

HEGEL AND WITTGENSTEIN ON GOD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD*

HEGEL Y WITTGENSTEIN SOBRE DIOS AL PRINCIPIO DEL MUNDO

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Recibido: 13/05/2022
Revisado: 01/09/2022
Aceptado: 12/09/2022

Abstract: I argue that Hegel and Wittgenstein, each in their own specific way, used the idea of God at the beginning of creation as a complex analogy for other kinds of beginning, most notably the beginning of philosophical thought. Hegel's *Logic* describes God's mind before the creation of the world, i.e. God's pure thinking. For a philosopher, beginning afresh means resolving to consider this kind of abstraction from the existence of the world. Wittgenstein, by contrast, says that the idea of a creator of the world does not explain anything. It marks the *terminus ad quem* of asking for explanations; we must not ask further who created the creator of the world. Wittgenstein generalizes this for any kind of reasoning: "Explanations come to an end somewhere." (*Philosophical Investigations*: §1) Any sort of explanation must eventually arrive at its *terminus ad quem*, which means only that any kind of reasoning must have its logical beginning.

Keywords: Hegel, Wittgenstein, God, pure thinking, beginning, Logos, creation, Gospel of John, ground.

Resumen: En este artículo sostendré que tanto Hegel como Wittgenstein, cada uno a su propio modo y con sus características propias, emplearon la idea de Dios al comienzo de la creación como una analogía compleja para otras clases de comienzo, en particular, para el comienzo del pensamiento filosófico. La *Lógica* de Hegel describe la mente de Dios antes de la creación del mundo, es decir, el pensamiento puro de Dios. Si la filosofía es un comienzo radical, que el filósofo empiece todo de nuevo significa que se decide a realizar una abstracción radical respecto a la existencia del mundo. Wittgenstein, por el contrario, señala que la idea de un

* This work has been supported by the Czech Science Foundation, project no. GA19-16680S.

creador del mundo no explica nada. Lo que hace es fijar un *terminus ad quem* en nuestra búsqueda de explicaciones, de forma que no vayamos más allá, preguntándonos por quién creó al creador del mundo. Wittgenstein generaliza esta tesis, aplicándola a cualquier forma de razonamiento: “Antes o después las explicaciones llegan a un fin” (*Investigaciones filosóficas*: §1). Cualquier tipo de explicación acabará por alcanzar su *terminus ad quem*, lo que únicamente significa que como tal ha de poseer un inicio lógico.

Palabras Clave: Comienzo, Creación, Dios, Evangelio de Juan, Fundamento, Hegel, Logos, Pensamiento Puro, Wittgenstein.

This short essay examines the idea of postulating a god as the creator of the world. Many religions and mythologies regard this idea as a crucial part of their faith. Our initial question is this: why did critical thinkers like Hegel and Wittgenstein,¹ who were far from accepting any dogmatic beliefs, nevertheless consider this idea or even employ it in explaining their philosophical views? I shall argue in this essay that Hegel and Wittgenstein, each in their own specific way, used the idea of God at the beginning of creation as a complex analogy for other kinds of beginning, most notably the beginning of philosophical thought.

Let me provide a brief classification of these kinds of beginning.² A beginning is the first element of a certain ordered series. Otherwise, there would not be much sense in speaking about a beginning. Our classification of beginnings is based on various kinds of such series. We can distinguish temporal, spatial, causal, epistemological, ontological and logical series. The *temporal* beginning is the beginning of an object's existence in time, i.e. the *moment* when the object begins to exist. The temporal series can be conceived as natural (causal, mechanical) or historical (spiritual in Hegel's terms). The *spatial* beginning of an object is its border with another object or external *space* (e.g. my garden begins with a fence). One can take the spatial beginning in a different sense, namely, as the smallest element of which the object is composed, i.e. a kind of atom. The temporal and spatial beginnings usually coincide, and we can thus speak of a spatio-temporal beginning. The *causal* beginning is the object's immediate mechanical cause. An object's spatio-temporal beginning usually coincides with the causal one. The *epistemological* beginning marks the beginning of the acquisition of *knowledge* (or getting rid of false knowledge) about an object X by subject Y. Typically, it is the beginning of a learning or discovery process. A more specific kind of epistemological beginning is the origin of language, and

1 The parallels, affinities and differences between Hegel and Wittgenstein have attracted some attention recently. For a general overview see my introductory chapter to the volume *Wittgenstein and Hegel: Reevaluation of Difference* (Mácha 2019).

