



The extimate essence of speculation

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Abstract The article seeks to delineate the often misunderstood idea of speculation that has conceptually been converted from an epitome of pure thought into an economic category of profitability and self-interest. But to define speculation already means to pose a problem. In Augustine speculation designates the mutual relationship between reflection and the mirrored appearance of God’s gaze. This dictates an unattainable task of catching God’s gaze, which is more inward than my innermost self and which models our thoughts accordingly. Such extimate activity as defined by Lacan is the formal condition for the construction of visibility and is inscribed into contemplation. The article postulates that this fundamental discrepancy was also the foundation upon which Hegel carved a positive determination of thought.

Keywords speculation · extimacy · Lacan · Hegel · reason · Augustine

While we can find many ideas about what characterizes speculation, usually in some guise or other of a commercial venture or value producing instrument, there is a lack of interest regarding its proper form, which is present even in our most mundane activities such as quips, relationships and other deeds of symbolization. This article aims to show how speculation is immanently present in the movement of thought, while at the same time highlighting a completely new perspective according to which such self-determination of thought is in itself animated by an articulation of extimacy—Lacan’s neologism for the uncanny feeling of intimate exteriority first mentioned in his seminar on ethics (1986/1997, p. 139). This idea fundamentally

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challenges the commonsense distinction between exteriority and intimacy that underlies our thoughts.

In addressing the notion of speculation, we will first and foremost rely on Hegel, who refined and shed a specific light on this enigmatic idea, while also considering the vast philosophical and religious background that was necessary for the concept to gain such a significance. Moreover, an equally important voice will be given to Lacan's observations and Augustine's indispensable work in explicating this notion.

The act of speculation significantly shows that our most intimate constitutive thought-forming operation carries with it a piece of exteriority in the mantle of negativity—that is, thoughts have to be related to something else, an otherness that has particular qualities. Such otherness is not just a simple external difference but an innermost affirmative gesture of thought production. The article will follow this essential trait of speculative thought, which is reflected in an extimate procedure by maintaining its otherness as its inner self, but also the historical and conceptual trajectory of speculation, emphasizing the complexities that make up the notion. We will not be able to come to grips with every by-product of speculation, but we will, if not directly push, at least encourage the reader to further speculative endeavors that harbor emancipatory potential.

Outline of an elusive concept

Let's start with a few examples of speculation to familiarize ourselves with the topic at hand and in doing so also outline its principal characteristics that tie it to the neologism extimicity. Speculation has been present in one form or another from the very outset of systematic contemplative efforts in ancient Greece and culminated in Hegel's appropriately labeled speculative philosophy. To some extent, every speculative act from the very first elementary form has a mystified expression to it; as such, speculation is unusually close to magic tricks. While magic performances use everyday means to turn something ordinary into something peculiar and extraordinary, speculations similarly gain real value only after reflection (watching closely and contemplating the act) of familiar events is displaced by the unusual effect they produce. However, just as Aristotle warned that care should be taken in dealing with objects of memory since mistakes are frequent (Bloch, 2007, p. 25), we need to be even more careful when speculating—the outcomes of speculation are often unpredictable, and profit can quickly turn into a loss.

The simplest of speculations can be found in the form of an anecdote—and why not use a Soviet anecdote since they also seem to gain value with time. Soviet anecdotes were used ubiquitously but rose to prominence when it became punishable by law in the Soviet Union to utter any politically motivated anecdotes (Davies, 1998, p. 159). They could be heard both in private and public settings. In this spirit, let us consider an anecdote that encompasses this antagonism between the ever-present telling of anecdotes and the prohibition of such speech that underlay the societal structure:



In a prison all the jokes have been told a thousand times, so the inmates number them so as not to waste time. “Number 67!” Laughter. “Number 52!” Laughter. “Number 41!” One of the inmates starts laughing like mad. “What’s the matter with you?” “I never heard that one before!” (Graham, 2004, p.169)

The self-enclosed prison system produces something out of nothing through such jokes, but this particular anecdote formalizes an underlying emancipatory moment, producing an excess of the prisoner’s predicament out of a mere number. While such speculative jokes were no laughing matter—they could cost the joke tellers up to ten years of their lives in jail—this anecdote clearly points to the speculative spirit embedded in the practice. This can initially be reduced to what is applicable to sense, what is inapplicable to it, but most crucial, what is *in sense more than sense*. The intimate being of this joke, the number of the joke, is non-analyzable, as every being is, for Hegel, extrinsic, foreign and lacking meaning (1812/1986a, p. 68). However, this lack is not merely a discrepancy that is sense-filled by the progression of the joke, but a structuring principle since the symbolic dimension of the joke is only established by the lack, while, on the other hand, lack itself is produced jointly with the symbolic order. This formula is contained in Hegel’s absolute knowledge that is structured around such lack in the form of an initial emptiness of words (1812/1986a, p. 72). The immediate reality with which we are surrounded is, at first, completely indeterminate and only negatively grasped as an abstract givenness.

