrida is no longer willing (if he really ever was) to subscribe to the Kojevian apology of the Master and his unbound self-expenditure/ *jouissance* at the expense of the Slave’s choice of life and survival, which invests in the “permanence and objectivity” of this world and, in order to do so, must “amortize”—diminish and harness—the apocalyptic powers of the masterly desire. Ultimately, therefore, Derrida ends up in the position that, for Bataille, would indeed appear “laughable”: a certain unavowed “Hegelianism with reserve” where the negative becomes restricted by the higher imperative of the world’s survival. On the post-structuralist reckoning with Hegel, see Kowalska 2015.

of cryptophilia as “a cryptopoetics” and “a poetic perversion of philosophy” (Derrida 1984b, 14) which should be replaced by the enlightenment pursuit of clarity and purity, Derrida explicitly chooses a *cryptophilic* and *eucalyptic* solution.²¹ On Derrida’s account, cryptophilia emerges as a necessary condition of all discourse on truth, which must draw on the same energy as the “overlordly” apocalyptic tone of the Hegelian Master, but in a tamed manner. Yet, this “taming,” *Bannung* or “steering” is more challenging than it appears *prima facie*. The apocalyptic desire is full of ruses which press toward its instantaneous gratification and which deconstruction must patiently demystify. Just as in Hegel, the Master’s desire aims at the total annihilation of its object, in Derrida’s analysis too, the seemingly positive desire for revelation hides a destructive death-wish directed against the fallen world—

Such a demystification must give in (*se plier*) to *the finest diversity of apocalyptic ruses*. The interest or the calculus of these ruses can be so dissembled under the desire for light, *well hidden (eukalyptus, as is said of the tree whose calycine limb remains closed after flowering), well hidden under the avowed desire for revelation*. (Derrida 1984b, 23; emphasis added)²²

Derrida, however, does not simply opt for the total repression of the apocalyptic desire: *eucalyptis*, the art of “hiding well,” although opposed to *apocalypsis*, does not just push it away. In the eucalyptic strategy, which Derrida recommends, the crypt, where the “well-hidden” truth lies buried, should be neither fully veiled nor fully unveiled: it should rather “secrete” an “enigmatic desire” which, when used as a *pharmakon*—in smaller weaker doses—does, in fact, a good job: instead of unleashing death and destruction, it fuels the deconstructive vigilance and its inner-worldly works of justice. The ideal of justice, which fulfills

21 See also Derrida on Kant in the 1998 text, “The History of the Lie”: “Everything must be sacrificed to this sacredness of the commandment. Kant writes: “To be truthful (*wahrhaftig*; loyal, sincere, honest, in good faith: *ehrlich*) in all declarations is, therefore, a sacred (*heiliges*) and unconditional (*unbedingt gebietendes*) commanding law of reason (*Vernunftgebot*) that admits of no expediency whatsoever” (Derrida 2002, 45).

22 In section 344 of *Gay Science*, “How to understand our cheerfulness,” Nietzsche explicitly links the unconditional will to truth with a death-wish: “Will to truth—that could be a hidden will to death... No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense which faith in science presupposes thereby affirm another world than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this »other world,« must they not by the same token deny its counterpart, this world, our world?” (Nietzsche 2001, 201).

itself in the apocalyptic judgment over the world (*Weltgericht*), must thus be laid in the eucalyptic, well-hidden crypt, if it is not to destroy the world immediately. But it must also somehow “secret” its message, if the world is to be an ethical place at all.

The crypt, therefore, should be *eukalyptus*, not only well hidden, but also hidden *well*, i.e. in a proper manner. For Derrida, the finest of the ruses which he can list on the side of his eucalyptic strategy, consists in turning apocalyptic desire on itself, so it begins to question the very desire for revelation: now it wishes to reveal the source from which all wishes to reveal come from. If, in Freudian psychoanalysis, enlightenment is nothing but desire made conscious, this is exactly what Derrida has in mind: the apocalyptic desire turned on itself, reflexively “checking itself,” goes partly into hiding, and manifests no longer as the annihilating negation, but as desire deferred and diffused: *no apocalypse, not now*. We can see it clearly in Derrida’s definition of *différance* as the differing and deferring “subversion of every kingdom” which indefinitely delays the advent of absolute *parousia*:

Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. (Derrida 1982, 22)

