

ABRAHAM AND EMPEDOCLES:
TWO FORMS OF RELIGIOUS SACRIFICE
IN THE ORIGINS OF EUROPE¹

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ABSTRACT.: During their period of Frankfurt, Hölderlin and Hegel paid special attention to the phenomenon of self-sacrifice, and its relationship with the configuration of Europe's early forms of religiosity. Moreover, and according to Hegel, they discussed between each other this theme "for several years and frequently"² since Hölderlin began to write a tragic drama about Empedocles of Acragas.

This happened on 1797, the first year of Hegel in Frankfurt, where Hölderlin lived and had published in mid-April the first volume of his *Hyperion*. In summer he began to plan the tragic drama. On December 11, 1798 he begins to write the first and unfinished draft of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, in a town nearby Frankfurt where he moved after being fired of his job. In the autumn of 1799 he writes several philosophical essays trying to develop some of the problems he confronted in the first two versions of his drama. In December he conceived a new plan, which was developed in a new version, also incomplete. This last draft has implicit references to Hegel, as characterized in the priest who opposes Empedocles³.

During these days in Frankfurt, Hegel was also writing on the abrahamic religions —*The spirit of Judaism* and about the role of love and its fate in Christianity—. As it is well known, these encounters with Hölderlin brought about a radical change of some of Hegel's previous opinions from the Berne period. These changes will have an enormous importance in the mature thought of Hegel. Hölderlin was the first student of Fichte who made a serious criticism of the I as principle of philosophy. This criticism will help Hegel to formulate his notion of spirit as something more radical than the self-consciousness subjectivity. A spirit is something that can be in other as in itself; that can be at home in otherness. So, a spirit it is not a pure I, limited by the non-ego.

The core of this notion of spirit has to do essentially with Hölderlin notions of life and love. And for the formulation of these ideas, Hölderlin needed all the work developed around *Der Tod des Empedokles*. As Harris has shown: "Hölderlin's mind was moving

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² GSA, VII. 2, S44. Cited by Harris, H. S., *Hegel's Development. Night Thoughts (Jena 1801-1806)*, p. 9.

³ This is an hypothesis of Veronique M. Foti, in *Epochal Discordance. Hölderlin's Philosophy of Tragedy*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Philosophy, New York, 2006, p. 47.

from the philosophically-poetic figure of Hyperion (the Titan who accepts political failure) to the poetically-philosophic figure of Empedocles (who accept Titanic martyrdom as an earnest of the people's political rebirth".⁴

With things as they are, Hölderlin and Hegel focused their work on two outstanding figures of religions: Empedocles and Abraham. They both accepted in their life a religious sacrifice of themselves. The aim of this paper focuses on the understanding of religious sacrifice in the works of Hölderlin, Hegel and Reinhard Lauth.

⁴ Harris, N.S., Harris, H. S., *Hegel's Development. Night Thoughts (Jena 1801-1806)*, p. 9.