However, this symbolic order emerges against the background of something impossible, the real in the Lacanian sense of the word, that disturbs such an immediate givenness, but as such functions as the speculative source of movement. A practically identical idea is at the heart of the prisoner’s joke where sense is established through scarcity of meaning or, as Lacan put it, *pas-de-sens* (1998/2017, p. 89), a negation of sense that needs to be at the same time understood as a step of sense, a speculative step further.

The content of joke number 41 may remain an enigma, but this should not mislead us into regarding it as simply incomprehensible. The joke produces something out of nothing precisely because its speculative character goes beyond mere understanding—it produces something *unlooked for*. What triggers laughter in the inmate, but also in the listener of the anecdote, is the introduction of a disturbance into the established meaning. But while laughter bursts onto a scene that has already been disturbed, it’s the comedic essence of the anecdote that empties out its content and institutes the juncture of two dissimilar narratives (one regarding the unbearable nature of the prison life that is made tolerable by imagination and the other encompassing the social bond between the inmates).

Filmmakers like the Coen brothers often achieve this effect through wordplay that is driving the work of speculation. Take the fairly well-known exchange from *Intolerable Cruelty* (Coen & Coen, 2003) in which we follow a divorce lawyer who, with a great deal of resourcefulness, represents clients involved in lost settlement cases. When the first hearing of the latest case is about to start, the following exchange regarding the sitting judge takes place: “Have you sat before her before?” “No. No, the judge sits first. Then we sit.” A sitting judge is of course the presiding



judge, however, she also has the honor of sitting down first and thereby opening the proceedings. What is at stake—and as we have pointed out, something real is certainly at stake—is not simply a negation of the perceived representation but the opening of the speculative dimension that unravels an affirmative outcome.

While the prison anecdote shows the contradictory or the unfamiliar aspect, which drives speculation, here it turns out that the speculative dimension is first and foremost expressed in *language*. Its speculative value is manifested precisely in such eye-catching word plays where the same word is used for two opposing meanings, which are a result of contingencies and ambiguities in common parlance. These disturbances, inconsistencies and excesses in language in which my intimacy is expressed, testifies to the proximity of otherness, externality in sameness and fixation of sentences that produces surplus value as either too much or too little meaning in our daily denotations and communications.

One further example of speculation that we will mention can be found in Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994). Irimiás, a man believed to be dead, returns to a broken community he left years ago with a promise of redemption, but instead encourages greed, betrayal and deceit among its members. In the scene that is of interest to us, Irimiás is waiting with his companion, Petrina, in front of a police captain's office when he notices the clocks in the tiled hallway, which are described in the following manner by the narrator: "The two clocks show different times. Both wrong, of course. This one here is too slow. The other measures not so much time, but the eternal reality of the exploited" (Tarr, 1994).

If this observation on the operation of the clocks merely registered two false aspects of time, the argument regarding the different forms of time would be an amusing exercise in fantastical logic; however, it would also be quite hollow in its significance. Instead, the effect produced by this remark is a concise explication of speculative logic that is produced by an antagonism. The narrator's observation simultaneously invokes the break of the rational narrative about time (slowness of the time on one clock juxtaposed with the other clock, which does not really show time, but its conditions) and a double negation (time on both clocks is false). From this emptied-out form an affirmatory revelation emerges: the reality of the exploited. The assertion regarding the clock includes a preconceived notion of time that is immediately placed on its head, in the same manner as in Hegel's most famous speculation, that "subject is just as much substance" (1807/1986c, p. 587). According to this notion, the permutable subject—time for Irimiás or Hegel's subject as such—is reduced to the firmness of the substance, meaning that determination passes over into its negative and thereby discloses the discord between both figures of time, that is, both subject and substance. In one sense, time itself is still firmly directed towards the future, even if at a slower pace and thus out of joint with the progress of lived or "real" time. In simple terms, this is the commonsense perception of time. But in the other sense, the very idea of time falls apart when a clock measure is introduced that has no temporal value at all. And precisely this absurd negation of time, which warps the idea of time on itself, substantiates the establishment of a contradictory relationship between the too-lateness of time and the idea of nontime. But the assertion regarding the lagging of time is a false lead—it seduces the spectator into expecting an opposing form of time that is ahead of



