

**Part Five Hegel on the Historicity of Normativity**

## Lecture 16

## Modernity, Alienation, and Language

## I. Introduction: Modernity, Legitimation, and Language

The *Phenomenology* aims to help us understand modernity. It is true that to do that we need to understand the traditional forms of life we came from, and how we got here from there. And recollectively understanding modernity is the proper way to realize where we are committed to going from here: what would count as further progress. Nonetheless, Hegel resolutely keeps the narrative center of attention focused on the promises and perils of the still-incomplete project of modernity. The motor of that project is the burgeoning significance of self-conscious individual subjectivity. A principal manifestation of that self-consciously new form of self-consciousness is the felt need for the theoretical *legitimation* of the norms by which moderns find themselves acculturated. The mere existence of inherited normative structures is no longer accepted as sufficient warrant for them. Entitlement to the acquiescence of individuals to institutionalized constellations of authority and responsibility is conditioned on the provision of sufficient reasons justifying those arrangements to those subject to them. The demand for their theoretical legitimation is an important dimension along which in modernity the authority of normative statuses answers to the attitudes of those bound by the norms in question. The demand for legitimation of authority is an aspect of the modern practical attitude-dependence of normative statuses that does not entail that the statuses in question are *instituted* by attitudes. The latter, stronger claim (to which the reciprocal recognition model answers) asserts the *sufficiency* of attitudes for statuses. Conditioning the bindingness of statuses on attitudes on their acknowledgment as legitimate by those whose attitudes they bind asserts only a *necessary* condition.

The fact that it is a hallmark of modernity that normative force is understood to depend on the possibility of a legitimating *account* expressing a rationale for it underlines a key feature

characteristic of the modern form of *Geist*: for it, *language* becomes the medium of recognition. Their specifically linguistic expression is now an essential aspect of cognitive attitudes of attributing and acknowledging normative statuses. Emphasis on characteristic means of linguistic expression was central all along to Hegel's discussion of different forms of empirical self-consciousness on the side of cognition: indexicals and demonstratives for sense-certainty, predicates and singular terms for perception, and subjunctively robust modals for understanding. As it is for cognition, so it is for recognition. We saw that behind and supporting the cognitive practices that embody and enact empirical consciousness lie the cognitive practices that embody and enact normative self-consciousness. Modern normative self-consciousness is articulated by cognitive attitudes and normative statuses that are what they are in significant part because of the language in which they are made explicit.

In particular, we can understand the *alienation* from our norms that is inherent in modernity only in terms of the deformations of language that express it. It is an essential, principled part of Hegel's general methodology to understand what is implicit in terms of its explicit expressions—to think of those expressions as essential to the identity of what is implicit. In this particular case, its specifically *linguistic* expressions are essential to alienation as a distinctively modern metaphysical normative structure. That is so precisely because alienation is at base a pathology of legitimization, undercutting the bindingness of norms. As such, it is rooted in the demand for a linguistically explicit account of the nature and rationale of the bindingness of the norms that make us what we are, in the light of an appreciation of the sense in which we make them what they are. The norms in question are discursive norms, in that they are conceptually contentful. But the demand for explicit legitimization is further a demand for specifically discursive justification. The failure to reconcile the status-dependence of normative attitudes with the attitude-dependence of normative statuses has significant practical expressions. But its theoretical expressions are equally essential to the predicament.

Language [Sprache], Hegel tells us repeatedly (at [PG 652, 666]), is the *Dasein* of *Geist*: its concrete, immediate being. Modernity is the age of alienated *Geist*, and “[t]his alienation takes place solely in language, which here appears in its characteristic significance.” [PG 508] In the middle section of his long *Spirit* chapter, Hegel accordingly explicitly addresses language,

with particular attention to the language characteristic of alienation and the institutions that both foster that language and to which it is addressed.

