

From Kant to Hegel and Back again – The Move Towards Detranscendentalization

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We could describe the history of the most interesting currents of post-Hegelian philosophy as a movement towards detranscendentalizing the knowing subject, in one version or another. But we would not include Hegel in that movement in spite of the fact that nobody did more to set the stage for it. Hegel was the first to put the transcendental subject back into context and to situate reason in social space and historical time. Humboldt, Peirce, Dilthey, Dewey, Cassirer, and Heidegger are among those post-Kantian philosophers who were or, if we think of Wittgenstein, could have been influenced by Hegel in their attempts to treat language, practice and historical forms of life as dimensions of the symbolic embodiment of reason. In his Jena period, Hegel did in fact introduce language, work and symbolic interaction as media through which the human mind is formed and transformed. Considering Hegel's notion of spirit, it is difficult to understand why we are hesitant to describe Hegel as a protagonist of detranscendentalization. One might suppose, perhaps, that his rationalism separates him from the following generations. But though linguistic philosophy, pragmatism, and historicism undermined the status of a noumenal subject beyond space and time, they do not necessarily lead to the kind of contextualism that has given rise to the familiar debates concerning the ethnocentricity or incommensurability of rationality standards.

There are, of course, many points of view from which we might draw a line between the 'last metaphysician', or the speculative, idealist and monist thinker, on one side, and those who came after and who could no longer make sense of the conception of an absolute spirit, on the other. But we might equally stress the many affinities that run across 'The revolutionary Break in the 19th century's Philosophical Thought'.¹ From this point of view, it is mentalism that stands out as the real watershed separating Kant and Fichte from Hegel and those who followed in his footsteps of detranscendentalization. I would like to take up once again² Hegel's attempt to criticize and transcend the mentalist frame. I would also like to consider why he gambled away what, from hindsight at least, appear to be his original gains. In doing so I shall focus on what Michael Theunissen has aptly called the 'repressed intersubjectivity' in Hegel,³ but this time from an epistemological angle.⁴

A rough sketch of what I understand by 'mentalism' and its 'transcendental' turn will allow us (in section I) to distinguish between the problematic meaning of self-reflection, which is constitutive for the mentalist paradigm as such, and

three inconspicuous modes of self-reflection that are independent of the conceptual frame of mentalism. The rational reconstruction of necessary subjective conditions of experience, the critical dissolution of illusions about oneself, and the decentring of one's own perspectives for the sake of moral self-determination are such paradigm-neutral types of self-reflection. The second part (II) deals with what Hegel regards as the misleading dualisms of the 'philosophy of reflection' and why he thinks there is no need to bridge any gap between the mental and the physical, the sphere of our consciousness and the sphere of what we are conscious of. In his accounts the knowing subject 'always already' finds itself 'with its other'. In his post-mentalist conception of subject-object-relations, Hegel is also motivated by the key idea in the rising *Geisteswissenschaften* – the idea of Geist or spirit. It is this concept that underlies the contemporary articulations of the historicity of the human mind, the objectivity of its manifestations, and the individual features of actors and their contexts. The third and main part of section (III) is devoted to the media of language, work and mutual recognition which are supposed to anticipate and structure all actual relations that the knowing, acting or interacting subject can ever enter into with its other. The love-relationship provides the first pattern of mutual recognition and is moreover an important exemplification of the interpenetration of the universal, the particular and the individual, i.e. of what becomes the logical form of any totality, the 'concrete universal'. In the following section (IV) I will treat the dialectics between Master and Slave (in the *Phenomenology*) as an introduction to the intersubjective constitution of objectivity. Our knowledge of the objective world has a social nature. Hegel counters the resultant temptations of historicism, however, by attempting to justify the modern form of thought as resulting from a history of reason. In this context Hegel relies on still another mode of self-reflection, let us call it ethical self-reflection. Finally (V) I will turn to the question of why Hegel did not consider an alternative strategy that was now open to him. On the basis of what later became a pragmatist and intersubjectivist model of self-consciousness, Hegel could have advanced a post-mentalist conception of the self-justifying culture of the enlightenment.⁵ But he conceived the modern self-critical and self-determining spirit which he so powerfully described as rejecting everything not authorized by its own standards only as a stage on the way from objective to absolute spirit. And this led him to fall back on the mentalist conception of self-reflection which he had so harshly criticized earlier. The knowing subject, assuming now the shape of 'absolute spirit', internalizes, as a conceptual dynamic occurring within itself, what previously had been external differences between subject and object, mediated by language, work and mutual recognition.

I

(1) The simple term 'mentalism' conceals an incredibly complex history of thought that stretches at least from Descartes to Kant, and from Fichte via Sartre

to contemporaries like Roderick Chisholm and Dieter Henrich.⁶ Without entering at all into this discourse, I want only to recall in broad brush-strokes the constitutive elements of the conceptual frame that Kant inherited and transformed.

(a) The epistemological turn that we connect with Descartes starts from the question of how we can reassure ourselves that we are at all capable of achieving knowledge. This leads to a new conceptualization of knowledge in terms of a subject's possession of 'ideas' of objects. The innovation is indicated by the third term, *idea* or 'representation', that now mediates between the knowing subject and the world. While the subject is one who has representings of objects, the world contains everything that can be represented by a subject for itself.

(b) The knowing subject is identified with a self or an ego. This conception of self-reference has major implications; it allows for an answer to the epistemological question of how we can acquire second-order knowledge of how we gain first-order knowledge of objects. This is possible in virtue of self-reflection, reflection on myself as a subject having ideas or representations of whatever objects. In representing my representings, I disclose an internal space, called subjectivity. Thus, the sphere of consciousness is intertwined with self-consciousness right from the beginning.

(c) Self-reflection or apperception is at first taken to be an inconspicuous act that could give a clear epistemic meaning to the ancient ethical imperative 'know thyself'. This epistemological notion of self-reflection suggests a dualist paradigm of subject-object relations which can be spelled out in three basic assumptions:

– Via introspection, the knowing subject has privileged access to its own more or less transparent and incorrigible ideas which appear in the mode of immediate evidence.

– This self-reflexive awareness of our own representings opens the way to a genetic account of the roots of our mediated knowledge of objects.

– Since the roots of knowledge in subjectivity can be grasped by introspection, and since the assessment of knowledge depends on tracing its subjective roots, the intended kind of reassurance is based on the concept of truth as subjective evidence or certainty.

(d) These assumptions – the myth of the given, the search for origins, and the idea of truth as certainty – articulate the conception of 'the mental' as distinguished from 'the physical'. There are three intuitive oppositions underlying this distinction. The mental is circumscribed by a boundary, drawn from the first-person perspective, between what is 'inside' and what is 'outside' of my consciousness, or between ego and non-ego. This coincides with two further delimitations: the boundary between what is immediately given and what is given in an indirect way, the private and the public realm; and the boundary between what is certain and what is uncertain, the incorrigibly true and the fallible.

Of course, this separation of the knowing subject from the sphere of its objects stimulates questions about the interaction between one side and the other, in particular the classical epistemological questions about the origin of knowledge and the direction of fit and influence. Empiricism and rationalism answered the question of origin in favour of knowledge a posteriori and knowledge a priori respectively; while the answers to the question of causal direction, developed in the realist and idealist traditions, were in favour, respectively, of the receptivity and the spontaneity of the human mind.

(2) This is the baseline for a brief characterization of the transcendental turn in epistemology that challenged Hegel to move in the opposite direction of detranscendentalizing the knowing subject. In a nutshell: Kant started from the idea that the knowing subject determines the conditions under which it can be affected by sensory input. The world of objects of possible experience is the product of the world-making spontaneity of a subject that is neither passively exposed to causal stimulation by a contingent environment nor capable of producing a world of its own just by fiat. The knowing subject is conceived as an operating subject that frames 'with perfect spontaneity an order of its own according to ideas, to which it adapts the empirical conditions' (A 548f.).

The activity of projecting or of 'constituting' a world of possible objects evinces aspects of both dependence and freedom⁷ – the freedom for cognitive legislation of a finite mind that must respond to a constraining reality. Guided by totalizing ideas, the correct representation of objects of experience results from an interplay between understanding and sensibility. Kant gives a genetic account of how the transcendental subject determines the conditions of what for it can appear as something in the objective world. The spontaneous mind is said to process the content it has received via sensory experience by conceptually forming the sensory raw material, thereby bringing unity and universality to the manifold of numerous disordered particulars. The interaction of the knowing subject and the world is thus again explained in terms of oppositions: spontaneity vs. receptivity, form vs. matter, the universal and synthesized vs. the particular and multiple.