itself. In the film's narrative, however, something else transpires and we encounter another form of time. This means that we aren't merely faced with two incomparable forms of time but that it is only through their incompatibility that it is possible to discern the speculative dimension of the statement, which doesn't entail just the reflection on the thought of time but the demand to think through this very negation of time as it highlights how the order of signification comes forth from its own structural deficit. It follows that, according to the speculative dimension the idea of eternity, which in Hegel's eyes is the Absolute's alienation of itself from itself in time, is ingrained in the reality of exploitation. Exploitation must be understood here in Marxist terms, as a reification of a part of workers' labor that becomes foreign to its wielder. The most personal faculty turns out to be the most alienating. This enigmatic aspect of speculation is precisely what forces us to take a more detailed look at the extimate nature of speculation. And, who better than Hegel to lead us into the speculative dimension of thinking?

The perspective of extimacy in the speculative movement

Hegel may have a reputation of being a divisive, even an obscure thinker. Such reasoning seems to hold true especially for his central concept of speculation. In his hands, speculative maneuvers apparently escape written fixation in the form of a sentence or a judgment, a point that we have already touched upon. Although Hegel insisted on the idea of speculation as the highest principle of philosophy, it had already gained a rather ambiguous role in his time.

In the everyday life of nineteenth-century Berlin, whose streets Hegel still frequented, speculation as a term tended to signify "matrimonial or commercial speculations" (1830/1986b, p. 178), denoting the potential that was present beyond the content at hand. While the speculative character of economic surplus is ubiquitous in our present time, marriage is much less clearly embedded in speculative endeavors. The worth of a common life with a partner may be regarded as something that reflects shared interests or, just as prominently, the romantic ideal of love. It also wouldn't be out of place to see in marriage a contractual union of two people who oblige themselves to surrender their individual autonomy in the name of a higher form of family. For Hegel, the so-called surplus value of marriage, its end goal, resides in the dissolution of such a unity in the form of a descendant who follows their own individual path. While there are always some speculations tied to inheritance of the offspring, the actual speculative moment as such comes to the fore in the reasonable life choices of the descendant. Even if the reasons behind their actions are not consciously reflected upon, there is nonetheless a certain weight ascribed to (their own) thoughts, which speculation produces out of itself without regard to what is.

That is to say, thinking takes itself as material and produces a self-differentiating thought that rests in the idea that the process of subjectivization relies on an otherness of itself, an outside that is consumed as the innermost structural nucleus. However, it should not be overlooked that in this outward referral of thought, it turns out that thinking itself is that core which is foreign to itself. In this sense,



descendant-subjects have two determinations—the necessities relating to the substantial unity of the family on the one hand and to the individuals' autonomy on the other—inasmuch as each moment entails its opposite in it, while in this opposite also coinciding with itself. However, these opposing moments do not persist at arm's length, since a speculative affirmation condenses both thought determinations together in a specific relation and at the same time into a relation to oneself. While it may seem that speculative thought consists solely in grasping these opposite moments, any such self-moving unity (as a speculative determination) is possible only if both moments are not substantial. And furthermore, as we have already pointed out, the speculative determination between subject and substance is sustainable “inasmuch as the emptiness was recognized as the source of movement” (Hegel, 1812/1986a, p. 185).

While Engels takes the division between man and woman as an elemental antagonistic unit (1884/1942, p. 69), Hegel appears to anticipate this remark and posits that their asymmetry is sublated in matrimony, where both willingly surrender their freedom and thus “renounce their natural and individual personality to this unity of one with the other” (1820/1989, p. 310). Though Hegel takes a child not to possess free will, a child nevertheless holds a crucial role in this endeavor as, crudely speaking, the void in the structure of the family that gives rise to the idea of a family as such (1820/1989, p. 264). It thus seems as if children's legacies are in a way present prior to the appearance of their families as an inherent gap that prevents the parents from coinciding with themselves in the family union. We can thus argue that the child, in its unsubstantiality, is the extimate object that holds together the signifying identity of the family. On the other hand, this impasse is constructed together with the idea of family, as a surplus of this idea without which neither would exist. If we put this point in terms of German idealism, the impasse itself opens up the conditions of the possibility of the actuality of a family and thereafter of a dynasty. This self-formative nature of a spousal union therefore does not get rid of its inner discrepancy, since the antagonistic structure and its contingent surplus both hold together the structure and encompass the core principle of speculative thoughts. That said, while we have highlighted the asymmetrical form of speculations, they have proven to be quite elusive, leaving us with no choice but to break them down and delineate their building blocks in more detail.