2 See my article “Hegel and Wittgenstein on Difficulties of Beginning at the Beginning” (Mácha 2022) for a more detailed account of these kinds of beginnings.

even here there are several variants: the historical origin of a certain language (e.g. English), the origin of language itself as such (or the first language), the origin of a person's acquisition of her first language. The ontological series covers various relations ranging from Aristotelian causality to contemporary notions of fundamentality, grounding and ontological dependence. The *ontological* beginning of X can be characterized as the *ground* of the existence of X. The logical series is of utmost importance with respect to the problem of beginning. The *logical* beginning is a presuppositionless axiom, the first *principle*. It does not presuppose anything else, whether a logical condition, justification or proof.

These are beginnings of something (an object, a piece of knowledge, a logical series). We can also consider the *subject* or the agent who begins (i.e. creates) something, who acquires knowledge of something, who starts a chain of logical reasoning. Such subjects do not need to be restricted to human agents. They can be the plural "we" (as often in Wittgenstein) or what Hegel calls spirit, or they could even be God. We can thus distinguish an objective and a subjective moment of the beginning.

Utilizing this conceptual framework, we can restate our initial problem: Hegel and Wittgenstein invoke the idea of the spatio-temporal beginning of God's creation of the world. This beginning is supposed to be analogous to the logical beginning of a philosopher's reasoning.

1. HEGEL: GOD'S MIND BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

Hegel's reflections on the beginning are highly complex. Unsurprisingly, there has been no scholarly consensus about what his account of beginning amounts to. Let us begin with his famous claim that his *Logic* describes God's mind before the creation of the world.³ How, after Kant, could Hegel make such a claim about the essence of God's mind? I think that a key to understanding this claim can be found in Hegel's discussion of the Gospel of John in his early work *The Spirit of Christianity*. The gospel begins with a well-known dictum: "In the beginning was the Logos; the Logos was with God; and God was the Logos; in him was life." (Hegel 1971: p. 256)⁴ Hegel urges us not to read these dicta as assertions despite their subject-predicate form; the predicate is not passively assimilated into the

3 Hegel writes that his *Logic*, i.e. the content of pure science is "*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*" (Hegel 2010: p. 29). It is clear that for Hegel, the primary determination of this content is that it is pure science, i.e. pure thinking, *not* that it is the exposition of God's eternal essence before the creation of the world.

4 This is Hegel's translation of John 1:1: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. However, the phrase "in him was life [*zōē*]" (ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν) occurs in 1:4. Hegel does not mark this discrepancy.

subject term. On Hegel's reading, they are what he later (in the *Phenomenology*) called *speculative sentences*. The predicate term expresses the essence of the subject (not mere its property).

Hence, in the beginning, the essence of God is the Logos. Hegel goes on to claim that God is matter in the form of the Logos. The Logos itself is with God; both are one. The life of the Logos is its infinite self-partitioning. In the beginning, i.e. before the creation of the world, nature and man, God exists in the form of the Logos. Seen in this light, Hegel's *Logic* aims to explicate this self-partitioning of the Logos. This etymological connection between logic and Logos is apparent if – as Hegel does – we keep the original Greek “Logos”/λόγος and do not translate it as “word”.

Why should we accept John's account of the beginning of the world in the first place? Hegel's principal aim was to explain the logical beginning of a person's philosophical thinking, rather than the temporal and causal beginning of the world and history. Does Hegel take these beginnings to be identical? Although some scholars (e.g., Hans Küng) have argued that he does,⁵ I think that the main attraction of this kind of identity is that it singles out pure thinking. A person's logical beginning must be made in the element of pure thinking, i.e. thinking without any presupposition, without anything given. In the beginning, the Logos is not divided, which means one cannot presuppose any conceptual distinction (e.g. between subject and object, form and content); one cannot presuppose any form of thought. In this sense, the *Logic* presents thinking before the temporal beginning of the world.

There are other beginnings within Hegel's *Logic*. In the essay “With What Must the Beginning of Science Be Made?” Hegel writes: “the only determination of this beginning is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such” (Hegel 2010: p. 48). And he goes on: “There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such*.” (ibid.) This resolve (*Entschluß*) accounts for a contingent (arbitrary) transition from the epistemological to the logical series, from the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic*.⁶ This aspect of *Entschluß* is captured by Goethe's Faust's famous line: “In the beginning was the deed”. This is Faust's reinterpretation of the beginning of the Gospel of John. As discussed above, the same holds true for Hegel's *Logic* and his account of the beginning in particular.

