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Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit

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Text and Running Commentary



IN A PREFACE it is customary to explain the goal which the author has set for himself, the circumstances of his writing, and the way he thinks his work relates to other, earlier or contemporary efforts at treating the same object. But in a philosophical text this custom seems to be not only superfluous, but, by the nature of things, inadequate and contrary to its purpose. For what would be appropriate to say about philosophy in a preface, and in what manner? Roughly, one would give a historical account^o of the work's standpoint and tendency, its general content and results—a conjunction of assertions and assurances^o made here and there^o about what is true; but this cannot be the valid way of exhibiting^o philosophical

Historical account: Meaning a narrative, a storytelling statement, or simply an empirical one. In a preface, all one can do is narrate the author's position "as in a story." Therefore, the general principles themselves appear within a preface as particular claims, lacking justification and severed from their systematic context. Such statements are in fact empirical (another sense of "historical" in Hegel's use) even when their content is philosophical.

Assurances (Behauptungen): Verbal warrants merely, as when saying, "Take it from me, I assure you this is so."

Made here and there: In a preface, one can express only dogmatic statements which, even when true as sentences, are only mere talk and, strictly speaking, because they lack their grounding context, are false (see below).

Exhibiting: The German *darstellen* (and *Darstellung*) acquired a special systematic meaning in Kant, retained by Hegel. The terms indicate the outer expression, indeed translation and transformation, of a rational essence or meaning into a sensual or empirical medium. This idea is best translated as "exhibition"; although "presentation" makes more readable English. (I make this remark once, and may later interchange between these terms as context advises.)

truth. Also, philosophy resides essentially in the element of universality which contains the particular; therefore philosophy, more than other sciences, gives rise to the illusion^o that the matter itself—even in its accomplished essence—is expressed in the goal or final result, in relation to which the development is inessential. Yet, [even] in the common image^o one has of, say, anatomy—roughly, that anatomy consists in knowledge of the body, considered in its nonliving existence—one is convinced that the matter itself, the content of this science, is not thereby possessed, but, in addition, one must take the trouble of dealing with the particular. Further, in such an aggregate of cognitions which has no right to the name of science, there is no difference between a conversation about the goal and similar generalities, and the historical and Conceptless

Gives rise to the illusion: It might create the illusion that what is essential resides only in the final end taken in isolation, while the detailed development is inessential, a mere vehicle which can be disposed of at the end of the road. This is the view of ordinary common sense and also of the formal (and mathematical) Understanding (*Verstand*), as opposed to philosophical Reason (*Vernunft*). In philosophy, the conclusion has neither meaning nor truth-value without the whole context within which it has evolved.

The common image: Literally, “the general image” (*Die allgemeine Vorstellung*). Hegel refers to what the formal understanding calls definition. By using the term *Vorstellung* (representation, image) he indicates that definitions are not genuine *Concepts*; they rather belong to a lower, more external level analogous to an image. Anatomy, for example, is a rationally inferior science, because it grasps a living body as if it were dead, and ignores its organic, dialectical structure. Yet even in anatomy, everyone will admit that a merely general definition of that science is inadequate and teaches us nothing, unless we consider the relevant particulars, namely, the diverse bodily organs. This is even more so in philosophy, which is organic and dialectical at a higher level, because it deals with reason. Nothing actual can be understood in philosophy by mere generalizations. We must observe how the generalization works within the body of the system, and how the particulars which realize it are integrated within the evolving context of the whole.

manner^o in which the content itself—the nerves, the muscles, et cetera—are discussed. In philosophy, however, this would give rise to an incongruity^o that consists in using a way of discourse which philosophy itself shows to be incapable of attaining the truth.

Similarly, to state how a philosophical work sees its relation to other treatments^o of the same object introduces a foreign interest, obscuring that which is important in the knowledge of truth. The more the current opinion^o views the opposition between the true and the false as rigid, the more it expects that every given philosophical system should be either endorsed or contradicted, and takes every explanation of such a system to be only the one or the other. It does not conceive the diversity of philosophical systems

The historical and Conceptless manner: “Historical” indicates here merely empirical, a simple enumeration of particulars lacking a Concept (*Begriff*), in the sense of an organic dialectical structure. Hegel is using the term “Concept” in his own, systematic sense (which is why I capitalize it). The universality of a genuine Concept is neither formed inductively, by abstracting from particulars, nor is it a priori in the sense of being independent of particulars. Rather, the universal Concept is an organic totality in which every particular makes its own contribution to the whole and is constituted by the dialectical movement of all the others. This is Reason’s characteristic structure, as distinguished from the analytical Understanding, which expresses a lower level of rationality.