While Hegel himself never wavered regarding philosophical speculation as such, he was uncertain and wary regarding the practicality of speculative thinking. Among his numerous letters, one written to Friedrich Niethammer is especially instructive for the topic at hand. As usual, in this letter to his best friend, Hegel had manifold topics in mind but the discussion inevitably steered towards his present work—specifically, the popularity and disenchanting form of his gymnasium lessons. According to the regulations of that time, the lessons should have partly exhibited a practical dimension, a requirement that left even Hegel perplexed: “How to exercise speculative thinking practically, I have no clear idea. It is already difficult enough to exercise abstract thinking in practice” (1969, p. 390). It is important to point out this biographical note, because it clearly highlights how the consequences of the speculative self-referral are not only of an abstract nature. Hegel's confession shows that there is something real in speculation, something



more in thought than thought that defies our grasp while simultaneously being intimately touched by it.

Although the use of speculation is considered self-evident—we regularly form intimate opinions without evidence, and willing investments are often made with an expectation of higher profit—it is difficult to bring the notion of speculation to the level of the concept. To specify the intricacies embedded in speculation as a principle and a method, the most suitable addressee is again Hegel himself. In *Encyclopedia*, Hegel defines the concept of speculation as follows:

The *speculative* or the *positively rational* grasps the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and their passing over into something else ... the speculative is nothing else than the rational (the positively rational, that is) insofar as it is *thought*. (Hegel, 1830/1986b, p. 177)

Now it should be emphasized that Hegel's initial "theoretical" constellation is internally divided, not according to the classical division between subjective thinking and the externality of things but along the distinction between understanding and reason, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, which is basically a critique of the coupling of thinking and objecthood. While understanding is an expression of the ordinary consciousness, where every subjective signifier is attached to a corresponding signified external object and forms a specific meaning, Hegel is advocating the position of reason, which eclipses the commonsense fixation, not by transcending it or by excluding certain areas of being but by persisting in it to the very breaking point. To be more precise, reason absorbs the independent external object of thought into itself and makes it its driving force.

Understanding is exclusively concerned with the formal aspect of knowledge, which cannot reach beyond formal logic and abstract categories. This also means that, according to the criterion of understanding, the world abides by the principle of non-contradiction, which boils down to the idea that scientific inquiry has to be effectively free of contradictions. But in contrast to (empirical) scientific discourse, reason has no positive object that would enable it to form objective conclusions, since it is itself the object of analysis. Having as its material only the commonsense understanding of the world, which is structured around the identity of notions and things and the exclusion of contradiction, reason has the sole function of sublating this concrete determination and thus "pass into something else" (Hegel, 1830/1986b, p. 177). Or, put more explicitly, "in speculative philosophy, it is true, the understanding is a moment, but a moment at which we do not stop" (Hegel, 1830/1986b, p. 106).

There is an essential paradox at play here. Understanding is essentially identical to reason. However, the key difference that keeps them apart is understanding's blindness to its structural identity with reason. On the other hand, as already mentioned, reason merely has to insist on the negativity that is produced by the reflection of understanding to the very end. Just to clarify, reason or reflected knowledge is acquired through negation in that every finite determination just as much has to assert its opposite, which means that both are for themselves nothing. What reason accomplishes by enduring in this "movement from nothing to nothing



and thereby back to itself” is the gain of itself as the object in the process (Hegel, 1816/1986d, p. 24). It turns out that reason can only exist if it follows the principle of self-renunciation (Hegel, 1986e, p. 28).

Because this is a classic example of speculative movement, it is also a good place to point out the extimate essence of such development. Reason is not a distinctive form of thinking but the insistence on understanding of ordinary consciousness dependent on the exterior being of given phenomena. Reason must drive understanding to the point where it loses contact with immediate exteriority and meaning, the point where the exterior coincides with the interior and an empty nothingness appears. The characteristic extimate trait of speculative undertaking is that it is able to think of this nothing as an object. We will return to the surplus produced in such a speculative passing over later on, but it is important to first clarify an obvious discrepancy that makes speculation such an enigmatic concept. To clearly understand the stakes involved with speculation and the specific context that enabled the construction of the method involved, it is paramount to add a few remarks regarding the conditions under which it gained its prominence. It seems clear that the principle of speculation refers in Hegel’s purview exclusively to thought, but it is impossible to overlook that the word speculation is inherently bound to the visual, specular domain, which incidentally constitutes a central element in Lacan’s explication of the special function of the *objet a*, the object that functions as a remainder of the symbolic function. Simply put, the object that constitutes “in you more than you” (Lacan, 1973/1998, p. 263).