Yet there is another *Entschluß*, another beginning, within Hegel's *Logic*. Curiously enough, it occurs at the end of the *Logic*. In the essay “With What

5 This identity amounts to the thesis that there was the divine Logos/word at the beginning of time, i.e. it amounts to taking John 1:1 literally.

6 Here we must take the *Phenomenology* as expressing an epistemological series leading to pure knowing, which is *presupposed* at the beginning of the *Logic* (Hegel 2010: pp. 46–58).

Must the Beginning of Science Be Made?” , Hegel makes the following reference to the end of the *Science of Logic*:

At the *end* of the development [the absolute spirit] freely externalizes itself, letting itself go into the shape of an *immediate* being – resolving [*entschließend*] itself into the creation of a world which contains all that fell within the development preceding that result and which, through this reversal of position with its beginning, is converted into something dependent on the result as principle. (Hegel 2010: p. 49)

This is a highly complex sentence. The second resolve occurs at the end of the logical development initiated by the first resolve; the absolute spirit resolves itself into the creation of a world. This second resolve marks the temporal (and causal and historical) beginning of the world. Before we try to disentangle the idea of the reversal of the beginning and the end, let us see what Hegel writes at the very end of the *Science of Logic*:

the idea *freely discharges* [*entläßt*] itself, absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest. [...] But what is posited by this first resolve [*Entschluß*] of the pure idea to determine itself as external idea is only the mediation out of which the concept [...] raises itself up. (Hegel 2010: p. 753, translation modified)

If the *Logic* describes God’s mind before the creation of the world, then when the logical movement is completed, God as absolute spirit *can* resolve itself into the creation of the world. This second resolve is – as with the first one – a free and arbitrary act. This means that the transition between the logical and the causal series is not necessary – analogously to the transition between the epistemological and logical series at the beginning of the *Logic*. There is a crucial difference between these two decisions or resolves. The subject of the first resolve at the beginning of the *Logic* is the philosophizing subject who decides to consider pure thinking (which is also the standpoint of God’s mind). In contrast, the subject of the second resolve at the end of the *Logic* is God as the absolute spirit that resolves to create the world. Before the creation of the world, God does not need to decide to consider pure thinking, for all his thinking is pure anyway. In terms of time and history, the first resolve by the philosopher occurs *after* the second resolve, which occurs at the beginning of time.

At the end of the *Logic*, after the logical series is completed, the spirit is fully determined and retrospectively grounded. Hegel writes: “The *retrogressive grounding* of the beginning and the *progressive further determination* of it, run into one another and are the same.” (Hegel 2010: p. 750) The notion of grounding presents us with interpretative issues in Hegel scholarship. The ground is the beginning of the ontological series, which runs in the opposite direction to the logical series. Those who interpret Hegel as not having any metaphysical commitments tend to downplay the difference between these

series and reduce it to the fact that one is the reverse of the other. Accepting this kind of non-metaphysical interpretation would bring Hegel closer to Wittgenstein.⁷

The ontological beginning is the ground of everything. It makes possible all other beginnings. It makes possible the second resolve, i.e. the spatio-temporal and causal beginning of the world, which, in turn, makes possible the epistemological and then the logical beginning, i.e. the philosopher's resolve to consider pure thinking. The goal of this pure thinking is, as we already know, to arrive at the fully determined spirit, which is the ontological beginning. This is the complex circularity of Hegel's system.

2. WITTGENSTEIN: GOD'S CREATION, ARCHITECTURE, AND INARTICULATE SOUNDS

Before we move on to Wittgenstein's reflections on the beginning, a few preliminary remarks are in order. Wittgenstein most probably never read any of Hegel's works. His knowledge of Hegel's philosophy came at second hand through Kierkegaard and Russell. I will leave aside the arguably distorted picture of Hegel's thinking that Wittgenstein acquired from Russell, and point out similarities and differences that go beyond direct or indirect influences. I will restrict my consideration to Wittgenstein's works from the 1930s and 40s, and leave aside his complex views about the beginning from his final manuscripts, collected in the volume *On Certainty*, where the analogy with God's creation of the world is not addressed.⁸

Hegel and Wittgenstein belong to quite different traditions of thought, and hence their philosophical outlooks and vocabularies are very different too. Let us pay attention to three notions that play important roles in the thought of both these philosophers and that will allow us to find some common ground between them: *system*, *logic* and *ground*.