Incongruity: Anatomy, though its object is organic, is rather an inorganic body of knowledge, and thereby external to its object. This makes it mere talk *about* this object. However, in philosophy, the organic Science of reason, mere talk involves an incongruity, indeed a contradiction, between philosophy’s *own* form of discourse and the form of discourse *about* philosophy.

Other treatments: Other philosophical treatises. In a preface it is customary to compare the author’s views with other writers. In philosophy, that convention may be misleading because it presupposes that every philosophical opinion is either absolutely true or absolutely false. Hegel will criticize this view.

The current opinion (Meinung): “Opinion” here takes the sense of the Platonic *doxa* as distinguished from actual Knowing. Hegel frequently conflates the connotations of “opinion” and “image” (*Vorstellung*). Any sub-Conceptual view of things is an “image” in terms of its cognitive *medium*, and an “opinion” in terms of *epistemic status*.

as the progressive development of truth; it only sees contradiction^o in that diversity. The bud disappears in the eruption of the flower,^o so one could say that the flower contradicts the bud. In a similar way, the fruit declares the flower to be the plant's false existence,^o and steps forward in its place as the plant's truth. These forms are not only distinct; they reject one another as mutually exclusive. At the same time, their fluid nature^o makes them into

It only sees contradiction: The ordinary view of the understanding assumes that any two contradictory claims, or philosophical doctrines, are mutually exclusive. Only one of them can be true, whereas the other is absolutely false. Hegel proposes a different view according to which conflicting philosophical doctrines are all dynamic ingredients or "moments" of a single system of truth, which evolves out of their contradictions. In the fulfilled system, every moment emphasizes a single, one-sided aspect of the overall truth. As such, it is both true and false: false in its one-sided claim to exhaust the whole truth of the subject matter; and true in so far as, liberated from that one-sided pretense, every philosophical doctrine contributes some nuclear, positive content to the evolution of overall truth. Taken as a "moment" of truth rather than its totality, each of the clashing philosophical doctrines has its inner necessity and is dialectically compatible with the others. This Hegelian view of the history of philosophy was in some respects prefigured by Kant (see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], chapter 7).

The bud disappears in the eruption of the flower: Hegel frequently uses images of organic life to illustrate what he means by "dialectical evolution" and the logical relations within it.

Existence: In Hegel's ontology, the term *Dasein* indicates the state of *specified being*, a being which has received some primary characterization, but is still grasped as standing in merely external relations with everything else, and as lacking a rational essence at its ground. Higher than *Dasein* is the stage of *Existenz*, where we grasp the particular empirical existent as expressing a rational essence latent in it. That stage corresponds to the dualistic "Understanding," not yet to the level of "Reason," which rises from existence to actuality (*Wirklichkeit*).

Their fluid nature: By "fluid" (and later "plastic") Hegel does not mean shapelessness, but structured flexibility. It is a nonrigid grid in which every ingredient refers us to all the others in a process of development and self-shaping. Hegel wishes to expose the same kind of structure within

moments^o of an organic unity, in which they not only do not struggle with each other, but one is as necessary as the other; and only this equal necessity constitutes the life of the whole. However, the contradiction^o of a philosophical system does not usually conceive of itself in that way, and the consciousness grasping the contradic-

philosophical thinking. Because it is the structure of true being, thinking too must be characterized by it. The process of thinking which leads to philosophical self-consciousness will be, for Hegel, the climax of being's *own* development and self-realization. Both ought to have the same structure, since they are two moments of one and the same unity.

Moments: This term, borrowed from mechanics, is given new meaning in Hegel's dialectics. It points to a dynamic factor or ingredient, which works together with other contradictory ingredients to produce a common positive result. According to Hegel, the formalistic understanding tends to isolate any such moment and turn it into an independent entity or a rigid notion, losing the dialectical "plasticity" which characterizes true being. In a system developing through time—like an organic body, a society, or human history—the dialectical moments appear diachronically, one after the other; yet within the fully actualized system they operate synchronically. This means that a dialectical movement persists even at the stage when a system is fully realized: now it operates as the principle which structures that system and repeatedly maintains it. In other words, the dialectical movement is *interiorized* into the system and becomes the constant, reciprocal transition in which each of the system's ingredients passes into the others and is recurrently rebuilt by them. Therefore, in an actualized dialectical system, every moment has an "ecstatic" existence transcending its limits. Even in the final stage no single ingredient is self-sufficient; each is negated, and passes into the others to be recurrently constituted through them as what it specifically is. Hence, actuality in Hegel, as in Aristotle, is not static, but an activity (*dynamis*, *Wirklichkeit*; the German word derived from *wirken*, to act). Hegel sometimes calls this process "*the inner movement of the Concept*" and uses the metaphors of "drunkenness" and "Bacchanalian whirl" to describe it.