These dualisms indicate how Kant wishes to solve a problem that he inherits from the mentalist paradigm, one that establishes the contrast between a representing subject and a world of objects offered for representation. At the same time, he also inherits those unanalyzed notions of subjectivity and self-reflection that are constitutive for the mentalist frame. The concept of transcendental apperception – the simultaneous awareness of myself as the subject of all my ideas – still relies on the same intuition that Leibniz had connected with the term 'apperception'. It is not until Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* that the confusing implications of this notion come to the fore. If the representation of an object is the only mode in which we can gain knowledge, a self-reflection that operates as a representation of my own representings could not but turn the transcendental spontaneity that escapes all objectification into an object.

(3) However, we must carefully distinguish this paradigm-specific notion of self-reflection from other, paradigm-neutral types of self-reflection. In Kant, we find at least three such types which are independent of the mentalist frame:

– In the Transcendental Analytic of his first *Critique* Kant is mainly engaged in making explicit those rules in accordance with which the knowing subject determines the objectivity of what it takes to be an experience. This kind of transcendental reflection is what we might call a rational reconstruction of the necessary presuppositions of observational judgements. (In the context of genetic epistemology, Jean Piaget even conceives this type self-reflection as a learning mechanism; he attributes the operation of what he calls ‘reflecting abstraction’ to the mind of the developing child itself.)

– In the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* Kant makes a different use of self-reflection. Here his aim is to make us aware of unconscious reifications that result from a misleading application of categories like substance or causality beyond the limits of experience. Kant generally understands the dissolution of an illusionary self-understanding as a process of enlightenment that leads to a loss of naïvety, rather than to progress in knowledge. He further stresses the internal relation between this type of critical self-reflection and emancipation. (In a clinical context, Sigmund Freud places this critical analysis of what remains unconscious for us in the service of therapeutic ends.)

– In his second *Critique* Kant appeals to self-reflection in still another sense, when he distinguishes ‘Wille’ from ‘Willkür’, the free will of the moral person from the rational choice of an independent actor. The categorical imperative binds us to reflect upon our choice of maxims in the light of an impartial consideration of the compatibility of our decisions with what everyone could will. The associated concept of self-legislation reveals another specific relation between self-reflection and freedom. While self-reflection plays an epistemic role in the two operations just mentioned, it here operates as part of practical reason.

II

(1) Hegel is convinced that the classical epistemological questions of origin and direction of fit and Kant’s dualist responses to them arise only from mentalist premises that are mistaken to begin with. To displace them, he (a) analyzes the problem of the ‘thing in itself’ that stems from Kant’s specific view of the interaction between understanding and sensibility, and then (b) attacks the underlying opposition between subject and object that forms the core of mentalism.

(a) The assumption that objective experience and true judgement result from the contributions of two independent sources, spontaneous understanding (guided by ideas) and receptive sensibility, leads Kant to the distinction between a phenomenal world and the ‘thing in itself’. In the course of his

career, Hegel refers again and again to an obvious problem widely debated at the time: How can we at all know and conceptualize a reality that is supposed to be prior to any experience and to escape all our concepts? How can Kant say of such an inaccessible reality that it 'affects' our senses, if the concept of causal influence – like all concepts of the interaction, cooperation or combination of spontaneity and receptivity – belong only to one of the two sides, namely to the categorizing activity of understanding? The paradox of conceiving the inconceivable applies to the related dualisms of form and matter (or scheme and content) and of the universal and the particular (or the one and the many).⁸ It is only in such polar pair-concepts that the given material not yet structured, the unrepeatable token not yet integrated in a rule-system, or the multiplicity lacking any order and unity, are conceived as something prior to any conceptualization. What is said to be given and found, or to be particular and manifold, is as much a conceptual matter as what is made, generalized and synthesized.

Hegel's response is to develop a self-reflexive notion of the inescapable conceptual medium in which both subject and object, as well as the way they relate to one other, must be conceived. He develops an account of the nature of concepts which makes them no longer coextensive with concepts and conceptual operations located in the minds of single subjects.

(b) The mentalist concept of a bounded, self-contained subjectivity is the main target of Hegel's attacks in his Jena lectures. It is that conception from which all the oppositions I have mentioned derive: inside vs. outside, private vs. public, immediate vs. mediate, and self-evident vs. fallible. Hegel's aim is to set aside these contrasts and to free the essentially practical spontaneity of the transcendental subject from the prison of self-enclosed interiority of an ego narcissistically aware of its own operations. Hegel instead describes the subject as involved in processes and embedded in contexts that anticipate the possibilities of, and provide the links for, any actual subject-object-relation. The subject finds itself already connected with an environment and functioning as a part of it. Hegel flatly denies that the knowing, speaking or acting subject has to **bridge** an original gap between itself and the 'other'. A subject that is always already linked to the world does not need to be compensated for an original lack of connection. It is at the same time inside and outside of itself. Speakers and actors find themselves in the course of established performances and practices, while their perceptions and judgements are shaped by conceptual networks in advance. A subject cannot be with itself before being with an other, so that self-awareness emerges only from encounters with others.

This crucial experience is not only an epistemological insight; it is also the key to Hegel's normative concepts of love – *Bei-sich-selbst-sein im Anderen* – and freedom – *Im Anderen bei-sich-selbst-sein*.⁹ The core intuition is, however, developed from a critique of the mentalist conception of a representing consciousness cut off from, and opposed to, the world of representable objects. Against the mentalist conception of subject-object relations Hegel maintains:

It is entirely misleading in the case of empirical intuition, as in the case of memory or conceptualization, to regard these moments of consciousness as composed of the two sides of the opposition, each contributing a part to the resulting unity, and to ask what is the active element in each part of the compound.¹⁰

In regard to the controversy between realist and idealist interpretations, Hegel adds that this misleading discussion should rather be focused on those 'media' that structure the coordination of subject and object prior to the actual relations they enter into. Subject and object are *relata* that exist only with and in their relations, so that the intermediary can no longer be conceived in mentalist terms. Hegel nevertheless uses the general term 'spirit' for the media of language, work and mutual recognition which he selects for closer analysis between 1803 and 1805: 'We should really speak neither of such subjects, nor of such objects, but of *Geist*.'¹¹

(2) The choice of the term '*Geist*' reminds us of the origin and rise of the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' after 1800. Though the great works of the founding fathers – of Leopold Ranke, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, Carl von Savigny and the others¹² had not yet been published, a new historical consciousness and a philosophy of historicism already formed a background for the emerging disciplines that would revolutionize the classical concept of the humanities in the course of Hegel's life-time. They were already manifest in the earlier works of Justus Möser, Gottfried Herder and Johann Georg Hamann, of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm v. Humboldt, and Friedrich Schlegel.¹³ With this historical mode of thought, three dimensions gained philosophical significance for the first time: (a) the historicity of the human mind, (b) the objectivity of symbolic forms and (c) the individuality of actors and their historical contexts. This shift was relevant to Hegel's concept of 'objective spirit' which pointed the way out of the mentalist *cul-de-sac*.

(a) The new historical consciousness¹⁴ soon reached philosophy and took hold of its self-understanding. Philosophy had to face the problem of a two-sided finitude of the human mind, which now appeared as determined not only by its confrontation with the contingent stimuli of nature but also by the shaping constraints of historical contingencies. The noumenal status of a transcendental subject beyond space and time is now challenged by changes that affect our view of the world and our self-understanding not only from without, through sensory channels, but through the communication of meanings which indirectly shape the mind. With this shift, the classical epistemological question is transformed into the issue of historicism. A philosophy that becomes aware of its own place in history encounters a different sort of scepticism. That is why Hegel feels the need to come to grips with an unsettling modernity and to grasp his time in thought. Once we recognize the historical origin and background of our standards of rationality, we have to justify them by means of a genetic

account tracing the path of consciousness through history. In the light of such a history of reason, we must convince ourselves that we came to accept our present standards as a consequence of learning how to correct past mistaken views.