But, as we know from Derrida’s analysis of the apocalyptic tone, to desire a kingdom—“let Thy Kingdom come”—can also be a threat: the absolute *parousia* of the apocalyptic fulfillment spells the end of the world based on the play of *différance* which, on its part, is supported by a counter-desire to subvert every kingdom. The calculus of *conatus*, with its interest and investment in the world, also “well hidden under the avowed desire for revelation/ destruction,” thus launches a defense which guards the divine inhabitant of the crypt—the ideal of absolute justice and truth—in his entombment, not completely dead but also not fully alive, just latent, “held in check.” Yet, just as in the case of Hegel and then Rosenzweig, this defense is not merely katechonic, because some of the “enigmatic desire” wishing “the light of lights,” becomes nonetheless manifest, yet deferred and “checked” in respect to its ultimate goal. It is used in the deconstructive critique of the *status quo*, which, to paraphrase Taubes, invests spiritually in the world, yet not in the world *as it is*. It does not say to the world—*let it go down*—yet, at the same time, does not affirm it in its given “figure.” The figures of the world may and should pass, but not the world as such. This is what Derrida, in the

Blanchotian manner, calls *apocalypse without apocalypse*: a dialectical fold or self-subversion of the apocalyptic discourse, which negates the catastrophe announced by the apocalypse (the end of the world) without, at the same time, negating the destructive energy which—delayed, transformed, harnessed, fused—can now serve the “works of the negative” within the worldly reality, with the emphasis on *works*:

There is the apocalypse without apocalypse. The word *sans*, without, I pronounce here in the so necessary syntax of Blanchot, who often says X without X. The ‘without’ marks an internal and external catastrophe of the apocalypse, an overturning of sense that does not merge with the catastrophe announced or described in the apocalyptic writings without however being foreign to them. Here the catastrophe would perhaps be of the apocalypse itself, its fold and its end, a closure without end, an *end without end*. (Derrida 1984b, 35; emphasis added)

The Blanchotian figure of *X sans X* serves Derrida as the best model for his “dialectics beyond the (Hegelian—A.B.-R.) dialectics”: a negation which does not cancel, but introduces into the *X* a moment of aporetic, but also pharmakonic, self-limitation. The deconstructor, therefore, may not be a simple *Aufhalter*/restrainer of the apocalyptic revelation, but he is also not an “accelerationist” who would rush to tell all the truth, where the “truth itself is the end, the destination... the end and the instance of the last judgment” (Derrida 1984b, 23):

The end is soon, it is imminent, signifies the tone. I see it, I know it, I tell You, now you know, come. We’re all going to die, we’re going to disappear. And this death sentence (*cet arrêt de mort*) cannot fail to judge us. (Derrida 1984b, 25)

The very structure of the truth as such is apocalyptic: one cannot see Truth face to face—and live. And yet, we cannot completely give up on truth; we must apply it in pharmakonic small doses of gradual enlightenment. Thus, as Derrida states in one of his early essays, “Force and Significance”: “it will be necessary (for the Truth—A.B.-R.) *to descend, to work, to bend*” (Derrida 1978, 35; emphasis added) if it is to be *livable*, that is, to metamorphose from the otherworldly sheer “force” into the innerworldly “significance,” capable of guiding and enlightening our actions. Indeed, as in Scholem commenting on Rosenzweig:

Here (...) the anarchic element undergoes metamorphosis. The power of redemption seems to be built into the clockwork of life lived in the light of revelation, though more as restlessness than as potential destructiveness.

For Derrida, this is precisely the intended goal of deconstruction: to keep us ethically vigilant and restless, but always short of “potential destructiveness.”

To find this *pharmakon* or the right “easy” dose of light constitutes the very gist of Derrida’s eucalyptic strategy: if one wants to survive the brush with the Light of Lights—the ideal of Truth and Justice—one must avoid the face-to-face confrontation and, following Emily Dickinson, the great poet of mediated revelation, “tell all the truth, but tell it slant.” Yes, we are weak, fallible, and we all are going to die; yes, the end is always near, *but...* “being here is a lot,”²³ and this *a lot* cannot be simply eliminated by the abiding death sentence, the “dead already” of the Heideggerian *Sein-zum-Tode*, based on the principle that “the essence of life is nothing but death” (*Aber die Essenz des Lebens ist zugleich Tod*) (Heidegger 2000, 100). *Always prefer life and affirm survival*—Derrida’s famous last words uttering a version of the Biblical imperative of *uvaharta bahayim*, “choose to live!”²⁴—trump the higher knowledge of the “philosophical sect” (Derrida 1984b, 25), by moving the whole debate onto a different plane where it becomes a matter not of knowledge but of choice and faith. I—says Derrida—may know that I am going to die, but I still *choose* life; the world may appear weak when compared to theological and philosophical Absolutes, but I still side with its precarious existence. Hence the new command: *eucalyptse, now!*—meaning: let’s hide well our desire to know and become *fröhlich* for a while, in the manner recommended by Nietzsche, when, in *Gay Science*, he tempts us to give up on “the unconditional will to truth”—

This unconditional will to truth—what is it? Is it the will not to let oneself be deceived? Is it the will not to deceive?... But why not deceive? But why not allow oneself to be deceived?... (Nietzsche 2001, 201)

To allow oneself to be a little deceived would mean precisely to “ease” the blinding light of truth in its absolute *parousial* revelation and then

23 Comp. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The 9th Duino Elegy*: “But because being here is a lot: because everything here/ Seems to need us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way/ Concerns us. Us, the most fleeting of all/ Once For each thing, just once. Once and no more. And we too,/ Just once. And never again. But to have been/ This once, even if only once:/ To have been earthly, seems irrevocable.”