The contradiction: A second philosophical system which contradicts the first (as in Locke vs. Descartes). By "the consciousness which grasps a contradiction" Hegel means the historian, or observer, who grasps the contradiction while reflecting on both systems. (Hegel frequently uses

tion does not know how to free it of one-sidedness, or to maintain it as free; it fails to recognize mutually necessary moments^o in the shape of that which appears to be in conflict and opposition with itself.

The demand for such explanations^o and the satisfaction of this demand easily count as the essential thing. Where could the inner side of a philosophical text be better expressed than in its goals and results? And how would these be known more precisely,^o if not through their difference from whatever else the period has produced in the same domain? But when such activity is taken to be more than the beginning of knowledge,^o when it is considered as actual knowledge, then we must count it among the devices which bypass the matter itself, and combine its actual neglect with the semblance of serious exertion. For the matter is not exhausted in

this unusual style, which refers to real people and actual events by abstract nouns, or converts adjectives into substantives.)

Mutually necessary moments: The two opposing moments (like empiricism and rationalism) are equally necessary for the complete truth—the totality—and for each other. Ordinary consciousness is driven by the law of noncontradiction (which suits the empirical and formal sciences, but not philosophy) to exclude one moment because of the other. This leads to a “rigid” view of the role of contradiction. A dialectically educated consciousness will identify the opposing systems as equally necessary moments of the truth.

Such explanations: Statements about the author’s goal, her difference from other authors, and so forth.

Precisely: The German word *bestimmt* (determined), or *Bestimmung* (determination), is a key term in Hegel. It means being “specific,” being determined at some level of precision, having this and that particular content.

The beginning of knowledge: At this point, Hegel starts to modify his critique of “mere conversation” and prepares the ground for writing a preface. A philosophical preface, he now claims, can be useful if we regard its generalizations as a mere beginning calling for development and particularization. We must not take its statements as adequately conveying the information to which they allude.

its goal,^o but in its development; and the actual whole is not the result, but the result together with its becoming. The goal for itself is the nonliving universal, just as the tendency is the mere drive which lacks actuality, and the naked result is the corpse which the tendency has left behind. Just as much, diversity is the matter's boundary;^o it exists where the matter ceases to be, or is what the matter is not. Such labor concerning goals and results, the distinction between one system and another, and their respective judgments is therefore much easier work than it seems. For this activity, instead of concerning itself with the matter itself, is always hovering outside it; instead of residing in the matter and forgetting itself in it,^o such knowing always resorts to [*greift nach*] another, and re-

The matter is not exhausted in its goal: The term *Sache* means the real issue, that which is seen as essential, the actual subject matter of our talk or action. In Hegel's use the word *Sache* (or *die Sache selbst*, as distinguished from *Ding*, "thing", which recalls the Kantian *Ding-an-sich*) also signifies actuality as a unity of being and thought. In this more systematic sense, the issue referred to is the *philosophical subject matter in its actuality*; and this cannot be exhausted by generalized results. It can only exist through the full dialectical process in which it is particularized and realized. Thus the philosophical result cannot be cut off from the process of its becoming. The genesis of truth is an inseparable part of the philosopher's essential subject matter; so he must either understand the result *out* of this process, or be left with a dead corpse instead of truth.

Diversity is the matter's boundary: A philosopher explaining what distinguishes her work from others'—thus engaging in comparisons—conducts her discourse outside the actual subject matter. Hegel calls this "external reflection": talking about something from the outside, or thinking about something without participating in its constitution. This echoes Spinoza's critique of comparative thinking as external to being, though Hegel adds an idealist frame to it.

Residing in the matter and forgetting itself in it: This is the necessary condition for avoiding external reflection and performing an "inner" philosophical thinking. Philosophy is not *about* something; its thinking evolves and is actualized together with its object. Therefore, philosophical thinking must first "tarry" or "reside" within its content and even "lose itself" in it. This also indicates that in philosophy there is no a priori method or schema by which thinking must proceed. Rather, the material itself should guide

mains with itself rather than being with the matter and giving itself to it. To pass judgment on what has substance and content is easiest; grasping it is more difficult; and the hardest is to unite these two by performing its exhibition.^o

