

# ELEUSIS

*Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*<sup>1</sup>

**T**he mystic philosopher Hegel dedicated this poem to his friend Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin in August 1796. The two had first met at the Tübingen Seminary in 1788, and had remained in contact. Rich in mystical symbolism, the poem expresses the importance of the ancient mystery schools to these eighteenth century philosophers and literary figures.

Oh! If the doors of your sanctuary should  
crumble by themselves  
O Ceres, you who reigned in Eleusis!  
Drunk with enthusiasm, I would  
shiver with your nearness,  
I would understand your revelations,  
I would interpret the lofty meaning of the  
images, I would hear  
the hymns at the gods' banquets,  
the lofty maxims of their counsel.

Even your hallways have ceased to echo,  
Goddess!  
The circle of the gods has fled back to  
Olympus  
from the consecrated altars;  
fled from the tomb of profaned humanity,  
the innocent genius who enchanted them  
here! —  
The wisdom of your priests is silent, not one  
note of the sacred  
initiations preserved for us—and in vain  
strive  
the scholars, their curiosity greater than their  
love  
of wisdom (the seekers possess this love and  
they disdain you)—to master it they dig  
for words,  
in which your lofty meaning might be  
engraved!  
In vain! Only dust and ashes do they seize,



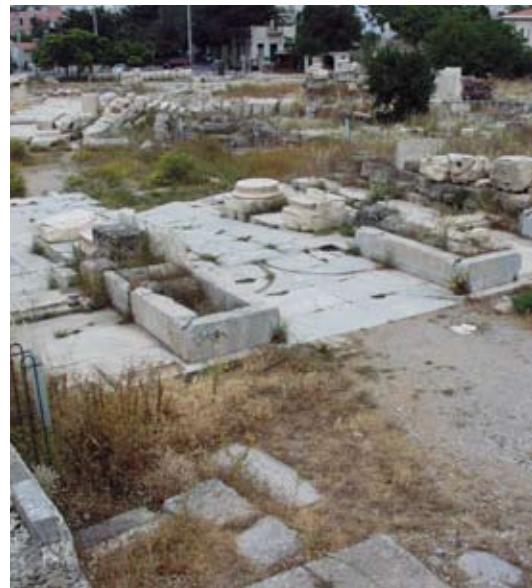
Statue of Hegel at the Rathaus in Stuttgart. Photo © 2009 by Ecelan, Wikimedia Commons.

where your life returns no more for them.  
And yet, even rotting and lifeless they  
congratulate themselves,  
the eternally dead!—easily satisfied—in vain  
—no sign  
remains of your celebration, no trace of an  
image.  
For the son of the initiation the lofty  
doctrine was too full,  
the profundity of the ineffable sentiment was  
too sacred,  
for him to value the desiccated signs.  
Now thought does not raise up the spirit,  
sunken beyond time and space to purify  
infinity,  
it forgets itself, and now once again its  
consciousness  
is aroused. He who should want to speak  
about it with others,  
would have to speak the language of angels,  
would have to experience the poverty of  
words.  
He is horrified of having thought so little of  
the sacred,

of having made so little of it, that speech  
 seems to him a  
 sin, and though still alive, he closes his  
 mouth.  
 That which the initiate prohibits himself, a  
 sage  
 law also prohibits the poorest souls: to make  
 known  
 what he had seen, heard, felt during the  
 sacred night:  
 so that even the best part of his prayers  
 was not disturbed by the clamor of their  
 disorder,  
 and the empty chattering did not dispose  
 him toward the sacred,  
 and this was not dragged in the mud, but  
 was entrusted to memory—so that it did  
 not become  
 a plaything or the ware of some sophist,  
 who would have sold it like an obolus,  
 or the mantle of an eloquent hypocrite or  
 even  
 the rod of a joyful youth, or become so  
 empty  
 at the end, that only in the echo  
 of foreign tongues would it find its roots.  
 Your sons, Oh Goddess, miserly with your  
 honor, did not  
 carry it through the streets and markets, but  
 they cultivated it  
 in the breast's inner chambers.  
 And so you did not live on their lips.  
 Their life honored you. And you live still in  
 their acts.  
 Even tonight, sacred divinity, I heard you.  
 Often the life of your children reveals you,  
 and I introduce you as the soul of their acts!  
 You are the lofty meaning, the true faith,  
 which, divine when all else crumbles, does  
 not falter.

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Translation from Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: the Place of Negativity*, translated by Karen Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 7-9, © 2006 University of Minnesota Press, [http://www.upress.umn.edu/Books/Agamben\\_language.html](http://www.upress.umn.edu/Books/Agamben_language.html).



Remains of the main entrance to the Sanctuary at Eleusis. Note the grooves in the stone floor where the doors to the temple opened and closed thousands of times over the millennia. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Georg Hegel, *Eleusis*, in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, translated by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6-9. Available at <http://content2.wuala.com/contents/nappan/Documents/Agamben,%20Giorgio%20-%20Language%20.pdf>.

Our origins are Egyptian,  
 Brahmanic, issued of the Mysteries  
 of Eleusis and Samothrace, the  
 Mages of Persia, the Pythagoreans,  
 and the Arabs."

— Michael Maier, seventeenth  
 century physician and  
 alchemist when speaking  
 about the Rosicrucians