Hegel is a philosopher of the *system*. His philosophy aims to build a comprehensive system of all knowledge, that is, of all science. Wittgenstein's attitude to philosophical systems was fairly negative. One of the aims (indeed, perhaps the most important) of his philosophy is to destroy or dissolve philosophical systems. Nevertheless, the expression "system" is not uncommon in Wittgenstein's writings. He speaks of various *systems* in a positive sense: a system of empirical propositions, a system of language, our whole system of evidence, a system of reification, our system of knowledge. These notions are

7 I address this issue in my (2019).

8 Cf. my (2022) article where I focus on Wittgenstein's reflections from his final manuscripts.

not so far removed from Hegel as it may seem at the outset. The main difference between Hegel's and Wittgenstein's notions of system is that Hegel's systems aspire to comprehensiveness (and it is their lack of comprehensiveness that drives their dialectical development). Wittgenstein's systems are sometimes comprehensive, and sometimes not. They occur within human practices and are bound up with language-games. The notions of a system and of a language-game are closely related. In the present context, it is important that Hegel's inquiry into the beginning (of the system of knowledge or of logic) is analogous to Wittgenstein's deliberations on the beginning of a certain language-game.

The notion of *logic* is ubiquitous in both Hegel and Wittgenstein. Both thinkers diverge from the usual account of logic as an inquiry into the forms of thought or entailment. Notoriously, there are competing interpretations of what Hegel's logic amounts to, which I do not want to go into here. Let me say only this: as with Kant's transcendental logic, Hegel's logic is about the structures of our thought, which are, however – and here the disagreement begins – also the structures of being (as with Aristotle's categories). For the later Wittgenstein, logic is about the constitutive rules of our language-games (Glock 1996: p. 202). If Hegel's logic can be interpreted without any metaphysical commitments (as on “non-metaphysical” interpretations), there is then common ground with Wittgenstein's conception of logic.

Finally, we have to look closely at the notion of *ground*. As we discussed above, there is no scholarly consensus about the ontological significance of this notion in Hegel. Wittgenstein usually treats the notion of ground as almost synonymous to that of motive or reason. Wittgenstein's key insight is that ground is opposed to cause even if they can be concomitant:

The causes of our belief in a proposition are indeed irrelevant to the question [of] what we believe. Not so grounds, which are grammatically related to the proposition, and tell us what proposition it is. (Wittgenstein 1967: §437)

This distinction between ground and cause is an instance of a more general distinction between internal and external relations.⁹ There are, thus, two main series in Wittgenstein's thought: the logical or grammatical (internal) series and the causal (external) series. Moreover, Wittgenstein reflected on the commonsensical etymological origin of the expression “ground” (as did Hegel before him). On Wittgenstein's view, the expression “ground” is related to architecture, where one speaks of the ground of a house in two senses:

We would like to begin philosophy with something which should be the foundation [*Grundlage*] of everything to follow, of all the sciences, and yet at the

9 Cf. Mácha (2015) for more details.

same time it is not supposed to be a “foundation” simply in the sense of the bottom course of bricks in a house. (Wittgenstein and Waismann 2004: p. 75)

After introducing this analogy between the foundation or ground of a house and the foundation of all science, Wittgenstein goes on to distinguish two senses of “foundation”: “the foundation of the building [...] as the bottom course of bricks and [...] as solidity.” (ibid.: p. 75) This ambiguity of the term “foundation” in the domain of housing and architecture has implications for how the term “ground” is used in the domain of philosophy.¹⁰ The idea I shall develop is that the bottom course of bricks is the spatial beginning of a building. In contrast, solidity refers to its inner structure and, as we shall see in a moment, to the ontological beginning. Wittgenstein continues: “This dilemma gives rise to the need to begin philosophy with, so to speak, an inarticulate sound.” (ibid.) He provides several examples of (purportedly) inarticulate sounds, including Heidegger’s “The nothing noths”.¹¹ Inarticulate sounds are like a concealed bottom course of bricks as opposed to solidity. Wittgenstein is, however, not entirely deprecatory of this kind of beginning. He switches back to the domain of architecture and argues that it is a matter of style whether we want to highlight some boundaries or edges, such as the bottom course of bricks.¹² Buildings are at times sharply bounded or, as Wittgenstein puts it: “At other times there is a need not to emphasize, but rather artificially to conceal boundedness.” (ibid.: p. 77) From these reflections, Wittgenstein draws the following conclusion about the beginning:

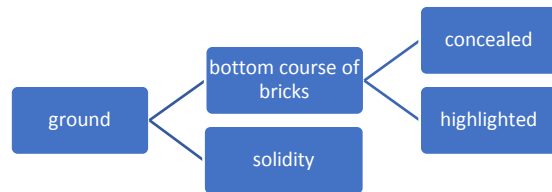


Figure 1: Wittgenstein's analysis of the notion of ground

¹⁰ Heidegger makes a related distinction in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (originally published in 1929): “If the established ground [*Grund*] does not have the character of an actual base [*Boden*] but that of a root [*Wurzel*], then it must discharge its function in such a way as to let the stems grow out of it while lending them support [*Halt*] and stability [*Bestand*].” (Heidegger 1962: p. 144) The bottom course of bricks is the actual *ontic* base, i.e. a spatial beginning in the present framework. Heidegger, however, prioritizes the ground as the *ontological* root that lends support and stability – which is like Wittgenstein’s notion of solidity, i.e. the ontological beginning.

¹¹ “Das Nichts nichtet.” This is Heidegger’s infamous phrase from his lecture “Was ist Metaphysik?” (1929) that caught Carnap’s attention in his classical essay *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache* (1932).

¹² Highlighting the bottom course of bricks is typical in Renaissance or classical architecture, but virtually absent in functionalist architecture (including the house Wittgenstein designed for his sister).

And that is just how it is with this argument: it is a desideratum, e.g., to trace back to a creator the coming into being of the universe even though this in a certain sense explains nothing and merely calls attention to the beginning. (ibid.)

Wittgenstein's ingenious analogy between the foundation/ground in architecture and in philosophy is an analogy between different kinds of beginning. The bottom course of bricks is a spatial beginning of the building. This beginning is analogous to the beginning of philosophical thought with an inarticulate sound and to the spatio-temporal beginning of the world with God's creation. Hegel's logical beginning with pure being is also something Wittgenstein would call inarticulate sound. (Hegel says that "pure being" is an empty word. (Hegel 2010: p. 55)) The spatio-temporal beginning with God is, however, not a concealment. Quite the opposite. This beginning calls attention to itself, like highlighting the bottom course of bricks.

In contrast, one can say that an ontological foundation in philosophy is analogous to solidity in architecture. Foundation/ground as solidity is thus the ontological beginning, which in Hegel is the absolute spirit. These two senses of foundation/ground that Wittgenstein focuses on are parallel to the logical and the ontological beginning in Hegel.

Wittgenstein employs the analogy with God's creation of the world on several occasions. Analogies are, in general, supposed to explain something. Wittgenstein, however, maintains that to postulate a creator at the beginning of the world does not explain anything. This is in sharp contrast to Hegel, who invokes the picture of God's mind before the creation of the world in an attempt to explain the pure character of his logic. According to Wittgenstein, this analogy merely calls attention to the beginning, as stated in my discussion above. However, Wittgenstein introduces another term or domain in this analogy (another beginning): the end of explanations (of signs), that is, the end of a chain of reasoning:

Explanations of signs do at some point come to an end. And that is similar to someone's saying: "What good does the assumption of a Creator do you, since it just postpones the problem?" (Wittgenstein 2005: p. 47e)

Or again in the *Big Typescript*:

Well, reasons for this can be given within the calculus; and at the very end, one is tempted to say "It is simply quite probable that this thing will now behave as it has always behaved" – or something like that. A phrase that veils the beginning of the reasoning process and plays a similar role at this beginning to that played by the Creator at the beginning of the world. He doesn't really explain anything, but is a beginning that is acceptable to humans. (ibid.: p. 181e)

The beginning with God's creation is not a concealment, not an inarticulate sound, but it does nonetheless veil something. Like any beginning, it veils (an inquiry into) what might have been before. This beginning is analogous to the beginning of the reasoning process, i.e. to the logical beginning. Wittgenstein speaks about two movements of thought: the chain of explanations of signs and the chain of reasoning. The end of explanations is the beginning of the reasoning process. Wittgenstein insists that the chain of explanations must come to an end, i.e. to the logical beginning. In other words, the chain of explanations aims at finding the logical beginning, and, of course, at stopping at the logical beginning, not before the beginning. That explanations do come to an end is the crucial insight of Wittgenstein's later thinking; as he writes in §1 of the *Philosophical Investigations*: "Explanations come to an end somewhere." (2009: §1)¹³