philosophical reflection and shape the structure emerging from it. The dialectical method, we shall see, is not a schema imposed on the subject matter from the start, but a structure emerging from it retrospectively. The philosopher lets the subject matter itself be her guide and, following its inner dynamics and constraints, also discovers its deficiencies—that which turns out to be lacking and called for by it—and traces the structure arising from the subject matter’s evolution. Some might see here a phenomenological approach in a quasi-Husserlian sense (which Hegel partly accepts); but seen in terms of Hegel’s contemporary debate, this is a special kind of “intellectual intuition,” though not a mystical experience but obedience to the *Sache*’s inner *logic* and development. Hegel rejects intellectual intuition as a special *mental* experience, romantic or super-rational. He demands to interpret it rationally, in terms of a *logical* structure and conceptual constraints. These structural elements can manifest themselves to us only if we follow the lead of the subject matter and refrain from imposing a priori abstractions upon it (including the law of noncontradiction). When, on the contrary, our thinking neglects the *Sache* and starts by concentrating on *itself*—for example, by investigating its own methodology (Descartes) or its own power and limits (Locke, Kant), or when it starts from laws that are said to govern every thought a priori—then it puts itself on the line rather than centering on reality. That viewpoint, says Hegel, is “merely subjective” because it always remains enclosed within its own domain. And it is ontologically empty, because the object—actual being—remains outside it. Adequate philosophy does not apply ready-made formal laws of thought to an external object; it is rather the inner explication of the rational structure of the object itself (of being), as it evolves and alters its shapes in the process of its actualization, and as it eventually attains self-consciousness through human knowledge and culture. Thought fulfills a constitutive role in this evolution, not as an object-like *logos* governing outer nature, but as embodied in *human* thoughts, acts, and artifacts; and thereby the object discloses itself also as subject.

Performing its exhibition: Darstellung, as we mentioned above, is a key concept in Hegel as in Kant, though in a different sense. In Kant it means the exhibition or embodiment of a conceptual content within a medium of

The beginning of cultural education [*Bildung*], of working one's way out of the immediacy of substantial life, must always first consist in acquiring knowledge of universal principles and standpoints, and raising oneself to the thought of the matter in general. No less, one must learn to support or refute that thought with reasons, to capture the rich and concrete fullness with specific determinations, and to provide an orderly answer and serious judgment about it. This beginning of *Bildung* will then have to give place, first, to the earnestness of life in its fullness, which leads to experiencing the matter itself; and second, if, in addition, the Concept's earnestness will descend to the depths [of the subject matter], then this kind of knowledge and judgment will retain an appropriate position in conversation.

The true shape in which truth exists can only be its scientific system. The goal I set myself is to contribute to bringing philosophy nearer to the form of science—to help it renounce its name as love of Knowing,^o and become actual Know-

intuition. Thus schematism is the *Darstellung* of the categories of the understanding. For Hegel, it means the full exposition of the philosophical system in the context of its evolution, whereby the ideas emerging in it are justified and refuted. It is impossible to exhibit philosophy by directly jumping to its final stage or “consequences.” To present a philosophical truth, one must follow the stages of its becoming, exhibiting all parts of the system according to their mutual relations and evolution. This is also the only way to *justify* or ground the system. In a formal system, the doctrine and each of its parts possess an independent meaning and a separate truth-value; it is therefore possible to grasp the doctrine's meaning by a different procedure than that used to justify it. In philosophy, however, the consequences have neither meaning nor a truth-value except as part of a totality which includes the process of their genesis; therefore, the same movement by which the system of philosophy evolves and is justified is also the procedure by which we can properly understand its meaning and exhibit it to others. A single process controls the system's *evolution*, its *justification*, its *understanding*, and its adequate *exposition*.

Love of Knowing: Love indicates that we lack its object and are still searching for it. In wishing to put an end to “the love of Knowing,” Hegel proclaims his far-reaching pretension to bring the philosophical quest to an end. This is the idea of the “end of philosophy” in its historical version, already

ing.^o The inner necessity that knowing should become science lies in its nature: and the only satisfactory explanation^o of that necessity is the exhibition of philosophy itself. However, the external necessity, so far as it is grasped in general, regardless of a person's contingency and individual dispositions, is the same as the inner neces-

found in Kant. On the one hand, the true system of philosophy depends on its historical development; it cannot emerge atemporally from the head of some genius, be he a Plato or a Spinoza. Yet on the other hand, philosophical progress is not open-ended; it has an end, which Hegel believes has finally matured and—following Kant's philosophy, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic code—can already be seen on the horizon. When the final stage is realized, philosophy will overcome its historical character, transcend time, and become supratemporal. This means that it will continue to exist *in* time, but will no longer *depend* on it. This will realize eternity within time. The supratemporal character which Plato and other philosophers ascribe to philosophy from the start is attained in Hegel through history and is the result of a process in time. (Moreover, in at least a metaphorical sense, time itself is said to come to an end when absolute Knowing emerges. By that Hegel cannot mean that time ceases as a sequential, continuous quantity, but as the bearer of qualitative *novelty*; since, in principle, nothing new can emerge, time's progressive direction becomes the eternal recurrence of the same.)