## II. Actual and Pure Consciousness

Hegel's discussion of the normative structure of the modern world of culture is long, intricate, and interesting. But our purposes do not require rehearsal of many of its details. He distinguishes two aspects of that structure: *actual* consciousness and *pure* consciousness. Actual consciousness comprises social institutions, the norms they embody, and individuals playing roles and engaging in practices governed and articulated by those norms. By applying those norms in their practice, individual subjects make them actual and efficacious; they actualize the norms. The norms and the individuals acting and assessing their actions according to those norms collectively *constitute* the institutions, giving them, as well as the norms, actual existence. To *act* according to the norms is to appeal to these in one's practical deliberations about what to do. Similarly, to *assess* according to them is to appeal to those norms—the ones implicit in custom—as standards in assessing one's own and others' performances. This is for one's attitudes to be governed by the norms in the dual sense that the norms provide standards for normative assessment of the attitudes and that the attitudes are subjunctively sensitive to the content of the norms.

The term “pure consciousness” is a way of talking about how the norms are understood theoretically: their explicit discursive articulation. Hegel says that pure consciousness “is both the thinking of the actual world, and its thought-form [Denken und Gedachtsein].” [PG 485] It is the way normativity is *understood*, the theory that makes explicit the normativity implicit in the institutionalized practice of actual consciousness. Pure consciousness is the way norms are conceived or conceptualized. Hegel's term for conceptual articulation—articulation by relations of material incompatibility and inference—is “mediation.” So he says that pure consciousness *mediates* the relation between actual individual selves and the norms it theorizes about. In traditional society, as opposed to modern culture, the norms implicit in *Sitte*, in customs, are *immediate*—not the subject of conceptualization or thematization, not made *explicit*, and hence

not subject to critical scrutiny. Immediate *Sittlichkeit* has a purely practical, implicit, *nonconceptual* conception of norms, and so has no analogue of pure consciousness.

Pure consciousness is a distinctively modern form of self-consciousness, a manifestation of the rise of subjectivity. It is a new way the norms implicit in the practices of actual consciousness can be something explicitly *for* consciousness. Where actual consciousness requires the adoption of *practical* attitudes toward the norms, applying them in practice by judging, acting intentionally, and assessing the claims and performances of others, pure consciousness requires the adoption of *theoretical* attitudes toward the norms. In particular, pure consciousness offers explicit accounts of the nature of the *binding force* and the source of the *content* of the norms. It reflects on the relations between norms and the institutions that embody them, on the one hand, and their relations to the subjective normative attitudes of those whose practice they govern, on the other. Pure consciousness is a response to a felt need for the norms, their binding force, and their particular contents not only to be explicitly understood and explained, but to be validated, legitimated, vindicated. That demand is itself a prime expression of the newly appreciated authority of self-conscious subjectivity and its attitudes. The question at issue between traditional and modern practical conceptions and constellations of normativity is whether, when the individual acknowledges the norms in action and assessment, that needs to be conceptually mediated or not—whether a theory, a story about it is needed. To say that it is, is to accord a new kind of authority to the attitudes of the individuals who produce, consume, and assess such legitimating stories. That is why the role in the world of culture of what Hegel calls “pure consciousness” is an essential part of the advent of modernity as the rise of subjectivity.

### III. Language

Language is the medium in which the ultimately recognitive relations among self-conscious individuals, their acts, their normative attitudes, the norms they are bound by, the practices in which those norms are implicit, their communities, and their institutions are not only expressed, but instituted and instantiated. That is why the deformations in that recognitive constellation of attitudes distinctive of alienation take the form of characteristic linguistic practices. In particular, they take the form of ironic relations between individuals and the culture-constituting norms,

which are viewed as pious fictions. Modernity is characterized by a one-sided focus on the normative significance of some of these elements at the expense of others. Paradigmatically this is the privileging of the authority of individuals and their acts and attitudes, construing them as independent of and authoritative with respect to the norms they fall under. The very fact that language has come to the fore as the cognitive medium in which conceptual normativity is articulated offers some guidance as to how the one-sidedness of the modern appreciation of the significance of subjectivity (alienation) can be overcome, without having to give up the insight that marks the shift from traditional to modern culture as an expressively progressive transformation of our self-consciousness. It sets criteria of adequacy for an unalienated, postmodern form of recognition. For it means that our model for the articulation of *Geist* should be the relations among individual language users, their speech acts, the attitudes those speech acts express, linguistic norms, linguistic practices, linguistic communities, and languages. The move beyond modernity will require us to understand how the bindingness of objective conceptual norms is compatible with both those norms being what makes particular desiring organisms into *geistig*, self-conscious individuals and with those norms being instituted by the practices such individuals engage in of applying concepts in the judgments and actions that express their commitments and other attitudes. Implemented practically, in actual and not just pure consciousness, that understanding will take the form of a move from the relations between individuals and their conceptually articulated norms exhibiting the structure of *irony* to exhibiting the structure of *trust*.