(b) The most significant feature of the historical world is the symbolic structure of what actors, speakers and believers intersubjectively share: world-views, mentalities and traditions, values, norms and institutions, social practices and, more generally, cultural forms of life. These phenomena make up the object-domain of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. They also highlight the media through which a socio-cultural life-world is reproduced – language and communication, purposive action and cooperation. It is to Hegel's credit that he discovered the epistemological relevance of language and work. He uncovered in them the 'spirit' that mediates the knowing subject with its objects in ways that undercut any dualist description. Language and work provide media in which the internal and external aspects, split by the mentalist approach, now merge. This also sheds a different light on the practical nature of the transcendental subject. The synthesising activity that was supposed to operate within the boundaries of subjectivity is now unbound and spills over into public space:

The speaking mouth, the labouring hand, even the legs if you will, are the actualizing and accomplishing organs which embody the act as act, or what is inward, in themselves. The externality which the act acquires through them makes it a reality separated from the individual. Language and labour are forms of expression in which the individual no longer contains and possesses himself within himself, but allows the inward to become completely external, and surrenders it to the other.¹⁵

The internal is externalized in a symbolic medium that stretches beyond the boundaries of subjectivity. In the spoken word and in the performed action there remains no opposition between inside and outside. Compared to mental episodes and observable events, these objectifications are the persisting elements that, in virtue of their symbolic medium, gain independence even from the intentions of speakers and actors and from their incidental manifestations.

(c) In addition to the historicity and the peculiar objectivity of symbolic forms there is one additional feature of cultural phenomena that – notwithstanding Leibniz's *Monadology* – was never previously captured by philosophy: individuality. This feature distinguishes man even from higher animals which reproduce their lives only as examples of a species:

What the individual does for himself immediately becomes something done for the whole species... and in the same way the being and activity of the whole species becomes the being and activity of the individual.

Animal selfishness is immediately unselfish, and selflessness, the cancellation of the particularity of the individual, immediately benefits the individual.¹⁶

Animals lack an awareness of themselves as individuals, while humans gain the specific self-understanding of persons who relate to each other as Ego and Alter, and who form communities while retaining a consciousness of absolute individuality. Once history – the sphere in which subjects encounter one other – advances to philosophical relevance, philosophy faces the task of differentiating carefully between particularity and individuality.

Observers identify particular entities, of certain kinds, under specifying descriptions, and thus distinguish them from other particulars. But the identity of persons also depends on their self-descriptions. Persons distinguish **themselves** from all other persons through the self-attribution of a unique life-history. They can present themselves with reference to a life-project of their own, and can raise the claim to be recognized by others – as this individual.¹⁷ The individual character of communicating and interacting persons is, moreover, mirrored in the specific features of the social practices and cultural forms they share with others. Hegel was the first philosopher to be acutely aware of the challenge posed by this fact. All historical phenomena participate more or less in the dialectical structure of those networks of mutual recognition, within which persons become individuated through socialization. Since Hegel recognizes intersubjectivity as the core of subjectivity, he also realizes the subversive implications of the mentalist move to identify the knowing subject with an ego.

'I understand myself simultaneously as *'Person überhaupt'* and as *'unverwechselbares Individuum'*. I am a person in general, sharing personhood – the constitutive features of knowing, speaking and acting subjects – with everyone else, but I am also an unmistakably unique individual who is shaped by, responsible for, and irreplaceable in a unique life-history. At the same time I have come to understand myself as being both person and individual only by growing up in a particular community. And communities essentially exist in the form of networks of mutual recognition among members. Members recognize each other in their roles as persons and individuals as well as members. It is this intersubjective structure of communities that informs Hegel's logical conception of totality as a 'concrete universal'. With genus, species and *ens singularis*, traditional logic provided a division of terms that raises 'particularity' above the bottom level of concrete entities to a somewhat higher level of abstraction and thus located the 'particular' between the 'universal' and the 'individual'. In some contexts the particular then gained the connotation of the typical. But before Hegel, the term 'individual' was never endowed with the strong meaning of a completely individuated human being. He is the first to correlate those logical categories with the three dimensions of the social infra-structure of mutual recognition, by which members recognize each other as members of a particular group, as persons sharing their personhood, and as individuals deserving to be treated as distinct from all other individuals. Particularistic relations among members of a specific community

interpenetrate with universalistic relations among individual persons who owe each other equal respect and concern in view of both the common humanity shared by all and the absolute difference of each from everyone else.

III

(1) The cultural and academic background of the period helps us to understand how Hegel's general concept of spirit springs from the idea of an 'objective' spirit that reaches beyond the minds of single subjects, while connecting and encompassing them. It is between 1803 and 1805 that Hegel brings this concept to bear on the epistemological question of how the spirit anticipates and structures relations between the knowing subject and its objects. In his Jena lectures that pave the way for a transition to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), the concept of 'spirit' is explained in terms of the mediating functions of language, work, and mutual recognition. While the conscious subject and the object the subject is conscious of, are still distinct from each other, they are brought together by, or within, 'third' or 'middle' elements, while at the same time contributing to the reproduction of these 'media': 'their unity appears as a middle between them, as the work of both, as the third element to which they are related and in which they are one'.¹⁸ It is in the manifestations of language and work that a consciousness comes to exist: 'That first bound existence of consciousness as middle is its being as language and as tool...'.¹⁹ Hegel pursues the formation of the single mind in its confrontation with nature before he deals with family, society, and state, or more abstractly with the intersubjectivity of social interaction as the proper sphere of objective spirit. Language is presented as the medium through which theoretical consciousness develops (a), and work as the medium through which practical intelligence develops (b). The results of these developments – descriptions of nature and tools as efficient means for mastering it – can however persist only in the horizon of an intersubjectively shared world. They then form parts of the culture of a community or of the material infra-structure of a society (c).

(a) The role of what Hegel calls in these Jena lectures 'the media' is best illustrated by language, 'the first creative energy of spirit'.²⁰ Focusing on the cognitive function of representation, Hegel first analyzes language from a semantic point of view. It is in the form of language that sensations assume the conceptual structure of perceptions, memories, and judgements: 'Consciousness (organizes itself) in language as the entire domain of the ideal.'²¹ Through the medium of language the mind is internally connected with what it conceives as something beyond or outside of itself. The distinction between the representing subject and the object of representation is 'superseded' in so far as the subject's activity results from the 'name-giving' or conceptualizing force of language, while the represented object is singled out and taken up by the name and concept given to it. The knowing subject moves from the start within a horizon of possible experience that is

disclosed for it by language. There is no base of sheer sensory input prior to, and devoid of, symbolic mediation.

Hegel destroys the myth of the given through an analysis of the material implications of words and sentences. A language articulates in advance the conceptual space of possible encounters with anything in the world. The particular item of a concrete experience, say something blue, is implicitly related to the abstract notion of colour and located somewhere on the scale of colours. I know that the blue object I see over there is a coloured thing that is neither green nor red nor yellow, that is lighter than violet and darker than orange.²² Because my linguistic knowledge organizes my actual perception, I cannot perceive anything without integrating it in a conceptual network. This is why Hegel connects language with memory as he will connect work with tools. The animal's consciousness of fleeting images is transformed into the fixed order of names, so that the human mind must learn to remember names: 'The exercise of memory is therefore the first activity of the awakened mind.'²³ We will see below that only the collective memory of a people, in the form of shared traditions, keeps and transmits the knowledge and the view of the world gathered by individual minds.

(b)What language in its cognitive function provides for the knowing subject, work provides for the actor. Hegel conceives of work as purposive intervention in the world by which actors realize their ends and satisfy their needs. Practical intelligence becomes manifest in and gains existence through work. As in the case of language, 'mediation' is again meant to set aside the mentalist suggestion of a gap to be bridged. A subject engaged in working does not first gaze at an object with which she then has to get into contact. An actor who wishes to cope with reality assumes a performative attitude towards what happens to her in the world. Work is conceived as a performance. And in view of the performative aspect of practice, the problem of how the actor establishes contact with an object, call it the problem of reference, cannot arise at all. Work is a complex process into which reality enters in an indirect way. As long as an established practice works, reality 'goes along' with it. If it fails, a resisting reality 'objects to' expectations from within our practice on conditions settled by our own engagement. An actor is always already with its other.

What the worker has learned in the process of coping with reality congeals in the tools he invents for extending his control over nature. The tool is what survives the vanishing moments of actual intervention and satisfaction: 'The tool is the existing, rational middle ... It is that in which labour acquires permanence, that which alone remains of the worker and what was worked on, and in which their contingency is externalized.'²⁴ The symbolic content of words and sentences enjoys a peculiar independence from the actual utterances of individual speakers. This objectivity of linguistic meaning finds its counterpart in the objectivity of a technology that accumulates the experience and knowledge of former generations. With a view to the mechanical loom of his time, Hegel even anticipates the automation of industrial work: 'Here the drive withdraws entirely from labour; it allows nature to work against itself, looks calmly on, and controls the whole process with little effort – artfulness.'²⁵

(c) The mediating role of language and work undermines the mentalist conception of subject-object relations. However, as long as the analysis focuses on the theoretical and practical consciousness of a single subject in confronting nature, the specific meaning of 'objectivity' – of the supra-individual status that language and work, memory and tool occupy – still remains unclear. Language can assume communicative functions and carry on traditions only within a community of speakers. And only within a cooperating society that allows for a social division of labour can technology assume its proper role. In virtue of their contributions to a shared view of the world and a common form of life, both become parts of what Hegel calls objective spirit or 'Volkgeist'.²⁶ The collective spirit embodied in a community is as much 'objective' as it is intersubjectively shared by members who live from the same traditions and participate in the same practices. What is in need of explanation is, therefore, this sense of 'sharing' or 'having in common'. What does it mean to say that we share the meaning of a tradition or engage in a common practice?