Actual Knowing: The Platonic ideal of *sophia*—wisdom—based on unconditioned knowledge (*epistēmē*). In Hegel this ideal awaits philosophy, at the end of a long and complex process of education. *Philo-sophia* is to become *sophia*: the Knowing mind will overcome *eros*, the element of love which implies lack and remoteness from its object, and will become actual knowledge and wisdom. While in Plato this process can be consummated in a single individual's life, in Hegel it presupposes the history of the whole human race. The *Phenomenology* thus historicizes Plato's theory of education. A single individual, however talented, cannot jump beyond his or her period and attain absolute truth in one ahistorical leap. All great philosophers express the immanent potential which their periods entail, and also its limitations, experienced as their own personal limitation, which drives them to seek new solutions. This process can end only with "absolute Knowing," into which all the major previous stages with their mutual contradictions are interiorized as partial "moments."

The only satisfactory explanation: The complete justification of the system of philosophy is immanent and can be grasped only from within it. Being

sity—shaped, that is, in the way in which time represents the existence of its moments. To demonstrate that the time has come^o for philosophy to be raised to Science is, therefore, the only true justification of the efforts pursuing this goal; for that would manifest the goal's necessity even while realizing it.

I know that in placing the true shape of truth in its scientific character^o—or, which is the same, in asserting that the Concept

circular and comprehensive, the system of truth includes its justification within itself as a kind of *causa sui* (cause of itself). In other words, its grounding does not depend on some singular, privileged item (evidence or axiom), but on the mutual dialectical relation linking its parts. The necessity of philosophy becoming an apodictic system thus follows from its own nature. This inner necessity can be grasped and justified only by someone who *already* knows the final system, having worked internally through all the parts of the *Logic*, and, eventually, of the whole Hegelian system. Still, the *external* necessity that philosophy should become systematic is exhibited by the *Phenomenology*. The *Phenomenology* expounds that necessity under a different configuration—temporal sequence. It follows the same logic that governs the system's formation as it manifests itself in the evolution of human consciousness in historical time. This is made possible because, in Hegel, the inner, supratemporal necessity of absolute Knowing must externalize itself as a *historical need*. Every philosophical standpoint and every historical configuration needs to reconcile its contradictions by evolving into a new form and—when the time is ripe—by passing into the complete system. Hegel offers here the nucleus of his well-known doctrine that the *system* of philosophy and the *history* of philosophy are two facets of the same organic whole, one existing within time and empirical history, the other transcending time and existing in a purely conceptual manner, which however, presupposes history and derives from it.

The time has come: In view of the previous note, the expression “now is the time” is not an exhortation, but a systematic claim: historical time has already ripened for that purpose. Yet this is only the *threshold* of the New Era. Before philosophical knowledge is fully actualized, we can justify the passage towards it only genetically, by historical need. The genetic justification of philosophy comes first in the order of time, although the system will justify itself also internally and become self-grounded.

In its scientific character: The word “scientific” indicates here a systematic character, which endows a body of knowledge with unshakable (apodictic) certainty. In philosophy, this occurs in a different mode than in the

alone is the element in which truth has existence—I seem to contradict a certain opinion^o [*Vorstellung*] and its consequences, which are as pretentious as they are widespread in the conviction of our age. It does not seem superfluous, therefore, to explain this contradiction, although my explanation cannot be anything here but a mere assurance, just like the assurance it opposes. Now, if the true exists only in that—or rather, only as that—which sometimes is called intuition, sometimes immediate Knowing of the absolute, religion, or being^o—not being in the center of divine love, but the being of that

empirical sciences—mainly, in the “organic” mode discussed above (and further below).

A certain opinion: By grounding the absolute (truth) of philosophy in its comprehensive system, Hegel opposes the conventional view that philosophical knowledge is made absolute by some special mental experience. Hegel thinks, among others, of his former friend and current opponent, Schelling, and also of the doctrine of irrational “faith” promoted by F. H. Jacobi. These philosophers made absolute Knowing depend upon a direct grasp unmediated by conceptual reason—either through immediate faith, or by an experience of intellectual intuition. Hegel fights the Concept’s war on two fronts: against romantic irrationalism he demands that philosophy be grounded on reason; and against shallow rationalism he denies that reason can be reduced to mere “Understanding.” The absolute, Hegel holds, must be attained through rational thinking: irrational experiences only provide emptiness and illusion. Yet for reason to reach the absolute, it must be construed as *dialectical* rationality, which recognizes the positive role of negation, and is linked to life, feeling, and being, all while retaining conceptual constraints and the capacity to universalize (= the basic conditions of rationality).

Intuition, . . . immediate Knowing . . . , religion or being: the joint critique is of Schelling, Hölderlin, Jacobi, and romantic metaphysics (see the introduction above). A special target here is “intellectual intuition,” which is supposed to grasp absolute truth by an original (and for Hegel, mysterious) experience of the intellect. Kant had used the concept of “intellectual intuition” to define the *limits* of human reason, and gave it a precise cognitive structure: it is a mode of knowledge which, by knowing the particular, allows us to directly know the universal principle governing it, and vice versa: if we know the universal principle, we can directly know all the particulars belonging to its range. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is based

love itself—then philosophy, too, will have to be exhibited in a form opposing the Concept's. The absolute should not then be conceived, but felt and intuited; not its Concept but its feeling and intuition should guide the word and be expressed in speech.