In a speculative manner, “in grasping opposites in their unity” (Hegel, 1812/1986a, p. 52), it could be deduced that *speculation* guides us towards *speculum*, which can convey two opposite, but complementary meanings. It is either used in the sense of reflection that can introduce, as we have briefly pointed out, the realm of self-reflection *or* as a reflection in a looking-glass, any object whose surface reflects images, a phenomenon that essentially galvanizes the capacity of seeing. Both interpretations cover certain logical conclusions, but the question of how to bring about a rational framework from a mere reflection remains unanswered.

A more definite argument regarding the ocular basis of speculation can be found in its etymological roots, which are distinctly implanted in the power of sight. *Speculation* is derived from the Latin verb *speculor* and designates looking, exploring, watching, while the one who is a *speculātor* has a voyeuristic penchant, and thus, of course, denotes a looker-out, spy, scout, explorer, inquirer, investigator, etc. In other words, speculation denotes activities that revolve around a point of indeterminacy in the visual field, where the subject fails to distinctly see and recognize the object of interest. This is most famously depicted in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), where Jeff the protagonist is confined to a wheelchair in his apartment and out of boredom starts secretly observing the private lives of his neighbors in his rear window. At some point he becomes a witness to a suspected crime by a neighbor and he consequently gets entangled in the ensuing events. Jeff’s observations of his neighbors mirror our perspective, the audience viewer. Both protagonist and spectator are in awe of the unraveling events, but both protagonist and the spectator fail to see or understand them. It is just as likely that a murder occurred across the courtyard as it is that there was a string of coincidences



that nevertheless produces uneasiness. Both are consumed by the gaze of something that bends the usual experience of the visual field, which negates common representations (of a neighbor) but simultaneously forces one to reflect on this blind spot.

Being a speculator isn't confined to perceiving in an act of looking, but also has to do with *specula*, the ability to gain greater perspective in the form of a lookout, a watchtower or high place, summit, or eminence (Charlton, 1915, p. 2137), a place from where speculations are conducted. Curiously, our ability to offer a clear structural tie between the ability of seeing to Hegel's conception of speculation remains unsupported, since we would have to resort to further sleight-of-hand speculations that would merely obscure the already abundant discrepancies. At this point, it is worth deferring the explication of the purely genealogical emergence of the concept of speculation and instead scrutinize the manner in which the term initially appeared.

The metamorphosis of *theoria* into speculation

Looking back at the events that lead to the constitution of the notion of speculation, it is clear that there were certain inconsistencies and divergences in the process of translation and subsequent revisions, which made room for the concept of seeing to be sublated into reason. The deviation materialized during the revival of Aristotle's teachings in the Middle Ages, having as its principal object the analysis of "theoretical science (*epistḗmē theoritikḗ*) of the first reasons and causes" and, more specifically, the idea of theoretical knowledge. This form of knowledge ensues from "looking at things, contemplating about them, and observing them closely, in order to understand their nature and their reasons and causes" (Ritter, 1977, p. 10). The work of *theōriā* shouldn't be understood as a reflective contemplative probing of objects, of the world per se, but as an activity, an inquiring search for truth that functions for its own sake, grasping objects as existent. Since theory is detached from day-to-day matters and worldly affairs, Aristotle did not place it among the "necessities of life" (1995, p. 21), having as its object exclusively *itself*.

However, it is important to emphasize that the first receptions of Aristotle were not purely philosophical exercises; they acquired a strong theological underpinning, whereby the justification for "not necessary" knowledge was imbued with a divine rationale. It may seem that a theological explication was a Christian solution, but the immersion of God in theory had been already present beforehand. The principal concept of theory (*theōriā*) had been long entangled with a religious component, recognizing in *theoria* the presence of God. But only subsequent translations made the fortunate (mis)judgment to inseparably merge it with the notion of *contemplari* and thus opened the way for the speculative movements.

What followed was that the theoretical method of grasping *what is* was amended to denote "looking out for, listening to God." Such a shift was also characteristic for ancient Rome, where the practice of augury, "taking of auspices" was widespread. The priesthood interpreted the divine omens according to the flight of birds and thereby decided on matters of public life, war or commerce. As such, it was quite a



speculative endeavor but also a surprisingly effective tool for laying the foundations of the city. Foundations of whole cities corresponded to signs produced by the curvature of a wandering flock (Livy, 2002, p. 58).

This led to the withdrawal of activity and the introduction of a resting gaze of knowledge, which no longer requires any search; taking place entirely in the *interior*. The examiner became a spectator, a simple onlooker withdrawn from everything, since he had everything within himself in the identity with the one, with divine thoughts. If we commit to such a dogmatic stance, as seen in Augustine, who took over the teaching of this method of contemplating God, in the form of *vita contempliva*, life becomes completely pervaded by it, so that a return to worldly existence was considered a fall. It is likened to voluntary blindness or muteness. There is thus nothing else but contemplation drawn to God that is worthy of a life dedicated to thought, regardless of suffering, pleasure, or love. But while Augustine's central point rests on the overabundance of contemplation (divine gaze) and the absence of worldliness, he was also instrumental in reviving the ancient spirit of theory.