24 The last words of Derrida, which he scribbled right before his death, were: “Always prefer life and constantly affirm survival (*Preferez toujours la vie et affirmez sans cesse la survie*)” (Derrida 2007b, 244).

“tell it slant.” Once the will to truth becomes *conditional*—that is, restricted by other desires, most of all the will to live, here and now, in the imperfect world—the truth does not disappear completely, but now it can be pursued within the context of life as a *livable* goal and not as “the truth (that) kills.”²⁵

“Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me, so I can have a moment of joy,” says Job to God (Job, 10: 20), and so also says Derrida to the Truth in its threatening apocalyptic glory. The *vere-diction*, “telling the truth,” is always and inescapably a *verdict*, a death sentence or the Blanchotian *arrêt de mort*; so, in order to practice *sur-vie* instead of *melete thanatou*, the “exercise of death,” one needs to retort to the cunning of unreason—and *choose* or *decide* instead of knowing. This is also where Derrida most radically differs from Hegel, who still wants to have his share in Absolute Knowledge at the end of history, when the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World will have finally coincided in peaceful reconciliation. While, in his deconstructionist method, he will always use the Hegelian-dialectical scheme of “delayed destruction” which, as a *différance* allows the apocalyptic desire of absolute truth and justice to work in and through the mundane condition, he does not want the process of deferral to end. The weakness and precarity of our worldly condition cannot be removed and replaced with an absolute “objectivity and permanence,” as in the Hegelian *telos*. Ultimately, therefore, enlightenment *is* revelation/ apocalypse, but (hopefully) forever differed and deferred: a revelation *cum différance*. We could thus sum up Derrida’s tarrying with Hegel by the ironic inversion of his own phrasing from the early essay on Bataille: *Hegelianism with Reserve*—even more reserved, restricted and cautious in its wary ways of “amortizing” the light of lights than Hegel himself.

Conclusion

Derrida’s tarrying with the apocalypse repeats Hegel’s strategy in late-modern circumstances where it is now the “philosophical sect” (Derrida 1984b, 25)—driven by the unchecked desire for enlightenment as “the unconditional will to truth,” even, or especially, at the cost of life—that steps into the Hegelian shoes of the Beautiful Soul. He will

25 *Wahrheit tötet* (Nietzsche 1995, 190). See Derrida’s comment on Nietzsche’s statement: “the truth is suicide in its structure. It is suicide. It is life death, as truth without truth of the truth” (Derrida 2020b, 153).

also use the same “tarrying” method in his treatment of “Marx & Sons,” or the Marxist “revolutionary sect” in *Specters of Marx*.²⁶ Here too, Derrida endorses the condition of a *chronic apocalypse* as belonging to the structure of messianicity, but only on the proviso that it can be fully inverted into a *procosmic position* which, putting things bluntly, does something good for the world. Instead of resulting in a “permanent catastrophe,” therefore, the chronic apocalypse metamorphoses into a “permanent deconstruction,” with the spectre of Absolute Justice hovering/ watching over the material world, too eager to close upon its immanence and follow the laws of the “social *physis*.” Spectre would thus be the “amortized” Spirit of the Apocalypse (or, as a “specter of Marx,” the amortized spirit of revolution): sufficiently restrained to withdraw its “fury of destruction” from the world—but also sufficiently *haunting* not to let the world rest on its immanentist laurels. Hence the idea of *hantologie* as an apocalyptic reference beyond presence and non-presence: inactive as the real power of destruction, but still active as a reminder of the ideal of justice, of which the world will always fall short for the very reason of being. This hantological *ratio* between being and nothing determines the measure of the Spirit/spectre as a *pharmakon*: the right dose of the poison, which transfigures but does not destroy the world as the host “hospitable to the ghosts.” This, again, can be interpreted in Hegelian terms. In *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel refers to the subject as a ghostly principle that gathers the sensual manifold of the self: “When the I grasps it, this material is *at once poisoned (vergiftet) and transfigured* by the universality of the I, loses its individualized, independent subsistence and receives a spiritual reality” (Hegel 2007, §381Z; emphasis added). Granted, the stakes are different—for Hegel, this is the universality of the Spirit, counteracting the dissipating tendency of the sensual substance; for Derrida, this is the Rosenzweigian ideal of justice, counteracting the self-enclosing tendency of the material immanence—but the method of *gradual poisoning*, which is to infect matter with something alien to it and thus start the process of its transfiguration, remains similar.