In order to grasp the appearance of this demand in its general context,^o we must view it within the phase in which self-conscious spirit stands at present. Here we see that spirit has gone beyond the substantive life^o it had previously led in the element of thought^o—beyond the immediacy of its faith, beyond the satis-

upon the denial that humans can have such a privileged mode of cognition. By contrast, some of Kant's followers wished to restore an element of intellectual intuition to philosophy, but each construed it differently. For Schelling it is a privileged mental and experiential faculty (the inscrutable origin of all the other faculties); whereas Hegel accepts Kant's *structural* definition of intellectual intuition, but claims, against Kant, that it *can* be realized in human cognition through a dialectical logic of philosophy. Of course, it then is no longer intuition, but (a special kind of) conception.

In its general context: Following his rather sarcastic description of Schelling and the romantics, Hegel proceeds to explain why the philosophical culture of the time must produce such positions. At the present historical juncture, the "self-conscious spirit" (the subject matter of the *Phenomenology*) occupies the following position. On the one hand, it has broken away from the immediate, unexamined life in which it had previously felt complaisance and plenitude. From that doubtful paradise, spirit was expelled by the power of reflection and universal thought (Enlightenment) which, however, drove it to the other extreme—a world of mere abstractions. Cut off from concrete life, it now suffers from the acute sense of loss of reality and nostalgia for it. That nostalgia drives spirit to seek solid reality through irrational means—renouncing the intellect's achievements by blurring all distinctions and submerging itself in a chaos of opaque experiences.

Substantive life: This is life marked by conformism and unreflective confidence in one's existence and environment. In itself, this life is already transfused with thought, because it contains conceptions and world-images, norms, and traditions. Yet, thought itself is still immediate at this state, enclosed within life's plenitude without performing a critical reflection about it.

In the element of thought: Hegel here has in mind a high level of substantial life, structured by a rich culture and tradition. Yet people are submerged

faction and certainty which consciousness possessed of its reconciliation with the essence^o [*Wesen*^o] and its general, inner and outer, present. Spirit has not only gone over to the other extreme—to a non-substantive reflection of itself in itself—but has gone beyond that, too. Not only did it lose its essential life, it is also conscious of its loss,^o and of the finitude which [now] is its

in that tradition in a “substantial” manner without critical reflection. Hegel may be thinking of medieval culture and more generally, of any tradition-oriented culture like that of the *ancien régime*. Life in that conservative way gives a sense of concreteness and solidity, as if it were an inert thing. Culture, knowledge, society is experienced as a substance. Yet in its essence, this culture is not an inert substance but “the self-conscious spirit,” though only in a potential and alienated mode.

Its reconciliation with the essence: Here, consciousness is not cut off from the real substance of life but is reconciled with it. The person feels at one with this world; but this takes place dogmatically, without reflection, as if the spirit were an inert substance. Hegel’s philosophy makes conscious rational reflection a necessary condition for all spirituality and truth, but goes beyond them to a third stage in which rational thought—the very same power that has undermined the dogmatic universe—is reconfigured in such a way as to restore the sense of plenitude and reconciliation with the absolute, which was lost to human life when thought had first become conscious and critical. While this project puts Hegel at odds with romantic irrationalism, it also explains why, at the same time, Hegel speaks favorably of the romantics’ “nostalgia” towards the plenitude of life, which he considers a legitimate and necessary goal. Hegel thus transforms the romantics’ nostalgia from a past-oriented into a future-oriented desire.

Wesen in German means both essence (principal meaning) and a being or an entity. Hegel mostly uses the first, but sometimes connotes both by the same word. (Miller chose to translate it “essential being.” I prefer the more classic translation “essence,” which context will make us read with or without the other connotation).

Conscious of its loss: Herein lies the driving force of the *Phenomenology*: it is not simply the *fact* of being torn from the lost unity, but the *consciousness* of this rupture which generates the drive to overcome it. Hegel’s doctrine is not nostalgic; there is nothing attractive in the primordial state: compact, dogmatic, immediate life is contrary to man’s spiritual essence and not worth living. As rational creatures, humans can elevate

content. Turning away from the pig's leftover food,^o confessing how badly it is doing and cursing its state, spirit demands of philosophy not so much to provide it with knowledge of what it is, as to make it regain that [lost] substantiality and dependability of being. Hence, philosophy should satisfy this need not by opening up^o the tightly closed substance and raising it to consciousness—not by bringing chaotic consciousness back to a thought-based order and to the simplicity of the Concept—but rather by dumping the distinctions of thought, suppressing the differentiating Concept, and putting forth the feeling of being, which confers not so much insight, as edification.^o The beautiful, the sacred, the