Despite various biblical references to variations of *speculatio*, its meaning constantly fluctuated. It is possible to find over twenty mentions of the notion in the Bible, one of these being a place where you can find peace and quiet for sacred study. Meanwhile, all the mystery and confusion regarding the theory presented all these variances embedded in the word and transform their spirit to fit Aristotle's *theoria*. Identifying theory with speculation (*speculari*, *speculativus*) was specifically a way to *partly* reestablish the initial meaning (Grabmann, 1909, p. 156). Based on the already mentioned meaning of *specula* (lookout), he derived *speculari*, which is still limited to the specular field and expressed watching, peeking, enquiring, spying, the activity of searching with a glance, which also includes attributes of care and caution. In the ongoing evolution of this idea there were other alterations. However, it was the introduction of an additional theological twist, in the form of revelation, which took the shape of a looking glass and had a long-lasting impact on the formation of the concept.

With the radical departure from the initial meaning of *theōriā* and *theoritikós*, there was a concurrent tendency to instill the latter purely into divine thinking. In describing the Trinitarian logic of theology, Augustine touched upon this in *De Trinitate*. The idea of trinity contained therein is predicated on two propositions: the saving act of God as a Trinitarian event *and* life as a growth towards a contemplation that is also a participation in the divine life. However, both propositions are dependent on a logical form of the trinity: one *ousia* (God), three *hypostases* (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). But what will interest us here, as we are trying to bring to light the genesis of the object of speculation, is Augustine's adoption of the said concept. Having in mind that it is still a contemplative framework, Augustine specifies how *vita contemplativa* enables us to see (*videntur*) God,

not by carnal eyes. ... We see now through a looking glass (*speculum*) enigmatically, thereupon face to face. ... In a looking glass (*speculum*) nothing is discerned but an image ... in order that we might see in some way



or other by this image which we are ... as if through a looking glass.
(Augustine, 1865a, p. 1067)

Augustine continues by quoting from the Corinthians: “We with unveiled faces behold through looking glass (*speculantes*) the Lord’s glory, are transformed into the *same* image” (2 Cor. 3:18). What Augustine aims at is the precise moment when one catches the gaze of divinity. Usually, it is thought that the path of sight to the object is paved with representational (symbolic) material, while the path to revelation necessitates the hard work of non-doing—devotion to the Absolute, to God. However, we can again refer to Lacan who had clarified in detail that this gesture of looking involves an elusive component in the form of a gaze, “a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (Lacan, 1973/1998, p. 84). This constitutes the other instance of extimacy in Lacan’s oeuvre, which we will not examine in detail here: with regards to the subject it is that of the Other as such.

Augustine follows the logic of the gaze when he says that we don’t see God through “carnal eyes” but “through a looking glass (*speculum*) enigmatically” (1865a, p. 1067). God is thus seen through a reflection, by means of a looking glass, not from an objective viewpoint or “watchtower” (*specula*). What we see through the looking glass, declares Augustine, is an image of God, which is “the image which *we* are.” While Lacan (1973/1998) points out that “we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world” (p. 75) as “there is already in the world something that looks before there is a view for it to see” (p. 273), Augustine’s emphasis is slightly different.

The contemplative observer is necessarily directed away from the world and towards an immersion in God. However, being faced with God’s image does not translate into a doubling of ourselves but into that in ourselves that is more than ourselves. Here we encounter the initial extimic feature of speculation. The contemplative phantasy of God is suddenly transformed when we recognize ourselves in him and thereby *méconnaissance* and its concomitant *connaissance*, that is, to misapprehend and in the same breath or blink of an eye to obtain knowledge. This speculative revelatory moment reveals and unfolds the appearance of the world. Furthermore, the description in Augustine’s *Confessions* of God as “*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*,” “higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self” (2004, p. 99), which can be used as a definition of extimacy or understood as the sphere beyond transcendence, the domain of the real, infuses the contemplator with a divine self-distance—not just the failed mastery of our self-image, but the inscription of God as the difference from ourselves into the heart of our being.

In this dialectic of truth and appearance, to understand God one must see, and therefore one must not “veil the head” as it prevents the veil of the Other to function. But what then is this enigma of the looking glass when we are “seeing through a looking glass (*speculum*) enigmatically”? It is neither a secret nor a solvable problem; perhaps the best answer would be a conundrum. According to Laplanche, “enigma refers to the other’s otherness,” to the reaction to this otherness, which is nothing other than that which the unconscious produces in the inhabitant (1991, p. 33). Jacques-Alain Miller offered a more famous definition for



this estimate core of the gravity of our action, describing it as “a gap in the midst of one’s identity” (1986, p. 7), which functions as the “locus of what we expect, where we hope, where we believe to recognize our most intimate” (2018, p. 52).