Hegel's preferred mode of explanation refers to various forms of mutual recognition. From early on, he chooses 'being in love with and being loved by somebody' as a key to analyzing the modern version of the classical Aristotelian notion of ethical life. In a love relationship, the object of recognition is the character and natural individuality of an entire, sexually attractive person. The passionate relation itself is described as 'being for the other' (*Sein für Anderes*) which gives the lover in turn 'the satisfaction of having one's own essence in the other'. In a symmetrical relation the point of mutual recognition is that the two persons involved seem to sacrifice their independence; but in fact each gains a new kind of independence by coming to recognize, in the mirror of the eyes of the other person, who he or she is. Both become for themselves the kind of characters they mutually attribute to each other. Both gain awareness of their individuality by seeing their own images reflected in the dense and deep exchange of an intimate interpersonal relation.

The general structure of mutual recognition can be read off from this modern, obviously romantic model. The two lovers encounter each other simultaneously as same and different. Only as persons different from each other do they attract one another, become united as equals in their love: '(In love) each is like the other in the very same respect in which each is opposed to the other. In differentiating himself from the other each also equates himself with the other.'²⁷ While recognizing their different characters, they also recognize each other as equal persons, each with a will of his or her own. But one aspect is still missing. The fleeting relation in which the lovers recognize each other as equal and different can be maintained only within a broader and stabilizing context of reciprocal normative expectations. This means that the two must also recognize each other as members of a community – at first of a family, in which rights and duties crystallize around socialization and material reproduction, the education of the child and property or income.

Relations that are constitutive for the intersubjectivity of sharing a world-view and having a form of life in common thus develop in three dimensions of mutual

recognition. They obtain among members who know themselves as members but accept each other also as persons who are equal and different at the same time. I will leave aside the details of the two additional patterns that Hegel takes from modern private and public law, contractual relations between legal persons and self-legislation among citizens of a constitutional state.²⁸ The recognitive structure remains the same, while the self-understanding and the meaning of freedom that the parties gain by their mutual attributions and confirmations undergo change. Under private law persons mutually recognize their legally constructed liberties; whereas citizens, under a constitutional regime, recognize each other as authors and members of a self-determining political community, which realizes the spirit of a particular people in the ethical form of civic solidarity. For Hegel the '*Geist eines Volkes*' means 'universality in the complete freedom and independence of the individual.'²⁹

(2) One can well understand why the structure of mutual recognition offers itself as an explanation of what it means to share a view or to participate in a common practice. A successful analysis of the constituent features of the intersubjectivity of possible encounters among speaking and acting subjects would clarify the pragmatic frame for the communicative use of language and for any social practice. But it is far from clear what it might contribute to a revision of mentalist epistemology. We can draw different epistemological conclusions from what we have discussed so far.

One side might argue as follows. 'Language' and 'work' are understood as manifestations of spirit. The unifying achievements of 'spirit' are best analyzed in terms of structures of mutual recognition. How language and work mediate between the knowing and acting subject and its objects should, therefore, be interpreted in terms of 'sharing' traditions and 'joining' in a common life. That would require an explanation of the 'objectivity' of spirit in terms of the 'intersubjectivity' of a shared social world. The epistemological problem of overcoming the mentalist gap would then be solved by an assimilation of subject-object relations to intersubjective relations. The contextualized and performative familiarity of 'being with the other' that precedes any distancing of the language user or worker from nature is understood as being similar to the intimacy created by a close and symmetric interpersonal relation, where each reaches an awareness of himself only by being with, in, and for the other.

The other side might propose the weaker interpretation I have favoured so far. We realize why 'language' and 'work' can do the job of mediation between subject and object, if we keep in mind that the model of a single subject confronting the objective world abstracts from a background that is only subsequently made explicit. Hegel at first attributes theoretical and practical consciousness to a single subject, while ignoring the fact that this subject must have been socialized in the communicative and cooperative practices of a community. In virtue of this implicit context, the actual perception of any object is already made to fit the categorical network of a linguistically disclosed world; so that oppositions between the general and the particular or between

the one and the many can figure only as contrasts within, and not as Kantian dualisms reaching beyond, the available conceptual space. Similarly, a worker facing a constraining reality within an established form of social practice, benefits from a pre-established contact with that reality; so that the oppositions between spontaneity and receptivity, form and matter appear as intrinsically related performative aspects of an integrated enterprise, and not as puzzling dualisms.

However, this reading works only on the premise that the structure of mutual recognition fulfills a specific epistemic role. For a language to be shared and a social practice to be joined one condition must be met. Participants who find themselves related to one other in an intersubjectively shared life-world must at the same time presuppose – and assume that everybody else presupposes – an independent world of objects that is the same for all of them. A view cannot be shared if it is not a view of or about something obtaining in ‘the’ world, and a practice cannot be performed in common if it is not situated in what obtains in ‘the’ world, meaning that it is one and the same world for everybody. The relations of mutual recognition that are constitutive for the intersubjectivity of a shared world-view and a life in common must also account for what is taken as the objective world of things and events, which we might possibly ‘grasp’ in the cognitive or practical sense of the word.

IV

(1) An intersubjective constitution of the objective world looks like the reversal of a problem that Husserl failed to solve in his fifth ‘Cartesian Meditation’ – the monadological constitution of intersubjectivity by the transcendental Ego.³⁰ In his analysis of love, as the first model of intersubjectivity, Hegel did not yet have to face this problem. Love is a worldless passion. There is no need to explain why for both partners a world that they perceive from different perspectives appears as the same world. However, once the actors have gained their independence and turn against one other, the issue of the controversial objectivity of the world comes up for the subjects themselves. When he arrives at this point in his Jena lectures, Hegel presents the ‘struggle for recognition’ as an equivalent of Hobbes’ state of nature. The same struggle for recognition appears at a somewhat different place in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There it marks the first transition from ‘Consciousness’ (of the single mind) to the intersubjective constitution of ‘Self-consciousness’: ‘Self-consciousness is in and for itself in so far as, and by virtue of the fact that it is for another which is in and for itself; that is, it exists only as something recognized.’³¹ In the course of a complex struggle for recognition participants are supposed finally to become aware of the mutuality of each’s recognition of the other as a self-conscious being: ‘They recognize each other as mutually recognizing one another.’³²

The explicit topic here is the struggle for a new stage of independence, provoked by the first encounter of one conscious being with another. The moment independent

subjects face one other, they discover the strange fact of a plurality of viewpoints from which people perceive the world differently and pursue various projects of their own. Suddenly each party realizes the monadological past of his own view of the world and now feels the pressure for extending his own perspective so as to incorporate the fact that his opponent acts from a different point of view. What first appears as the practical matter of a power struggle for self-maintenance and for achieving superiority over a resisting will turns out to have epistemic relevance. For each party the struggle aims at confirming those standards by which self-conscious persons, with opinions and projects of their own, take things to be true, reasonable, or efficient, or with which they criticize others for doing so in one way and not another. Terry Pinkard captures the point:

The activity of making knowledge-claims is part of our overall practice of dealing with the world... Since two points of view can clash, there will be problems of conciliating one individual's claims with the conflicting claims of others. But a genuine conciliation could come about only... if they could judge their own claims not completely internally to their own point of view and experience but could judge them in terms of something that would transcend that subjective experience ... Since the objective, impersonal point of view cannot be discovered ... the agents themselves must construct a social point of view.³³

Rather than a power struggle for the end of repression, for emancipation, life and death, the dialectic of recognition between master and slave reflects the social construction of what claims to be an impartial view of 'the' world.