their life only if intellectual reflection awakens in them—with all the sorrow, alienation, destruction, self-criticism, and the sense of rupture between a person and his world which this awakening will cause. Awareness of this rupture produces an acute sense of deprivation and the desire to restore the lost unity. Yet this cannot be satisfied by an impossible regression to the past, either in the form of nostalgia (abandoning oneself to the pure experience of yearning), or by a romantic attempt to retrieve the plenitude of the past through artificial and possibly violent means; it can be satisfied only by going *forward* within the element of reason and developing it further. The rational principle which, as “understanding,” has produced the rupture, must now overcome it as “reason.” It ought to evolve further, until it produces a *re-conciliation*, which must be attained not at the expense of reason and self-consciousness but *through* them—and on the basis also of the social and practical life which reason structures and expresses in concepts. From here, too, Hegel derives the need for a new philosophical logic expressing the power of onward-going life and not only formal thinking.

Turning away from the pig's leftover food: This comes from the New Testament story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:16 and passim), who was so hungry he was ready to eat the husks the pig was fed.

Not by opening up: Although that would have been the adequate way—breaking up the compactness of substance and raising it to rational self-consciousness. The romantics reject this answer; preferring vague feeling to the Concept, they confuse all distinctions.

Edification (Erbauung): A sort of arousal and uplifting produced, for example, by a lofty sermon or a vague yet deep experience which one cannot quite clarify to oneself. Hegel sees edification as unphilosophical and op-

eternal, religion and love are the bait needed to arouse the desire to bite. Not the Concept but ecstasy, not the cool progressing necessity of the subject matter, but effervescent enthusiasm, are to sustain and extend the richness of substance.

To this demand corresponds a strenuous effort, which looks irritated and almost zealous, to tear people away from their immersion in the sensual, the vulgar, and the singular,^o and direct their gaze toward the stars; as if, forgetful of the divine, they were about to satisfy themselves with dust and water, like worms. In earlier times they had a heaven richly studded with ideas and images. Everything that is had its meaning in the thread of light linking it to heaven; and instead of abiding in this [-worldly] presence, the gaze of people followed the thread of light outside this world to a divine essence—to a transcendent presence (if such a phrase is possible). It took coercive power to redirect the spirit's eye back to the terrestrial domain and attach it to it;^o it took a long time until that clarity,

posed to the "Concept." Philosophy must be "scientific," not edifying; it has to do with knowledge and understanding, not with preaching and creating sublime, yet opaque feelings. (Not accidentally, philosophers opposing the goal of philosophy as science—like Rorty today—argue that philosophy *ought* to be edifying.)

The sensual, the vulgar, and the singular: The new era, of which Hegel thinks himself the philosopher, restores to this-worldly existence the value it lost in the Middle Ages. Hegel objects to the philosophical preaching which negates this world in the name of a hidden transcendent world. Although he, too, seeks to rise from vulgar sensuality to reason, Hegel is not ready on that account to abandon the terrestrial, sensual element in reality: his goal is to provide the sensual and terrestrial with a new significance derived from the rational essence they embody. Hegel is therefore a philosopher of immanence. Philosophy is to give a new meaning and a higher, even divine, value to this world in all its concreteness. This goes against the transcendent tendency which despises the world and makes it depend upon the "thread of light linking it with heaven."

To redirect the spirit's eye back to the terrestrial domain and attach it to it: The return from the supernatural to the immanent world was expressed, among other ways, in the high value which Bacon, Galilei, Locke, and others restored to empirical experience, following the long medieval pe-

which only otherworldly things used to possess, could be reintroduced into the muddle and blur in which the sense of this world was lying; and a long time was necessary before the attention to the present as such, which we call experience, could be made valid and interesting. But now the opposite need seems to be felt: sensibility has become so strongly rooted in the worldly domain, that the same violent force is needed today to raise it above it. Spirit shows itself to be so impoverished, that like a wanderer in the desert who longs for a simple gulp of water, spirit seems to be craving to refresh itself with the meager feeling of the divine in general. From this little which satisfies spirit, one can tell how great its loss is.

But this humble satisfaction in receiving or parsimony in giving are unfit for Science. He who seeks edification only, who demands to shroud the diversity of his earthly existence and of thought in a foggy mist, and to bask in the indefinite enjoyment of that indistinct divinity, will see for himself where he can find it; he will easily find a way to stir himself into enthusiasm and thus pump himself up. But philosophy must beware of the will to be edifying.