With this in mind, let us return to the explication of the concept of speculation and make a step further. In *Expositions on the Psalms*, Augustine draws the consequences that such an additional meaning acquired by the concept of speculation carries with itself: not only observation (*contemplari*) or the dimension of the imaginary, not only understanding (*theoria*) or the dimension of symbolic, but also comprehension (*revelation*) or the speculative dimension. This forced Augustine to derive the nonword (in Latin) of *speculatio(n)*.

Augustine used it in the following manner: God “dwells” (*habitat*), one can say *is*, “which means speculation” (*quod interpretatur Speculatio*) (1865b, p. 122). Finally, we have our first glance of speculation, even if in a rudimentary form. But he continues to further explain the state of this being of newness: “Speculation, however, precedes vision” (*Praecedit autem speculation visionem*) (Augustine, 1865b, p. 122). This means that vision emerges after the speculative act of opening up the space of visibility.

Before drawing any further conclusions, let us return to Boethius for a short supplement, which will allow me to unfold the last speculative twist. The aforementioned connections and flirtations with God had dissolved the presence of knowledge resulting from the *search*, *examination*, and *inquiry* emerging in thoughts that acquire the intimate insight of God through contingent things so that this particularity loses its bonds and passes into a new causality. The ensuing revelatory knowledge has a venerable, even sublime, quality. Inquiring and venerable consideration are thus part of the notion of *speculari*, which, *post factum*, strives to revive the essence of Aristotle’s theoretical life. The interplay of the changed circumstances and the ancient meaning redefined the conditions under which speculation was appropriated. With the insertion of this engaged query into speculation, the speculative pursuit for knowledge seemed to lose its pureness. So, after Boethius, the speculative nature of *speculation* was reduced to a specific characterization that persisted throughout the Middle Ages.

Added value of language

While the metamorphosis of *theoria* (as the inquiring search for truth that has itself for its object) into *speculation*—a revelatory kind of apprehension—brought about a somewhat revitalized concept of speculation, a couple of hundred years needed to pass for someone to recognize the speculative capacity to create something out of nothing. While Kant was the culprit to do so, it took Hegel’s speculative aptitude to recognize Kant’s speculative merit.

In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel denied that Kant’s contribution to the speculative philosophy can be reduced to “forms, which are expressed in categories, placed in human faculty of knowledge just like a stake of absolute finitude” (Hegel, 1802/1986e, p. 316), as is often claimed. Rather, as Hegel saw it, Kant succeeded in grasping “the idea of *true a priori* in the form of transcendental imagination and in so doing also established the beginning of the idea of reason within understanding



itself” (Hegel, 1802/1986e, p. 316). In short, it was already Kant who introduced the idea that reflection (as understanding) has to persist in itself and make itself into an object and through this become reason. The other part, which was taken up by Hegel was the productive nature of the imagination that is able to form a (new) complete system that he describes as Kant’s “truly speculative Idea” (1802/1986e, p. 328). This is reflected in the identity of being and thinking, which is nothing other than “revelation” or reason itself (Hegel, 1802/1986e, p. 301).

And lastly, for this occasion, Hegel took over this speculative mantle and called for a “speculative Good Friday” (1986e, p. 432). While liturgically, Good Friday recalls Jesus’s crucifixion and Calvary, the paradigmatic instance of death and resurrection, his speculative Good Friday commands “a reading that involves a kind of persistence of thinking in what is equivalent to its death—that is, a resurrection of the concept transformed out of its contradiction” (Kobe, 2017, p. 230). This can be viewed against the background of the already mentioned relationship between *understanding* and *reason*. But let us return to the question, which we left unanswered and is already implicit in the empty tomb that announced Jesus’s resurrection: where does the added value of speculation come from?

As we have outlined, while understanding is bound to empirical wealth and meaning, reason is the catalyst, which shows the schism in this meaning, separating understanding from its function. To put it in Lacanian terms, *reason* is the action of emptying the signifier of the signified and thereby comprehending concepts of understanding without relying on concrete signification. The affirmation of this empty place is speculation at work through which something singular emerges. More precisely, it is a thought process that releases freely from itself the moment of its particularity of givenness or the first determination defined through otherness, which generates often surprising outcomes, the most prominent being the subject. And appropriately, Hegel sees the “highest form of reason” in “God’s revelation” as a self-revealing act of reason (1986f, p. 82–86). To catch the gaze of God, with whom one catches oneself, is thus, according to Hegel, revelatory not just because of its comprehension, but also because it both reveals and produces a world.