There is a fundamental social division of normative labor corresponding to the distinction between the *force* and *content* of speech acts. The force (Fregean “Kraft”) is the normative significance of a speech act: what difference it makes to the commitments and responsibilities that the speaker acknowledges, undertakes, or licenses others to attribute. The content is what determines *what* one has committed oneself to or made oneself responsible for by performing a speech act with that content. The key point is that performing a speech act (expressing a linguistic attitude, such as a belief or intention) involves coordinate dimensions of *authority* of the speaker concerning the *claiming*, and *responsibility* with respect to what is *claimed*. When we talk, making claims about how things are, or expressing intentions as to how they shall be, there is always something that is up to each one of us, and something that is not. It is up to each

of us which move we make, what concept we apply, what counter in the language game we play. And then it is not up to us what the significance of that is, given the content of what we have said. So it is up to me whether I claim that this pen is made of copper, whether I play the “copper” counter that is in play in our practices. But if I do play it, I have bound myself by a set of norms; I have committed myself to things independently of whether I realize what I have committed myself to. In this sense, the normative *status* I have taken on outruns my normative *attitudes*. What I am actually committed to need not coincide with what I *take* myself to be committed to. (The linguistic *Tat* goes beyond the linguistic *Handlung*: the distinction that speech acts involve.) If I say that the pen is copper, then whether I know it or not I have committed myself to its melting at 1085°C, because what I am saying cannot be true unless that is true, too. It *is* up to me whether I play the counter, make that move, invest my authority or normative force in that content, but then *not* up to me what I have committed myself to by it, what commitments I have ruled out, what would entitle me to it. The normative significance of the move I have made, the boundary of the responsibility I have undertaken is not up to me; it is a matter of the linguistic norms that articulate the concepts I have chosen to apply.

The conceptual norms determined by the content of the concepts speakers apply in judgment and intention are administered by the linguistic community, which accordingly exercises an authority correlative to that of the speaker. Metallurgical experts know a great deal more than I do about what I have claimed, what I have committed myself to, by calling the pen “copper.” Those to whom I am speaking, those who attribute and assess my speech act, have a certain kind of privilege: the authority to keep a different set of books on its consequences than I do. It is important to Hegel that even expert audiences are not *fully* authoritative concerning the content. They do not determine melting point of copper. That is a matter of how things are in themselves, which is not a matter of how things are for the experts, or the rest of the community, any more than it is a matter of how things are for the speaker. The norms are not something that can simply be read off of the attitudes of either. Hegel wants to reconstruct the objective, representational dimension of discourse, what it is for there to be referents that are authoritative for our inferences, the noumena behind the phenomena, the realities behind the appearances, in terms of the recollective *historical* structure of discursive practice. One of the principal aims of the rest of the discussion here of Hegel’s *Spirit* chapter is further to delineate the fine structure of

the diachronic, historical account of the relations between normative force and conceptual content. But the fact that there is a third pole of authority, besides that of the speaker and of the linguistic community, should not be taken to minimize the authority that the community does exercise with respect to conceptual content.

Further, if we ask how the term “copper” came to express the content that it does, so that assertions employing it have the normative significance that they do, the story we tell is going to have to include the practices of the linguistic community in question, the acts individual speakers have actually performed in concrete circumstances, and the assessments of the correctness or incorrectness of those performances that their fellow community members have actually made. Somehow, by using the expression “copper” the way we have—in concert with the uses we have made of a whole lot of other expressions—we have managed to make “copper” claims beholden to how it objectively is with *copper*. We have incorporated features of the world into the norms we collectively administer, instituting a sense of correctness according to which the correctness of our “copper” claims answers to the facts about copper. Judging and acting intentionally must be understood both as the process of *applying* conceptual norms and as the process of *instituting* those norms. (Recall the slogan that, in this respect, Hegel is to Kant as Quine is to Carnap.) In terms we will be concerned with further along, the first is the process of giving contingency the form of necessity, the second the process of incorporating contingency into necessity. As we will see, the account of recollective rationality and the relations between normative statuses and attitudes that are instituted by the recollective phase of experience points the way to a postmodern form of recognition that overcomes ironic alienation. This is the recollective-recognitive structure of trust.