The main argument of this section is to prove that this impartial view is a necessary cognitive condition for the **social constitution** of self-consciousness. Being forced to work for the master, the socially dependent slave finally succeeds in turning the tables, thanks to the cognitive independence he acquires in virtue of what he learns from the work with which he extends his control over nature. The master satisfies his desires by 'having the slave work over the things of the world for him. The slave, however, ... comes to see his own point of view embodied in the artifacts of his work.'³⁴ We must keep in mind here one implication of that close-knit relation in which one gives the commands while the other must follow them. In the master-slave relation the doings of one side are the doings of the other – *das Tun des einen ist das Tun des anderen*. This, then, is the dialectical development of perspectives: Although the slave first makes the master's view of his own, the master, in the course of his interaction with the slave, comes in turn to recognize and acknowledge the elaborations and extensions of their common perspective that, step by step, result from the slave's intelligent interaction with what is thus becoming the same world for both of them.

(2) The section on the Master and the Slave does not quite lead to the anticipated end of a reflexive and mutually symmetrical coordination of subjective perspectives in an impartial point of view. But the intersubjective constitution of

self-consciousness provides a particular experience for both parties: They become aware of the social nature of what they take to be objective knowledge and reasonable arguments. That is to say, a subject cannot achieve self-consciousness without realizing the 'sociality of reason' (Terry Pinkard). What counts as knowledge depends on standards that are not just his or hers. Despite the remaining difference between subjective standpoints, only such intersubjectively binding standards can enable us to develop, from a presumably impartial point of view, the same opinions about the same things we encounter in 'the' world.

This result has three implications. Hegel discusses the first under the title of 'unhappy consciousness'. As soon as we become aware of the social construction of objectivity, scepticism breaks into the confines of the naive, self-centred consciousness. A spiral of self-reflection is set in motion which terminates in the disquieting to-and-fro between our quest for, and our doubt concerning the possibility of, objective knowledge. Though it remains a pervasive feature of modernity, the well-taken *skepsis* in scepticism finally gives way to the assumption of a common human reason that can justify, by its own devices, both an objectifying science of nature and an enlightened mode of ordering social life. Under the title of 'observing reason' Hegel, secondly, discusses the method and limits of an objectifying science of nature. The essence of man escapes any scientific image of man. If science is understood, however, as a historical project, and if the type of rationality expressed in science and enlightenment is seen as part of a historical formation of consciousness, we face the third, and most important, implication. We cannot achieve a genuine self-understanding of the human condition and the human world without some kind of historical or genetic account of our self-justifying culture. This signals a turn from naturalism and from transcendental philosophy, but also from historicism. Reason is not an appropriate object either from a science based on observation, or for the self-reflection of an invariant subjectivity beyond space and time. Nor does a situated reason which tries to understand its own historical genesis lend itself to a simple historical narrative.

We fail to understand the option that Hegel chooses in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* unless we understand the kind of self-reflective strategy he actually pursues. (a) He employs ethical self-understanding, an Aristotelian type of self-reflection that is as independent of the mentalist paradigm as is rational reconstruction or the critique of what remained unconscious. (b) He counters the temptations of historicism by a genetic account of reason which presents the history of reason as a learning process. (c) Following this path, he is, however, led to reconceptualize the subject of this process in a way that amounts to a relapse into the mentalist frame.

(a) In his Jena lectures Hegel shed new light on the practical nature of theoretical reason. Practical intelligence leaves its transcendental confines not only through language and work: the human mind reveals its practical nature by manifesting itself in a social space established by mutual recognition. Spirit is at home in what the members of communities share – the views and practices of their life-world. Intersubjectively shared forms of life are reflected in mentalities and traditions, in the kind of historical formations that Hegel analyzes for

instance under the titles of stoicism, scepticism, enlightenment, etc. In virtue of such historical and symbolic objectifications, spirit is essentially 'objective' spirit. In any case, the subjective mind is led to recognize itself as an abstraction from spirit – from the spirit of a people. Hegel recapitulates this itinerary of self-reflection in the first parts of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Like a biographer, he describes for us, the readers, those shifts in consciousness that are revealed to and suffered by a remembering subject once she becomes involved in auto-biographical self-reflection. The author wants to have his readers learn, through analyzing the memories of the remembering subject, how this subject came, stage by stage, to be convinced of what she now accepts as the valid standards of her understanding of self and world. And since this understanding is shared by us, the author thereby guides his readers to pursue the genesis of what they, too, take to be the standards of rationality.

The expressivist notion of 'spirit' introduces intersubjectively shared forms of life as the point of reference for a self-reflection that follows the pattern of the ethical self-understanding of individuals and communities. This type of first-person (singular or plural) reflection on one's own formation process is meant to clarify questions of identity. The self-critical remembrance of how we came to accept ourselves and to want to be recognized by others as the kind of person or community we are – this ethical self-understanding is to reassure us of our own identity. This self-reflective process requires a unique combination of descriptive and evaluative operations. First introduced by Aristotle under the title of 'phronesis', the most sophisticated analysis is presently offered by philosophical hermeneutics.³⁵ However, for the purposes of giving an account of the history of reason, the hermeneutical appropriation of a classical tradition in which we recognize a spirit of our own provides only an incomplete model. Hegel had to extend the model of ethical self-understanding by replacing the 'self' with something as impersonal as reason. 'Phenomenological' self-reflection comprises a rather complex form of analysis that integrates elements of a rational reconstruction of presuppositions and of the critical dissolution of illusionary self-images with the hermeneutical clarification of modern identity, that is, with a self-awareness of standards appropriate for justifying a shared view of the world and a common form of life.

(b) This detranscendentalizing move towards a retrospective comprehension of how we came to accept those standards by which we presently justify our collective understanding of ourselves and the world is deeply ambivalent. Granted that there is no transcendental consciousness that can self-reflexively, through awareness of its own operations, reveal invariant patterns of reason, we must admit a disquieting fact. Our standards of rationality, which require us not to accept anything as true or binding, efficient or valuable unless it is justified by our own lights, are certainly part of our modern forms of life and internally linked to them. If they were, however, just part of a particular form of life, no genetic account of how people like us, having been socialized in certain ways, came to affirm the prevailing standards, nor any hermeneutic reassurance of our modern identity,

could save our claims of validity from the suspicion of being as context-dependent as those superseded standards. Therefore, Hegel must understand phenomenological reflection differently from sheer ethical self-understanding. He must prove that our standards, and the modern forms of life they are part of, result from what we, from our point of view, can recognize as a process of learning. Hegel conceives of the process by which 'we' have come to accept the standards we now regard as binding and to use the categories we now regard as the right ones, as a convincing curriculum for becoming aware of the ever new presuppositions necessary for coping with what, at each previous stage, had been problems and conflicts overcome and solved in an insightful way.

Even among those who are prepared to follow Hegel's strategy up to this point, the next question divides Hegelians from post-Hegelians: Who is the 'we' that is supposed to learn, and whose or what is the 'spirit' the conceptual genesis of what we are supposed to comprehend self-referentially? Are 'we' the members of Western culture and of everybody who joins us in an inter-cultural discourse on the standards of rationality that have come to prevail today on a global scale? This interpretation would allow for a strictly intersubjectivist approach. Or must we reckon with a spirit that surpasses the modern forms of life, in which it first manifests itself? That spirit is not 'ours' because it is not entirely absorbed in the present set of rational procedures. As part of an encompassing process we, who participate in our reflective practices of reason-giving, would be seized by a wave of conceptual change which carries us away. The modern culture of self-critical enlightenment would then appear as a transitory stage in a process the subject of which reaches intentionally beyond the reflexive consciousness of present generations – with the exception of those philosophers who succeed in occupying a standpoint higher than that of 'us' – who remain tied to the reasonable 'Yes' and 'No' of our peers.

(c) Among Hegel scholars today there is a certain inclination to give the notion of 'absolute spirit' an intersubjectivist reading and to treat it in a deflationist manner. On this reading the absolute spirit is taken to comply with the post-metaphysical insight, 'that it is only the community's linguistic and cultural practices and the socially instituted structures of mutual recognition that provide the grounds for determining who one is.'³⁶ The absolute differs from the objective spirit only by the inclusiveness of the human community that participates in a world-wide religious and philosophical discourse. The nature of this discourse is both ethical and epistemic. The aim is to reflect on 'what people take as definitive grounds for belief and action' and the community is concerned to 'work out the internal requirements of its own reason-giving activity that it sets for itself.'³⁷ This might be a good strategy for exhausting as much of the substance of Hegel's reasoning as we inhabitants of a disenchanted world might be prepared to buy. Moreover, we can thus connect Hegel also with post-Hegelian strands like pragmatism and hermeneutics, linguistic philosophy and philosophical anthropology.

