**CHAPTER 3**

**The Inseparably Different Architectonics of Hegel and Derrida**

*Pure being* and *pure nothing* are, therefore, the same. What is the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being—does not pass over but has passed over—into nothing, and nothing into being. But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately vanishes in its opposite.¹

From the moment that one questions the possibility of such a transcendental signified, and that one recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signified and signifier becomes problematical at its root.... [N]or is it a question of confusing at every level, and in all simplicity, the signifier and the signified. That this opposition or difference cannot be radical or absolute does not prevent it from functioning, and even from being indispensable within certain limits—very wide limits.²

**Theography and Philosophies of Difference**

Attending to the Chalcedonian logic—or pattern, or structure—of “distinct but not separated” (or “not confused”), which I argued plays a persistent role in Calvin’s theology and perhaps Christian doctrine generally, offers a potent orientation to systematic theology. But it promises other fruit as well, by which theology can make a contribution to interdisciplinary discussion: a wide-ranging comparison between the abstract structure of Christian doctrine and the abstract logic, structures, or patterns that animate other fields of thought—so long as one is mindful of what theological particularities are left out of this abstractive comparison and seeks to recoup them elsewhere. Particularly

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¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 82–83. Since Hegel employs emphasis so frequently, I will reproduce his emphasis using italics; if and when I add emphasis, I will use underlining, as I have done in this citation.

appropriate for such a comparison are the philosophies of difference found in Hegel and Derrida. What makes a consideration of both of them so compelling is their peculiar difference from one another. Here are two theories of difference that are in some ways opposite, yet, considered abstractly, so nearly identical.

The epigraphs already hint at this difference. Hegel intends to legitimate all distinctions within a whole that orders and encompasses them all; Derrida sees distinctions, while never absolute, as operating within very wide limits, wider than any whole that would attempt to contain and stabilize them. Derrida will acknowledge his proximity to Hegel; yet, rather than becoming another “other” to Hegel of the sort that Hegel was very good at anticipating, Derrida will attempt to undermine Hegel’s system by means of an “infinitesimal” difference. After explicating this complicated relationship, this chapter concludes that the Auseinandersetzung—to employ academic jargon—between Hegel and Derrida remains difficult to adjudicate on its own terms, yet creates a useful philosophical matrix with which to deepen the understanding of the difference between justification and sanctification in Calvin. Moreover, the lack of a philosophical resolution leaves an opening for Calvin’s theological difference to become philosophically productive. Clarifying this particular philosophical juncture is not first among my concerns; yet if academic theology is to be faithful to its context, as I argued in Chapter 1 that it should be, then theology ought to concern itself with furthering the discourses in other disciplines from its own resources.

Yet the relevance of Hegel and Derrida to my argument goes beyond their intersection with the theme of “distinct but not separated.” As set out in Chapter 1, theography is theology that attempts to become reflexive about its textual location by means of scrutiny of academic institutions and their correlative genres. There I drew on Pierre Bourdieu and other theorists to attain some critical purchase on the social conditions of academic texts. Yet sociological description and genre analysis are not sufficient. The issue behind textuality for theology is epistemological: how far are academic texts capable of representing theological truth? What on the other hand are their limits? Hegel and Derrida are remarkable resources for these questions, since both produced philosophical work that is critically cognizant of philosophy as academic writing. To be sure, there are many competing approaches to interpreting

3 See David Duquette, “Kant, Hegel, and Possibility of Speculative Logic,” in George di Giovanni, ed., Essays on Hegel’s Logic (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 3: “The separateness of the concepts is denied or abolished, but their distinctness is nonetheless preserved.”

4 It is often said that modern philosophy turned to the subject—consciousness and perception—while twentieth century philosophy turned to language. Hegel and Derrida suggest a further turn to academic textuality as the starting point for philosophy.