What, then, is the end of explanations, i.e. the logical beginning, for Wittgenstein? He considered several options, but never ultimately subscribed to any of them. We have already mentioned the beginning with an inarticulate sound. Other suggestions Wittgenstein considered are the beginning with the distinction between sense and nonsense, the beginning with a contradiction, and the beginning with an immediate description. Other kinds of beginning that come into focus in Wittgenstein's final manuscripts are a primitive reaction, the end of doubting and, especially, a simple decision. Before considering these beginnings, let me note that they are regarded as logical beginnings, as the beginning of chains of internal relations. Language-games do also have external causes. Hence these logical beginnings have causal, external presuppositions. This fact does not disrupt their being logical beginnings. Quite the opposite: the fact that the logical beginning has causal or historical presuppositions accounts for its non-arbitrary character.

Wittgenstein's suggestion that we begin with the most immediate description belongs to his so-called phenomenological period in the early 1930s. I want to leave the details of this proposal aside. One point is of utmost importance for the present discussion, however. Wittgenstein discussed what would happen if one tries to go beyond the most immediate description: "anything which tried to be more immediate still would inevitably cease to be a description" (Wittgenstein 1975: §68). It would be an inarticulate sound. He concludes: "You simply can't begin before the beginning." (ibid.) This claim seems to be in sharp contrast to Wittgenstein's later claim from *On Certainty* that the most difficult thing is not to begin before the beginning (Wittgenstein 1969: §471). On a closer inspection, I do not think there is any contradiction. Any attempt to go before the beginning results in speaking nonsense. To begin before the beginning is to begin with nonsense, i.e. not to begin at all. A beginning before the beginning is thus impossible. However, to recognize that one begins before the beginning is still the most difficult thing.

13 Or even more aptly: "Presuppositions come to an end." (Wittgenstein 1982: §354)

Let us move on to some of Wittgenstein's more promising accounts of the beginning. In the late 1930s, he wrote: "The origin & the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can the more complicated forms grow. // Language—I want to say—is a refinement, 'in the beginning was the deed'." (Wittgenstein 1998: p. 36)¹⁴ In these remarks, Wittgenstein discusses the genealogical development of language-games. He imagines here a primitive reaction of an infant, e.g. a cry or a smile. As a person grows up and is educated, such reactions are refined into complicated linguistic structures. Hence, a primitive reaction is not a logical beginning, but rather an epistemological one. This is related to Wittgenstein's philosophical method: if it is difficult to give a definition of a word, one is prompted to ask: "How did we *learn* the meaning of this word ('good' for instance)? From what sort of examples? in what language-games?" (Wittgenstein 2009: §77) Hence, the origin – i.e. the *epistemological* beginning – of a word ("good", "pain" for instance) is a primitive reaction (amazement, crying, etc.). A primitive reaction thus cannot be taken as the distinctively logical beginning.

CONCLUSION

Both Hegel and Wittgenstein invoke the idea of God's creation of the world, and both embed this idea in complex analogies. I hope it is now clear that entertaining this idea does not commit them to the metaphysical or theological thesis that the world was created by God (or that God exists). On the contrary, the idea is far from being nonsensical for them. And this is shown by the very fact that it has an explanatory role in the analogies we have discussed.

There is, however, one notable difference in their employment of this idea. Hegel's *Logic* describes God's mind before the creation of the world. If the world did not exist yet, God's thinking must have been pure. For a philosopher, beginning afresh means resolving to consider this kind of abstraction from the existence of the world. Wittgenstein, in contrast, says that the idea of the creator of the world does not explain anything. It marks the *terminus ad quem* of asking for grounds. This is a familiar idea adopted from St Augustine (*Conf.* XI, 12): we must not ask further who created the creator of the world (because the idea of God veils what might have been before, as we already know). Wittgenstein generalizes this for any kind of reasoning: "Explanations come to an end somewhere." Any kind of explanation

14 As indicated above "In the beginning was the deed" is a famous line from Goethe's *Faust* (1806) which inspired many philosophers since then. In its original context, it is Faust's speculative translation of John 1:1 "In the beginning was the word". For Faust, word is not enough. Word is too passive. This deed [Tat] captures an aspect of the meaning of *logos*. For Wittgenstein, this deed in the beginning of a language-game is something active and closely connected to language, even though not in its outward appearance (it is a primitive reaction after all).

must eventually arrive at its *terminus ad quem*, which means only that any kind of reasoning must have its logical beginning. Wittgenstein provided several suggestions for what that beginning might be.

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