An intersubjectivist reading of 'spirit' remains, however, deficient by Hegel's

own standards, in at least two important and inter-related respects. From the viewpoint internal to any, even the most inclusive community, there remains, first, an unmediated difference between the world we intersubjectively share and the objective world we have to cope with; and there remains, secondly, an unresolved tension between our contestable view of what is rationally acceptable for us and the assumed impartial view of what is unconditionally valid. The lasting difference between intersubjectivity and objectivity cuts in both directions. First, there is no reason why we, the heirs to a sweeping process of secularization, should hope for a deeper understanding of the contingencies of nature 'from within' – why we should succeed in grasping nature not merely by developing hypotheses from observations but by a non-nominalist approach to a presumed essence of, or conceptual structure inherent in, nature. Nor, second, can we break out of the horizon of our language and our reason-giving practices and replace the fallible impartiality, and decentred 'We'-perspective of rational discourse, by the objective point of view of an ideal observer. While we can certainly engage in moves towards transcending our epistemic contexts from within, there is no context of all contexts that we would actually be able to survey.

V

(1) Even the collective spirit of an ideally enlarged community including all human beings would be marked by the finite features and constraints of its intersubjective constitution. Hegel would never have accepted such a deflationary reading of the notion of absolute spirit. Of course, even on the objective idealist reading, transformations occur in the consciousness of individual subjects; it is socialized individuals who go through the learning process which he describes phenomenologically. However, the process appears *as learning* only to the self-critical members of a modern, self-justifying Enlightenment culture. And it is specifically to this audience that Hegel, as an author, directs another of his crucial points: through a **further** shift of perspective from 'for itself' via 'for us' to 'in and for itself', his enlightened contemporaries are supposed to achieve a decisive step **beyond** the modern stage of consciousness. Those to whom Hegel's presentation is addressed are supposed not just to look back on a series of reversals of consciousness which already lie *behind* them; they are supposed to become aware, as if through a form of conversion, of the power of spirit. Like a kind of fate, spirit permeates the sphere of the successive spirits of peoples [*Volksgeister*], in other words the history of intersubjective forms of life. Hegel's expectation that his readers will accept this view marks the high threshold between objective and absolute spirit, which the deflationary reading tries to level out. With this move Hegel strips away from the concept of spirit the traces of origin in the intersubjective forms of objective spirit. Spirit, as it develops, essentially defines itself through its primacy over against nature, and this means ontologically: '*For us* spirit has nature as its precondition, but in fact it is the truth and the *absolute first* of nature.'³⁸

We have followed Hegel through his Jena period, and have emphasized the antimentalistic dimension of his turn away from the philosophy of reflection. But his rejection of the notion of a subjectivity disclosing itself through introspection did not prevent his continuing reliance on other forms of self-reflection. The rational reconstruction of the necessary preconditions of cognitive operations, the critique of unconscious hypostatizations and false self-images, the decentring of self-centred perspectives, the securing of one's own identity – all these achievements are entirely independent of self-reflection in the sense of that representation of one's own ideas which is essential to the mentalistic account of self-consciousness. But at the end of the Jena period the 'self' of an obscure self-consciousness is still the only model which Hegel had available for a higher-level subjectivity to which a higher knowledge could be ascribed. Such knowledge is supposed to be categorically superior to all knowledge emerging from the co-operative quest for truth of participants in the rational discourses of a self-justifying culture.

Absolute spirit embodies and perpetuates the *Tathandlung* [primordial act] of Fichte's self-'positing' ego, since it pervades the processes of natural evolution and world history. Hegel still understands this act, which occurs continuously throughout nature and history, as self-reflection writ large. Its goal is a 'self-comprehending knowledge', which in fact consists in the recollection of all the stations through which self-externalizing spirit has passed in the process of realizing itself as absolute. Hegel says of this 'final shape of spirit' that 'it gives itself its complete and true content also as the form of the self.'³⁹ He employs the concept of subjectivity to conceptualize the return of spirit to itself, the move 'from substance to subject'. But this is the very concept which he himself had so convincingly criticized. Certainly, he cannot have recourse to this model without taking account of his own earlier critique of mentalism.

Previously he had reached the view that the relations between subject and object do not begin from the knowing and acting subject itself, but arise with the prior structures of language, labour and interaction. The inward and subjective surrendered its priority to the external and objective. Being-with-oneself is 'always already' mediated by being-with-the-other. Self-consciousness is formed in relations of mutual recognition between the subjects, each of whom can recognize itself only in the other. The acculturation processes through which subjects emerge have themselves no subject. Originally, the media through which the history of the detranscendentalization of the subject was played out were subject-less subjects – as yet not manifestations of a higher-order subject.

But by the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at the latest, it becomes clear that Hegel was presupposing such a subject as the basis of the history of consciousness. This subject is thought of as the One and All, as the totality which 'can have nothing outside itself'. For this reason, absolute spirit must internalize the shaping processes which were anonymously guided up to that point as the history of its own emergence, thereby restoring the primacy of subjectivity. It can no longer tolerate 'the other of itself' as the constraining opposition of a resistant reality, or as an alter ego with equal rights *external* to itself. It can accept such an other only

within itself, downgraded to the status of raw material for its own process of development. The thorn of alterity, the tension of a distance which is both bridged and maintained, is removed from 'being-with-the-other'. The other is now what is in and for itself one's own, but is encountered in the recollected form of past self-alienations. Hegel identifies this 'other' with what happens in time, with the working out of the movement of the Concept, whereas the absolute self is understood as the Concept which engulfs time within itself, which consumes it, as it were. But this means that the historicity of reason ceases to pose a challenge. At the least, the challenge is blunted if logic once again wins out over history in the traditional way: 'Time is the concept which is there...; this is why spirit necessarily appears in time, [but] it [only] appears in time for as long as it has not comprehended its pure concept, in other words not *abolished* time.'⁴⁰ Spirit, alienated in time, triumphs over time once more. It is the Platonic element which remains identical with itself throughout an eternal coming to be and passing away.

The media of language, labour and mutual recognition, which once testified to an anti-mentalistic turn, either entirely disappear within the developed system, or assume a modest role. *Language* is assimilated to the expressivist model of a body which makes manifest psychological impulses.⁴¹ The notion of the body as a medium of expression which reveals an inner life fits better with the mentalistic image of a subjectivity which must alienate itself before it can recognise itself in its alienated forms of expressions. *Labour* and the *tool* disappear entirely from a 'phenomenology of spirit' which is reduced to a subdivision of the chapter on 'Subjective Spirit' (*Encyclopaedia*, §§ 413–39). These concepts now serve only to explicate the notion of purposive activity as a logical category.⁴² It is true that the *struggle for recognition* appears in the *Encyclopaedia* at the appropriate place. But the intersubjective structure of reciprocal recognition is no longer relevant for the mentalistic account of self and self-reflection, given that in the *Logic* Hegel unfolds the concept in accordance with the model of the 'ego', or of pure self-consciousness.⁴³ Intersubjectivity is repressed from subjectivity, leaving no trace in the presentation of the absolute Idea.

(2) There is an obvious explanation for this reversal. A post-mentalistic conceptual framework, in which an intersubjectively constituted 'objectivity' of spirit would take over the theoretical role of 'subjectivity', cannot satisfy the ambitious demands which Hegel had in mind from the very beginning, in his 'philosophy of unification' (*Vereinigungsphilosophie*).⁴⁴ He always expected philosophy to fulfil the task of reconciling modern human beings both with their objectified inner nature and with a subjugated outer nature, thereby overcoming the alienation of the individual from society. In what was – according to his own lights – a realistic manner, Hegel wanted to restore the fractured ethical world of modernity to the unity and spontaneity of an unimpeded and undamaged flow of life, yet without prejudicing indispensable achievements of subject freedom. Charles Taylor correctly ascribes this intention to Hegel.⁴⁵ This conventional explanation will not disturb anyone who has come to terms with the constellation of postmetaphysical thinking. Even after metaphysics, the speculative interest retains its own

dignity. It would be much more unsettling if Hegel had found difficulties in the intersubjective approach itself. Was there perhaps an **internal** reason which led him in the end to depart from the intersubjectivist track he had started along in Jena? My assumption is that his critical retrospective account of the French Revolution provided a spectacular back-up for his desire to avoid one specific consequence of detranscendentalization.

Setting aside other motivations, Hegel's scepticism about modern forms of 'revolutionary praxis' (Marx) explains why he will not allow the subjectivity of socialized individuals to be exhausted by the reflexive mobility of intersubjectively-shaped forms of consciousness. He wants this subjectivity to be contained in the stabler forms of an objective spirit whose rational substance can be judged only from the viewpoint of absolute spirit (a). But if this rather implausible solution is nonetheless the result of a serious diagnosis, we must pose the question which motivated Hegel's subordination of objective to absolute spirit in a different way. The excessive demands on subjects which the framework of a self-justifying culture structurally generates have preoccupied Right Hegelians right up to the present day (b).