Hegel talks about the move from theoretical and practical application of categories of *independence* to categories of *freedom* (from *Verstand* to *Vernunft*) as giving us a conceptual apparatus for both, on the one hand, identifying ourselves as the products of norms that incorporate features of the objective world like what the melting point of copper is and, on the other hand, seeing our activity as having instituted those norms, the norms that make that fact potentially visible and expressible. Focusing on the linguistic character of modern recognitive processes—the practices of adopting specific recognitive attitudes—that is, of acknowledging

and attributing conceptually contentful commitments, responsibilities, and licensings—provides a new perspective on the notion of *freedom*, which is characteristic of *Vernunft*. According to the Kantian framework Hegel takes over, agency is thought of as a matter of what agents are responsible for. Agents (and knowers) are creatures who live and move and have their being in a normative space, creatures who can commit themselves, who can undertake and attribute responsibility and exercise authority. Concepts determine what one has committed oneself to, what one has made oneself responsible for in acting intentionally (and judging). This framework leads Kant to distinguish between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom in normative terms. To be *free* in his sense is to be bound by norms, to be able to perform intentional actions and make judgments, which is to say to be able to undertake commitments. That is to be able (in the normative sense of having the authority) to make oneself responsible in the ways articulated by concepts, which are rules for determining what one has committed oneself to—for instance, by calling the pen “copper.” One of the radical features of this normative conception of freedom as constraint by norms is that it is a conception of *positive*, rather than *negative*, freedom.<sup>1</sup> Negative freedom is freedom *from* something: the absence of some sort of constraint. Positive freedom is freedom *to* do something: the presence of some sort of ability. In Kant’s picture of the freedom characteristic of *geistig*, normative beings, the capacity that they have to commit themselves, to undertake responsibilities, is of a kind of positive freedom. They are able to do something that merely natural creatures cannot. Freedom for Kant is the capacity to constrain oneself by something more than the laws of nature—the capacity to constrain oneself normatively, by undertaking commitments and responsibilities, acknowledging authority, and so on.

One way in which the model of language helps us think about the possibility of overcoming alienation, then, is that it exhibits an unalienated combination of the authority of individual attitudes and their responsibility to genuinely binding norms. For linguistic practice exhibits a social division of labor. It is up to each individual which speech acts to perform: which claims to make, which intentions and plans to endorse. The original source of linguistic commitments is the acts and attitudes of individual speakers. In undertaking those commitments,

---

<sup>1</sup> The terminology is due to Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 168-216.

those speakers exercise a distinctive kind of authority. But in doing so, as an unavoidable part of doing so, they make themselves responsible to the norms that articulate the contents of the concepts they have applied. Committing oneself in asserting or expressing an intention is licensing the rest of one's community to *hold* one responsible. The speaker and agent's authority is not only *compatible* with a coordinate responsibility (that is, authority on the part of the norms, administered by the community); it is unintelligible as determinately contentful apart from such responsibility. The individual has authority over the normative *force*, the undertaking of a commitment, only by making himself responsible to the world and to others for the *content* of the commitment. The positive freedom to exercise authority by undertaking determinately contentful commitments requires giving up some negative freedom, by making oneself responsible.

Unlike Kant, Hegel has a social practice account of the nature of normativity. Freedom for him is accordingly not a wholly individual achievement, not something that can be understood agent by agent. It is possible only in the context of communities, practices, and institutions that have the right structure. Because normativity is a social achievement, freedom is an essentially political phenomenon, in a way it is not for Kant. This difference between the two thinkers is connected to another one: freedom is a comparative normative phenomenon for Hegel in a way that it is not for Kant. Not everyone who is constrained by norms is free, according to Hegel. Only norm-instituting recognitive communities and institutions with the right structure constitute *free* self-conscious individuals. The paradigm of that ideal freedom-instituting structure is *linguistic* normativity.