If we take understanding as the source of speculation, it is mandatory to start speculating with “the natural language of understanding, ... which provides us with a terminological basis” (Simoniti, 2008, p. 64). The latter, in the form of a sentence, is decomposed and brought back together with an added speculative value.

This movement, which constitutes what otherwise would have to be accomplished by proof, is the dialectical movement of the proposition itself. It alone is actual speculation, and it is only the expression of that movement which is a speculative account. As propositional, the speculative is only the inner inhibition and the non-existing return of essence into itself. (Hegel, 1807/1986c, p. 61)

Leaving aside the broader implications of Hegel’s theory of language, the speculative dimension of language can be discerned in the internal impediments of language, which also means that any logical structure can be articulated only through this impediment. Take Hegel’s proposition: *God is being*. While it seems possible to effortlessly define the subject (God) and predicate (being) in an immanent manner, through the mere content of the proposition, it is clear that *being*



is not simply a predicate having its own substantial meaning. This causes *God* to lose his fixed subjective role in the proposition. The movement from one determination of understanding to the other is thus inhibited, lacking the subject and thus returning thinking to itself, but in an alienated form, emancipated from the initial notion. This emancipatory role is speculation at its finest as thinking occurs only when a sequence of words, normally formed as a declarative sentence, is emancipated from its immediate meaning, renouncing representational content. It is in this sense that “language is [also] the body of thought” (Hegel, 1830/1986b, p. 286). We can now also put forth an answer regarding the object of speculation. It arises through the articulation of the structural deficit that is expressed as self-renunciation, more specifically, as “the self-generating, advancing and retreating path” of spirit in its self-apprehension (Hegel, 1807/1986c, p. 61). We can also say that deadlocks of signification produce the object of speculation.

In the same manner that thought comes to itself through the self-sublation of language, *theoria* is basically the conceptual field that is taken apart and revived by way of speculation to speculation itself. It persists in its theoretical framework until the breaking point, leaving the mark of lack in signification and thereby also a new affirmation in the form of a novel actuality that was not present beforehand. To conclude, let us turn once more to Hegel’s correspondence with Niethammer. In another letter, Hegel expressed his enthusiasm for his own work: “I am daily ever more convinced that theoretical work accomplishes more in the world than practical work. Once the realm of representation is revolutionized, actuality will not hold out” (Hegel, 1969, p. 179). As already mentioned, with the onset of reason, meaning is stripped of its content, leaving an emptiness behind the symbolic order of signifiers, which is filled by the master signifier, as Lacan puts it. However, this signifier should not be understood as the true signifier we were looking for, but as a signifier that signifies the missing signifier. And this signifier is the most intimate, which is at the same time most foreign to us, that which we have defined as extimacy. This dimension can also be described as a disjunction of our intimate identity that folds outwards; a detail that is often overlooked, although it holds the potential to challenge the impasses of modern society.

A few final speculations on the speculative notion

In examining the structure of speculation, which we have done primarily to shed light on the internal logic of this basic thought-forming process, we have leaned on the logic of extimacy. By introducing the Lacanian notion of extimacy, a number of scattered questions raised by speculation that are intrinsically opaque fall into place.

Speculative undertakings are usually understood as uncertain, even risky actions, which are carried out for the purpose of obtaining symbolic or other value, however, we elaborated how speculation functions as an expression of an impasse. In its most elemental form, speculation is manifested in reason, which emerges through the sublation of its own condition of existence in the form of understanding. While understanding produces our everyday meaning, reason persists as the negative other side of understanding to the point of revealing its constitutive lack. Speculation is for this very reason a force that generates externality in its most intimate interior.



Extimacy highlights this general characteristic of speculation where the intimacy of understanding turns out to be the Other but also reveals a detail that is not addressed in standard Hegelian debates. The structure of extimacy introduces itself through articulation and produces an object that is not symbolically represented but nonetheless exists without its essence being defined. In this estimate form, speculation should not merely be considered as the capacity to produce surplus value of assets, knowledge, or thoughts but as a necessary operation to bring objects from nothing into our world. And it is precisely in such a productive principle that we find the vestige of emancipatory character that speculation as an economic category obscures. By returning to intimacy of thought, by repeatedly articulating the real in the symbolic, which is identical to Hegel's idealization, a positive surplus is produced in the form of an object around which a signifying configuration is established. This object is the object of speculation.

Note

The quotes attributed to Hegel, Augustine and Simoniti in this article are the author's translations from the German, Latin and Slovenian.

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