(a) Hegel is convinced that the culture of the Enlightenment reaches its highest stage of moral consciousness in Kant's theory. Although autonomy remains the indispensable criterion of subjective freedom for Hegel, he always regarded the 'moral view of the world' as encouraging the destabilization of ethical relations.⁴⁶ In the relevant passages of the *Philosophy of Right* (§§ 105–56) he shows that a universalistic ethics of duty, which is guided only by the moral standpoint of the generalizability of maxims, tends to hang in mid-air. Of course, Hegel makes no effort to give a fair interpretation of Kant, let alone an intersubjective reading of the principle of universalization, one which might have suggested itself after the detranscendentalization of the noumenal 'ego'.⁴⁷ But three of his objections to the effort of abstraction demanded by ethical formalism still deserve consideration. *Firstly*, such formalism neglects the actual motives and inclinations of morally acting persons. Moral commands do not automatically harmonize with the pre-given preferences or relatively long-term need-dispositions and value-orientations which agents have developed in the course of their socialization. *Secondly*, Kant takes just as little account of the problem of the complexity and unpredictability of the consequences of actions, consequences which are sometimes attributed to actors. In confused, entangled situations good intentions often have bad outcomes. *Thirdly*, formalism has no solution for the problem of the application of general norms to concrete cases – especially when norms which seem equally appropriate at first sight clash with each other.⁴⁸

The thrust of Hegel's arguments is that abstract morality demands too taxing a motivational and cognitive effort on the part of individuals. This shortfall has to be compensated for at the institutional level. Objective spirit must make good what subjective spirit cannot manage alone. Hegel attributes to an ethical life which has become objective: 'an existence which rises above the subjective opinions and preferences of individuals.'⁴⁹ He perceives in the major institutions of

society an actually existing form of reason which reaches beyond the limited horizons of subjective spirit. Institutions coordinate ideas with interests and functions. They harmonize the legitimating *ideas* of the ethical powers both with the *interests* of social members and the *functional imperatives* of a differentiated social system. Through the specification and imposition of concrete duties, institutions relieve the burden on the will and intelligence of overtaxed individuals. On the other hand, individuals should not have to accept anything which they cannot perceive to be justified. The modern state has 'the tremendous strength and depth to allow the principle of subjectivity to reach completion in the self-sufficient extreme of personal particularity, and yet to bring it back to substantial unity.'⁵⁰ This is why Hegel is willing to subordinate subjective spirit to objective ethical life only on condition that institutions have taken on a rational form, measured by the criterion of the realization of equal freedoms for all.

Hegel favours a strong institutionalism, provided the state roughly corresponds to its philosophically developed concept. But as a contemporary of the French Revolution, he is aware of the problem which this condition immediately generates. How are we to define a praxis which does not run along the comfortable tracks laid down by an *existing* constitutional state, but which must cope with the task of bringing rational institutions into existence? In a situation where the liberal mechanisms of a republican community are lacking, effective and inclusive procedures and practices for the legitimation, approval and application of laws have first to be established. But, on Hegel's view, *this* task is too much for politically acting subjects, both as individuals and as a collective. The reasons why he takes this view derive from his critique of Kant's moral theory.

Without the constraining effect of rational institutions, figures such as Robespierre or Fries, the leaders of a revolution or a national movement, will relapse to the stage of abstract moral consciousness. They become entangled in the aporias of a calculated commitment to the *creation* of the conditions under which it would be reasonable to expect people to behave morally. They believe themselves entitled to act strategically, and if necessary even to accept the violation of moral norms, in order to achieve this higher moral goal. This argument is based on a convincing insight. For any such policy threatens to become repressive, to harm the interests of others. It assumes that its own *subjective* anticipation of what it takes to be the good eliminates the need for an intersubjective endorsement which is currently unavailable (and may indeed be impossible in the given circumstances). Such endorsement, however, is the only guarantee of the equal freedom of all. In his reflections on 'Virtue and the Way of the World' Hegel anticipated the debate over what was later to be called 'revolutionary ethics'. The fact that an ambitious praxis which aims at a general transformation of morality can flip over into the terrorism of virtue has been tragically confirmed by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

But this essentially legitimate objection acquires a different value for Hegel. If persons, even in straightforward cases of moral action, need relief from the burdens of decision, then this must apply even more in cases where self-referential moral action is raised to the level of politics. The problem of the overtaxing of

self-determining persons becomes more acute as the problem of the overloading of a culture which seeks to give itself a new ethical basis through the revolutionary transformation of state and society. Hegel responds to this problem with his conviction that history as a whole follows the path of reason. Politically acting citizens can be released from the burden of creating the morally supportive institutions of the constitutional state only by a reason which can realize itself historically through its own dynamic. But this requires the construction of a transition from objective spirit to absolute knowledge. Such a construction has to be able to reassure us that, seen from the standpoint of the philosophy of history, the ethical reality of the modern world is on the way to becoming rational, even without our cooperation. The uncoupling of absolute spirit from objective spirit simultaneously disconnects theory from practice. In this way, assessment of whether and how far the existing institutions are rational becomes a matter for speculative philosophical diagnosis, which always comes too late to teach the world how it ought to be.

(b) From a postmetaphysical point of view, however, we can no longer base our judgements on such an authority. Yet our contemporary Hegelians seem to be in the right, when they regard themselves as the fortunate heirs of a historical process which has established the liberal mechanisms and procedures of a democratic regime on an almost world-wide basis. Certainly, the majority of citizens in the West can feel confident in the view that, at least in their historically favoured regions of the world, constitutions have been effectively established which have made the generations alive today the clear beneficiaries of *existing* institutions and procedures. Citizens of these democratic regimes have been freed from the morally ambiguous exploits of revolutionary avant-gardism, since societies have now become too complex to be radically 'overthrown'. On the other hand, the only thing which has made Hegel's problem more tractable is the fact that the proceduralistic mechanisms of the constitutional state have turned the process of the *realization* of civil rights, through an institutionalized democratic practice of self-determination, into a long-term task. This is a task which, according to Hegel himself, should not even exist.⁵¹

A constitutional state which has become reflexive institutionalizes the constitution as a project. Through the medium of law it internalizes the tension between the subjective consciousness of the citizens and the objective spirit of the institutions. It is this tension which Hegel sought to relieve by subordinating both to absolute spirit. A democratic practice of self-determination does not entirely dissolve this tension, but makes it the driving force behind the dynamics of public communication structured by constitutional norms. Hegel was forced to blame the difference which he perceived between the 'concept' and the 'existing reality' of the state – understood as the 'fetter of something abstract which has not been freed into the concept'⁵² – on the limited subjectivity of overburdened individuals. Nowadays the same dissonances energize the institutionalized clash of opinions, and decision-making processes, within the political public sphere. They are also stimulus for social movements. To the extent that a society becomes capable of acting politically and can shape itself, a democratic constitution *empowers* citizens

to achieve a progressive institutionalization of equal civil rights. Of course, the procedures of the democratic constitutional state can only ever offer good prospects of success, rather than a guarantee, even when they are institutionalized in a favourable environment. But they still give a postmetaphysical answer to Hegel's question concerning the structural overloading of the modern subject. They make possible the radical reformism of a self-transformation of society which is normatively required by the existing constitution itself.

Of course, the conditions for political action must be fulfilled. And this requirement can give rise to doubts about even such a solution. Under the privileged economic and social conditions of the post-war period, the citizens of the OECD countries may in fact have had and used the opportunity to commit themselves to a project which was in *harmony* with the principles of the *existing* constitutional order. This was the project of realizing the equal value of equal liberties for everybody. But Hegel's problem returns in a different form, when we consider those societies where the immaculate wording of the constitution provides no more than a symbolic facade for a highly selective legal order.⁵³ In such countries social reality controverts the validity of norms which cannot be implemented for lack of the material preconditions, and the necessary political will. A similar tendency towards 'Brazilianization' could even grip the established democracies of the West. For even here the normative substance of the constitutional order could be hollowed out. This will happen if we do not produce a new balance between globalized markets and a politics which can extend beyond the limits of the nation state, and yet still retain democratic legitimacy.⁵⁴

My unintended use of the expression 'produce' reminds us once again of the Hegelian problem of excessive demands. Today this problem takes the form of a structural overloading of the democratically-constituted nation state.⁵⁵ A solution can be expected only from a constellation in which the institutionalized principles of an egalitarian universalism could acquire sufficient impetus. The motivational force of social movements would have to combine, in a favourable historical moment, with the intelligence of systems capable of developing through learning. *After* Hegel even philosophical reason, now become fallible, has no better answer. The rose in the cross of the present may have grown pale, but it is not yet completely faded.