A classic, perennial, in some sense defining problem of political philosophy has always been to explain how and on what grounds it could be rational for an individual to accept some communal constraint on her will. What could justify the loss of negative freedom—the freedom from constraint—that you get by entering into a community and subjecting yourself to their norms, acknowledging the authority of those norms? One can easily see how that could be justified from the point of view of the community. Unless people act *rightly* and conform to the norms, there are lots of things the community cannot do. The challenge has been to say, how one could justify that loss of negative freedom, as rational on the part of the individual. Responses to

**Commented [m1]:** AU: rightly?

**Commented [m2R1]:** Yes.

this challenge form a favorite literary genre in the Enlightenment. (Hobbes and Locke are paradigmatic practitioners.) Hegel saw in Kant's notion of positive freedom the possibility of a new kind of response to this challenge. In this context the fact that language provides both the medium and the model of recognition takes on a special importance. His idea is that some kinds of normative constraint provide a positive freedom, which, in Hegel's distinctive view, and moving beyond Kant, is *expressive* freedom. And the model for the exercise of that sort of freedom is talking.

Subsequent developments have put us in a somewhat better position to say what is promising about the linguistic model of positive freedom. Think to begin with about the astonishing empirical observation with which Noam Chomsky inaugurated modern linguistics—the observation that almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is a *novel* sentence. It is new, not just in the sense that *that speaker* has never produced or heard exactly that string of words before, but in the much stronger sense that *no one* in the history of the world has ever heard exactly that string of words before. “Have a nice day” may get a lot of play, but for any tolerably complex sentence (a sentence drawn at random from this text, for instance), the odds of anybody having uttered it before (unless we are in quotation mode) approach the infinitesimal. This is an observation that has been empirically verified over and over again by examining large corpora, transcribing actual conversations, and so on. And it is easy to show on fundamental grounds. Although we do not have a grammar that will generate all and only sentences of English, we have lots of grammars that generate only sentences of English. If you look at how many sentences of, say, fewer than twenty-five words there are, even in the vocabulary of basic English, five thousand words (the average speaker may use twenty thousand), you can see that there has not been time for a measurable proportion of them to be uttered, even if everyone always spoke English and did nothing but talk. So linguistic competence is the capacity to produce and understand an indefinite number of novel sentences. Chomsky wanted to know how that is possible.

However the trick is done, being able to do it is a kind of positive linguistic expressive freedom. The fact is that when you speak a language, you get the capacity to formulate an indefinite number of novel claims, and so to entertain an indefinite number of novel intentions,

plans, and conjectures. That is a kind of positive freedom to make and entertain novel claims, things that could be true, or things one could commit oneself to making true. One gets this explosion of positive expressive freedom, though, only by constraining oneself by linguistic norms—the norms one must acknowledge in practice as binding in order to be speaking some particular language. However open textured those norms may be, they involve genuine constraint. If one does not sufficiently respect the linguistic norms, then one ends up not saying, or thinking, anything at all. Of course, one need not say anything. One could just not ever say anything, though at the cost, as Sellars says, of having nothing to say. But the only way one can buy this positive, expressive freedom is by paying a price in negative freedom. One must constrain oneself by linguistic and conceptual norms. When one is speaking one's own language and not using fancy vocabulary, that constraint becomes invisible. It becomes much more visible when speaking in a language in which one is not fluent. The point here is that the way in which the language one does constrain oneself by becomes the medium in which one's *self* not only expresses, but develops itself is a paradigm of central importance for Hegel.

In the context of the essentially political, because social, account of the nature of normativity, the paradigm of linguistic norms provides the form of an argument about how it could be rational to give up some kind of negative freedom, constraining oneself by norms, making oneself and one's performances responsible to them (liable to assessment according to them) by practically acknowledging them as authoritative. For consider a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of trading off some minor negative freedom for the bonanza of positive expressive freedom that comes with constraining oneself by linguistic norms. (Any such assessment would have to be retrospective, of course, because anyone who has not yet made the deal is not in a position rationally to assess anything.) Can there be any doubt that the trade-off is worth it? Even though the beasts of field and forest are not in a position to make this argument, it seems clear that it would be rational for them to embrace this sort of normative constraint if they were.