Even less should this humble sufficiency, which has renounced Science, pretend that its enthusiasm and opacity^o are higher than

riod (and scholastic metaphysics) in which sense experience had been despised. Hegel views this restoration as a major turn toward, and condition for, the rise of modernity. Contrary to what is sometimes believed of him, Hegel does not deprecate experience; on the contrary, as testified by our text, he sees great historical progress in restoring value and validity to what “we call experience.” However, attachment to sensual experience is today overpowering and conceived as the essential thing rather than a necessary moment of truth. This one-sidedness manifests itself in philosophical empiricism, in the metaphysics of vague feeling, and in the theology that goes with it.

Enthusiasm and opacity: Hegel now criticizes the call for “enthusiasm” in religion and mysticism, which rejects the power of the intellect in favor of an ecstatic rapture considered more spiritual. This haziness sacrifices the conceptual distinctions in order to create an empty feeling of depth. (Hegel’s sarcasm against “enthusiasm” recalls Kant’s disdain for its parent-concept, *Schwärmerei*; yet Kant would so qualify Hegel’s own presumptions to attain the absolute.)

Science. Believing itself to be residing in the center and in the very depth, such prophetic talk looks down with disdain on specific determinateness (*horos*), and intentionally distances itself from the Concept and from necessity, as belonging to a reflection which resides in the finite alone. However, just as there is an empty breadth, so there is empty depth; just as the extension of substance can pour itself in a finite diversity without a unifying force holding it together, so there is an intensity without content, holding itself as pure force without extension,^o which is the same as superficiality. Spirit's force is only as great as its externalization;^o its depth is only as deep as it dares expand and lose itself in its expansion. When this substantive and Conceptless knowing^o pretends that it has sunk

Pure force without extension: In Hegel's dialectics, a force lacking outward manifestation signifies that the force *does not actually exist*. What these philosophers consider as their greatest discovery is an unreal thing, analogous to an occult quality.

Spirit's force is only as great as its externalization: Inwardness is meaningless unless it expresses itself outwardly: this is a major element of Hegel's dialectic. Every inward essence, every hidden potentiality will receive its meaning *as inwardness* only in so far as it has been manifested in the external world. This does not mean that Hegel dismissed the concept of interiority in the manner of positivists or behaviorists. On the contrary, the various forms of interiority ("essence," "principle," "force," "talent," "potentiality," and so forth) play a fundamental role in Hegel's system. Yet they receive their status *qua* interiority from being exteriorized, that is, embodied in a series of empirical manifestations (actions, events, particulars, and the like). On the other hand, no empirical series is actual if it exists as a discrete aggregate of particulars with no inner essence or power expressing itself in them. An empirical entity, or set, is actual only insofar as it embodies an inner principle of essence. Thus each of the two opposites (inner and outer, essence and empirical existence) receives its meaning and distinct status from their mutual constitution.

Substantive and Conceptless knowing: A vague inner feeling which cannot be articulated or expressed as a Concept.

the self's ownness [*Eigenheit*]^o in the essence and is philosophizing in truth and sanctity, it conceals from itself that [in fact], because it disdains measure and determinateness, it does not give itself to God, but, at times, gives itself [rather] to the contingency of the content, and at other times submits the content to its own arbitrariness. In abandoning themselves to the unrestrained ferment of substance, [these people] believe that by shrouding self-consciousness and renouncing the understanding, they become God's own [God's elect], to whom he imparts wisdom in their sleep. And, to be sure, what they thus receive and engender in their sleep are dreams.

The self's ownness [Eigenheit]: The "ownness" meant here is that which distinguishes one individual self from others (not a personal trait but the self's ontic uniqueness, its being a separate entity). The mystics claim to have unified the self with the essence of the whole universe, and thereby with the deity; but because they follow a nonconceptual way, they inevitably miss their goal. The self is neither preserved in the mystical experience, nor built by it, but is rather sunk and lost. Worse, the mystical self is not even sunk and dispersed *in God*—the true essence of being—but in a shapeless mass of subjective feelings and arbitrary images. Because the mystics despise reason's lucidity, necessity, and conceptual distinctions, they miss the actual character of the deity and lose themselves within an empty illusion of God. Note that Hegel's criticism is partly immanent; his own philosophy also leads in the end to the self's dialectical unity with the absolute (i.e., the deity); but this involves neither a mystical leap nor the dissolution of the Self. In Hegel, the self's individuality is *built* (or constituted) rather than destroyed through its relation with the absolute; and this relation, moreover, presupposes the complex mediation of rational concepts, social practice, and a long historical evolution. In the final analysis, Hegel, like Plato and Spinoza, shares the *ultimate* goals of mysticism, but rejects the imaginary ways that the mystic suggests for attaining them. Those goals can be achieved only in a rational way, which calls for a different view of rationality—one based upon dialectic and mediated by history.