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NOTES

- 1 cf. the subtitle of Karl Löwith's famous study (1941).
- 2 Habermas 1974: 142–69.
- 3 Theunissen 1982.
- 4 Habermas 1987: ch. 2.

⁵ Compare the systematic perspective developed in Honneth (1992).

⁶ Frank 1991a: 9–49; and the two readers edited by Manfred Frank: *Selbstbewußtseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre* (1991b); *Analytische Theorien des Selbstbewußtseins* (1994).

⁷ Pippin 1997: 29ff.

⁸ Brandom 1994: 614ff.

⁹ Theunissen 1978: ch. 1.

¹⁰ Hegel 1986: Fragment 20, pp. 203f. ['Es ist vollkommen falsch, in der empirischen Anschauung so wie im Gedächtnis und im Begreifen diese Momente des Bewußtseins zu betrachten als zusammengesetzt aus den beiden Seiten des Gegensatzes, so daß jedes von ihnen einen Teil zu dem Eins beitrage und zu fragen, was in dieser Zusammensetzung das Tätige jedes Teils sei.']

¹¹ Hegel 1986: Fragment 20, p. 205. ['Es muß eigentlich weder von einem solchem Subjekte noch Objekte die Rede sein, sondern vom Geist.']

¹² Rothacker 1948.

¹³ Ott 1991.

¹⁴ Koselleck 1989.

¹⁵ Hegel 1949: 229. ['Der sprechende Mund, die arbeitende Hand, wenn man will auch noch die Beine dazu, sind die verwirklichenden und vollbringenden Organe, welche das Tun als Tun, oder das Innere als solches an ihnen haben; die Äusserlichkeit aber, welche es durch sie gewinnt, ist die Tat als eine vom Individuum abgetrennte Wirklichkeit. Sprache und Arbeit sind Äusserungen, worin das Individuum nicht mehr an ihm selbst sich behält und besitzt, sondern das Innere ganz außer sich kommen läßt, und dasselbe anderem preisgibt.']

¹⁶ Hegel 1986: Fragment 15, p. 182. ['Was das Individuum für sich tut, (wird) unmittelbar ein Tun für die ganze Gattung; ...und ebenso (wird) das Sein und Tun der ganzen Gattung zum Sein und Tun des Individuums; der animalische Eigennutz ist unmittelbar uneigennützig und die Uneigennützigkeit, das Aufheben der Einzelheit des Individuums, unmittelbar Nutzen des Individuums.']

¹⁷ Habermas 1988b: 187–241.

¹⁸ Hegel 1986: Fragment 18, p. 191. ['...Ihre Einheit erscheint als eine Mitte zwischen ihnen, als Werk beider, als das Dritte, worauf sie sich beziehen, in dem sie eins sind.']

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 193. ['Jene erste gebundene Existenz des Bewußtseins als Mitte ist sein Sein als Sprache, als Werkzeug...']

²⁰ Hegel 1987: 175.

²¹ Hegel 1986: Fragment 20, p. 208. ['Das Bewußtsein (organisert sich) in der Sprache zur Totalität des Idealen.']

²² *ibid.*, pp. 202ff.

²³ Hegel 1987: 178. ['Die Übung des Gedächtnisses ist deswegen die erste Arbeit des erwachten Geistes.']

²⁴ Hegel 1986: Fragment 20, p. 211. ['Das Werkzeug ist die existierende, vernünftige Mitte ... Es ist das, worin das Arbeiten sein Bleiben hat, was von dem Arbeitenden und dem Bearbeiteten allein übrig bleibt und worin ihre Zufälligkeit sich verewigt.']

Hegel holds on to this insight; cf. Hegel 1951: 398: 'In this sense the means is something higher than the ultimate aim...; the plow is more noble than immediate enjoyment ... The tool remains, whereas immediate enjoyment fades and is forgotten.' ['Insofern ist das Mittel ein Höheres als die endlichen Zwecke ...; der Pflug ist ehrenvoller als unmittelbar die Genüsse ... Das Werkzeug erhält sich, während die unmittelbaren Genüsse vergehen und vergessen werden.']

²⁵ Hegel 1987: 190. ['Hier tritt der Trieb ganz aus der Arbeit zurück; er läßt die Natur sich abreiben, sieht ruhig zu, und regiert nur mit leichter Mühe das Ganze – List.']

²⁶ On the level of objective spirit Hegel conceives language, following Herder and Humboldt, as the energy that is manifested in the linguistically articulated world-view of a people: 'Language exists only as the language of a people... Language is the ideal existence of spirit, in which it expresses itself, only as the work of a people.' [Hegel 1986: 226. 'Die Sprache ist nur als Sprache eines Volkes ... Nur als Werk eines Volkes ist die Sprache die ideale Existenz des Geistes, in welcher er sich ausspricht.'] Need-satisfaction, work and technology assume an objective shape in the context of a conflict-ridden market society that requires political constraints: 'Need and labour, raised to this level of generality, build up in a great people an immense system of common and reciprocal dependency, a self-moving life of something dead, which shifts blindly and elementally to and fro in its movement and, like a wild animal, requires continuous and strict control and taming.' [Hegel 1986: 230. 'Das Bedürfnis und die Arbeit, in diese Allgemeinheit erhoben, bildet so für sich in einem grossen Volk ein ungeheures System von Gemeinschaftslichkeit und gegenseitiger Abhängigkeit, ein sich in sich bewegendes Leben des Toten, das in seiner Bewegung blind und elementarisch sich hin und her bewegt und als ein wildes Tier einer ständigen strengen Beherrschung und Bezähmung bedarf.']

²⁷ Hegel 1987: 192. ['Jedes ist darin (in der Liebe) dem anderen gleich, worin er sich ihm entgegengesetzt hat. Sein Unterscheiden vom Anderen ist daher ein Sichgleichsetzen mit ihm.']

²⁸ On 'love', 'law' and 'civic solidarity' as the different stages of mutual recognition in Hegel's writings of the Jena period, see Honneth 1992.

²⁹ Hegel 1987: 232. ['Allgemeinheit in der vollkommenen Freiheit und Selbständigkeit des Einzelnen.']

³⁰ Theunissen 1977: ch. VI; Habermas 1984: 35–59; Honneth 1992: 144–55.

³¹ Hegel 1949: 141. ['Das Selbstbewußtsein ist an und für sich, indem und dadurch, daß es für ein anderes an und für sich ist; d.h. es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes.']

³² *ibid.*, p. 143. ['Sie anerkennen sich, als gegenseitig sich anerkennend.']

³³ Pinkard 1994: 57.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁵ Gadamer 1960.

³⁶ Pinkard 1994: 252.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 222, 254.

³⁸ Hegel 1970: § 381. ['Der Geist hat *für uns* die Natur zu seiner Voraussetzung, deren Wahrheit, und damit deren *absolut Erstes* er ist.']

³⁹ Hegel 1949: 556. ['...seinem vollständigen und wahren Inhalt zugleich die Form des Selbsts gibt.']

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 559. ['Die Zeit ist der Begriff, der da ist...; deswegen erscheint der Geist notwendig in der Zeit, (aber) er erscheint (nur) solange in der Zeit, als er nicht seinen reinen Begriff erfaßt, d.h. nicht die Zeit *tilgt*.']

⁴¹ Hegel 1970: § 411 and §§ 458ff.

⁴² Hegel 1951: 'Teleologie', in particular pp. 396ff.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁴⁴ Henrich 1971.

⁴⁵ Taylor 1983.

⁴⁶ Hegel 1949: 424ff.

⁴⁷ Habermas 1991: 9–30.

⁴⁸ Günther 1988.

⁴⁹ Hegel 1953: § 144. ['Ein ... über das subjektive Meinen und Belieben erhabenes Bestehen.']

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, § 260. ['...die ungeheure Stärke und Tiefe, das Prinzip der Subjektivität sich zum selbständigen Extreme der persönlichen Besonderheit vollenden zu lassen und es zugleich in die substantielle Einheit zurückzuführen.']

⁵¹ Habermas 1992.

⁵² Hegel 1953: Preface, p. 16. ['Fessel irgendeines Abstraktums, das nicht zum Begriff befreit ist.']

⁵³ Neves 1998.

⁵⁴ Beck 1997; Beck, ed. 1998.

⁵⁵ Habermas 1998.

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