Part of Hegel's thought about how we can move beyond modernity, and a lesson we should learn from the single biggest event in the history of *Geist*, is that the positive expressive freedom afforded by engaging in linguistic practices, so subjecting oneself to constraint by

linguistic norms, is the paradigm of freedom for normative, discursive beings like us, and that political institutions and the normative constraint they exercise should be justifiable in exactly the same way that conceptual linguistic ones are. In particular, every loss of negative freedom should be more than compensated for by an increase in positive expressive freedom. This is the capacity to undertake new kinds of commitments, new kinds of responsibility, to acknowledge and exercise new kinds of authority, all of which at once express and develop the self-conscious individuals who are the subjects of those new norms. This is a paradigm and measure of justifiable political constraint. This is how it can be rationally legitimated—even if only retrospectively, because the positive expressive freedom in question may not, as in the paradigmatic linguistic case, be prospectively intelligible. The demand is that every aspect of the loss of negative freedom, of the constraint by norms that individuals take on, be compensated for many times over by an increase in positive expressive freedom. The form of a rational justification for a political institution and its immanent norms is to show that it is in this crucial respect language-like.

Language is of course not a distinctively modern institution. There is no *Geist* of any kind apart from linguistic practices. But we can see that the stakes are high when Hegel specifies the distinctive role language plays in the norm-articulating cognitive structure of modernity. Rather than being just one optional form in which the force of norms can be acknowledged and their content expressed, language becomes the medium in which the norms are instituted and applied. There are profound consequences to seeing the rise of subjectivity in the form of the acknowledgment of the rights of intention and knowledge, the advent of a new kind of self-conscious individuality, as bringing with it this new institutional centrality of language. Hegel's philosophy of language—his account of the relations among speakers, their acts and attitudes, the linguistic communities they belong to, and the linguistic norms that make up the language itself, and the idiom in which that account is articulated—may be the part of his thought that is of the most contemporary philosophical interest and value. That is partly because he attributes deep *political* significance to the replacement of a semantic model of atomistic representation by one of holistic expression. It is this line of thought that underlies the contention here not only that Hegel's semantic theory (his theory of conceptual content) and his pragmatist understanding of how *meaning* is related to the norms governing the *use* of expressions (the practical attitudes

expressed by applying concepts in judging and acting intentionally) should be thought of as at the center of his thought, but also that he is presenting a semantics that is intended to have a practically edifying effect. Understanding how discursive practice both institutes and applies determinately contentful conceptual norms is to point the way to a new and better, more fully self-conscious structure of practical normativity. It is to lead to a new form of mutual recognition and usher in the third stage in the development of *Geist*: the age of trust.

#### IV. Pure Consciousness: Alienation as a Disparity between Cognition and Recognition

As actual consciousness is divided into State Power and Wealth, pure consciousness is divided into Faith and Enlightenment. Faith and Enlightenment are not just theories of normativity; they are *institutionalized* theories. The characteristically alienated structure of modern normativity shows up not only in the relations between the competing forms of actual consciousness, but also in the relations between the competing alienated theories of normativity embodied by Faith and Enlightenment. That is to say that in both cases the relations of authority and responsibility between the two substructures are practically construed on the model of independence, hence as competing and incompatible, rather than on the model of freedom, as reciprocal and mutually presupposing.

By telling us what he thinks Faith is right about, what he thinks Enlightenment is right about, how Faith looks to Enlightenment, and how Enlightenment looks to Faith, Hegel assembles raw materials that are crucial for the transition from modernity to a form of normativity structured by self-consciousness with the form of Absolute Knowing. In general, Hegel's reading of Faith—the distinctively modern, alienated form of religion—is a successor project to Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, a book that had had a tremendous influence on Hegel when he was still a student at the *Stift* in Tübingen (and on his classmates Friedrich Schelling and Friedrich Hölderlin). Where Kant had looked for the rational moral teachings that were expressed in sensuous images in Christianity, Hegel seeks also lessons about the metaphysics of self-conscious individuality and social substance.