Derrida tarries with the apocalypse from the beginning till the very end of his intellectual career: from the very idea of *différance* as the indefinite delay of presence/ *parousial*/ Real and “subversion of the kingdom” to his apology of partial blindness in *The Memoirs of the Blind* and the defense of the necessary *bêtise de la vie*, “stupidity of life” in the *Death Penalty* seminar. The “easing” paradigm is manifest

26 See Derrida 1999, as well as Derrida 1994.

in Derrida's writing above all as the lesson of the *pharmakon*: the right, properly "diminished" dose of the poison which is lethal when taken without prescription, but beneficial when limited and restricted. In its direct unmediated form, the *apocalypse*—the lightning of revelation—is nothing but *die Gift*: the annihilating contagion that spells the end of the world. But as "eased to the children"—"the apocalypse without the apocalypse"—the lightning indeed "steers all" and constitutes *the gift*, which assists the world on its way towards "objectivity and permanence." Derrida, therefore, is indeed "another Abraham"²⁷ who, while wrestling with God threatening to end the world, presents him with the following alternative: "You desire the world and you desire absolute justice. Take one or the other. You cannot hold the cord at both ends at once."²⁸ At the same time, however, Derrida does pull the cord at both ends at once, when insisting on the necessity of the critique of the worldly *status quo*. The ultimate stake of Derrida's Hegelian-Rabbinic intervention is to safeguard the transcendental possibility of the critique as poising itself between negation and affirmation. From Hegel on, secularised apocalypticism—the fury of destruction which wandered into the profane to live with it on critical basis—forms such a transcendental condition: the dialectics of critical works aim not at the destruction, but at the transformation of the worldly reality. In his attack on the "philosophical sect" (Derrida 1984b, 25), Derrida reminds us that what today passes for a "critical theory" is often not a critique, but an exercise of simple negation—looking at the world severely, from the apocalyptic vantage point of redemption/ Last Judgment.

The politics of the apocalypse, which takes its most mature form in Derrida's deconstruction, belongs to the Hegelian legacy which has not lost its ongoing significance. This particular line of inheritance is mediated by Rosenzweig, from whom Derrida derives the conviction that the dialectical model of "tarrying with the apocalypse" is older than Hegel and can be traced back to the Judaic tradition which they both try to awaken in its procosmic ethical choice of life and world, however weak and precarious, over against the powerful divine Absolute. Whether in dialectics or in deconstruction, the mighty force of creation and destruction is not simply warded off, but cunningly utilized for the sake of the

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27 See Derrida 2007a.

28 *Genesis Rabbah*, "Lekh Lekha" 39:6. To which God replies, clearly taking Abraham's admonition to heart: "I will never again curse the ground because of man (...). Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done" (Gen. 8:20–21).

world: the tremendous power of the negative is here a *gebannter Blitz*, a lightning “eased to the children” and harnessed to do mundane work.

For, even the destructive might transform into the world.

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Tytuł: Światło ujarzmione, czyli polityka apokalipsy: Hegel, Rosenzweig, Derrida

Abstrakt: Co łączy tych trzech bardzo różnych myślicieli: Hegla, Rosenzweiga i Derridę? W eseju tym twierdzę, że łącznika dostarcza wspólna im wszystkim formuła teologii politycznej, polemiczna wobec Schmittiańskiej kategorii *katechona* jako „powstrzymywacza apokalipsy”. Podczas gdy ich formuła także wspiera się na idei powstrzymywania, przybiera ono inną postać niż zwykłe odwleczenie apokalipsy: postać *osłabienia* albo *amortyzacji*, która stwarza dystans mediacji między Bogiem, wszechpotężną instancją kreacji i destrukcji, a światem czyli słabszą stroną tej istotowo asymetrycznej relacji. Ta alternatywna formuła ani nie odwleka, ani nie przyspiesza apokalipsy, lecz ustawia się w trzeciej dialektycznej pozycji między obiema postawami: jej celem jest, słowami Emily Dickinson, „zelenie światła”, tak by mogło ono posłużyć do transformacji świata, a nie do jego zniszczenia. To dialektyczne „zmaganie

się z apokalipsą” ani zatem nie pozostawia świata w jego *status quo*, ani nie dąży do jego prostej destrukcji, lecz stawia na jego immanentne przepracowanie.

Słowa kluczowe: Hegel, Rosenzweig, Derrida, apokalipsa, prawo, sprawiedliwość, praca