**Commented [m3]:** AU: lowercase, as it is in the conclusion?

**Commented [m4R3]:** Yes.

**Commented [m5]:** AU: want to add first names?

These passages about a core structure of Faith are a paradigm of how Hegel gives a metaphysical reading of religious imagery:

Here, in the realm of faith, the first is the absolute being, spirit that is in and for itself insofar as it is the simple eternal substance. But, in the actualization of its notion, in being spirit it passes over into being for another, its self-identity becomes an actual self-sacrificing absolute being, it becomes a self, but a mortal, perishable self. Consequently, the third moment is the return of this alienated self and of the humiliated substance into their original simplicity. Only in this way is substance represented as spirit. [PG 532]

These distinct beings, when brought back to themselves by thought out of the flux of the actual world, are immutable, eternal spirits, whose being lies in thinking the unity they constitute. [PG 533]

This is his reading of the actual significance and metaphysical meaning of the allegory of incarnation and the Trinity. (Similar accounts are found throughout his work, notably in the *Science of Logic*.) He thinks that the doctrine of the Trinity is really talking about the structure of *Geist*—that is, of social normative “substance”—and that the community and the norms that are implicit in the communal doings (its “essence”) is what God the Father in the Trinity is the image of. The substance is social substance synthesized by reciprocal recognition. That is the medium in which the norms inhere. In the model, that is the language. The interfusion of humanity and divinity in God the Son within the allegory stands for the actual individual speakers, who are bound and constituted as self-conscious individuals by those norms “passing over into being for another, becoming a self, a mortal, perishable, self.” The relations between them—the way in which speakers and their utterances are what they are only by virtue of the linguistic norms that govern them, and the norms are only actualized by being applied to actual utterances by speakers and audiences—that is the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. So we have the universals or norms, their perishable incarnation raised above mere particularity, which is also the actualization of those norms, and the relation between them in individuality. The lesson Hegel draws is that the being of these spirits “lies in thinking the unity they constitute”—that is, in understanding his recognitive account of normativity and individuality in relation to biological particularity and normative universality. It is a measure of the way he works that Hegel goes back and forth cheerfully between the logical vocabulary, the theological vocabulary, and the

linguistic-*cum*-normative vocabulary for talking about these things. The religious language is a sensuous allegory for the most fundamental metaphysical-logical idea Hegel has.

**Commented [m6]:** AU: italics?

**Commented [m7R6]:** Yes.

Thinking of the universal and particular elements of individuality (the divine and the human) as standing in familial relations is construing mediation under categories of immediacy. Universality is thought of as being a kind of *thing*: in many ways, like the things here, only somewhere else, over there, in a beyond (“jenseits,” in a different ontological postal code than ours). In a corresponding and complementary approach, Enlightenment construes universality and normativity as rationality. This good thought shows up only in alienated form, however, when rationality is then thought of as a matter-of-factual dispositional property that happens to be shared by some particular organisms or kind of organism—when our being *geistig* beings is put in a box with having opposable thumbs. The lesson of the transition from *Perception* to *Force and Understanding* was that the universals, the conceptual relations of incompatibility and consequence that articulate facts and show up in the form of laws, should be understood not as a supersensible world of theoretical entities standing behind and ontologically distinguished from the objects that show up in sense, but rather as the implicit structure or articulation of them—the modal articulation of observable fact. In the same way, here, that is the lesson we are supposed to learn here about what he insists is the common topic of Faith, under the heading of the religious absolute, and of Enlightenment, under the heading of reason. Normativity, universality, is not to be reified into some kind of a thing, either over there (as God) or in individual human beings (as Reason), but rather as implicit in the articulation of individuals in a community, their cognitive interplay, and the utterances and attitudes that actualize and express the norms.

Enlightenment’s critique of Faith shows some understanding of this lesson. As Hegel reconstructs that critique, it is a three-pronged attack. There is an ontological claim, an epistemological claim, and a practical, moral, claim. The first is that Faith makes an ontological mistake. It thinks that something exists, when it does not. God is not in fact part of the furniture of the world. Thinking there is such a being is just a generalization of premodern, magical thinking, which sees ordinary sensible material objects as enchanted, possessed of magical properties. Generically, this mistake is of a piece with thinking that there is a tiger in the next room, when in fact the room is empty. The epistemological objection of Enlightenment to Faith

is that even if there were such an object, we could not come to know about it in the way Faith claims to know about God. The actual epistemological grounds for belief in this absolute are prejudice, error, gullibility, confusion, stupidity. Faith claims an immediate relation to the Absolute, but in fact all the content of its purported knowledge depends on contingent, empirical claims. Reports of miracles, accidental preservation of evidence of the knowledge of those occurrences through scripture, and correct interpretation of the text cannot critically bear the weight of the belief that is predicated on it.

Third, enlightenment accuses faith of bad intention or motivation, of practical errors of action, of immoral activity. The priests are accused of trickery, the pretense of insight and knowledge, and of using that as a means to amass power. The proof of that is the way despotism, through the doctrine of divine right of kings, is a state power that employs the gullibility and bad insight of the masses and the trickery of the priests to establish itself. So, Enlightenment says, the ontological mistake and epistemological mistakes of religion are put in service of bad political and moral activity, and despotism and religious institutions are two hands that wash each other. (This is the radical enlightenment attitude that is summed up pithily by Denis Diderot, when he says that he will be happy only when the last king is strangled with the guts of the last priest.)

Commented [m8]: AU: want to add first name?

## V. Faith and Trust

Hegel responds to these familiar, telling complaints that Enlightenment is fundamentally misunderstanding Faith by seeing it as in the first instance standing in a *cognitive* relation to some thing—as consisting at base in a claim to *knowledge* of the Absolute. The criticisms as to evidence, the ungenerous attribution of ignoble motives for promulgating this belief (which we consider further later on)—all of these things depend on seeing faith as making a matter-of-factual claim about how things are, about which we can then ask for its epistemological credentials, and about the matter of factual truth or falsity of the claim. For Hegel, Faith is, in the first instance, a matter of realizing a certain self-conception. It is not a kind of *cognition*, but a kind of *recognition*, and therefore a kind of self-constitution. Generically, it is the identification of the individual self with its universal rather than its particular aspect. That identification with

the universal takes the form of sacrificing particular subjective attitudes and interests through service and worship.

In the original, melodramatic allegorical picture of the transition from nature to spirit, the first Masters pulled themselves by their own bootstraps out of the muck of nature by being willing to risk their biological lives for a normative status, for a form of authority, to be recognized as having that normative status, by being willing to *die* for the cause. The point of the allegory of the sacrifice of service and worship is, rather, to identify with the authority of the norms (the universal) by being willing to *live* for it, by submerging particular attitudes (beliefs and desires) in the communal norms. In that way, like the Master of the original allegory, believing consciousness succeeds in making itself something other than what it already was, constitutes itself as something more than that. That existential self-constitution—institution of a normative status by adoption of an attitude—is what faith really consists in.

The reason the criticisms of Faith by Enlightenment miss their mark, on this account, is that the self-conception to which a community is in this way practically committed to realizing is not the having of a belief that could turn out to be radically false. It does not stand in that sort of a relation to its world. It is a doing—a *making* things be thus and so, not a *taking* them to be thus and so. It is a recognition, a kind of self-constitution, not a kind of cognition. What it is about, the truth that the certainty of the believer is answerable to, is not something distinct from the believer in the community; it is something that if all goes well, the believers *make* true of themselves. If not, the failure is practical, not cognitive. Faith, for the believer, is not an alien thing that is just found in him, no one knowing how and whence it came. On the contrary, the faith of the believer consists just in him finding himself as this particular personal consciousness in the absolute being, and his obedience and service consist in producing, through his own activity, that being as his own absolute being. [PG 566]

But here Enlightenment is foolish. Faith regards it as not understanding the real facts when it talks about priestly deception and deluding the people. It talks about this as if by some hocus pocus of conjuring priests, consciousness has been pawned off with something absolutely alien and other to it in place of its own essence. It is impossible to deceive a people in this manner. Brass instead of gold, counterfeit instead of genuine

money may well be passed off, at least in isolated cases. Many may be persuaded to believe that a battle lost was a battle won, and other lies about things of sense and isolated happenings may be credible for a time. But in the knowledge of that essential being in which consciousness has immediate certainty of itself, the idea of this sort of delusion is quite out of the question. [PG 550]

The language of belief is performative, establishing as well as expressing social normative relations—not just saying how things objectively are, independently of the attitudes of the believers involved.

What is constituted by Faith is a certain kind of self-conscious individuality. The recognitive account of self-consciousness tells us that this is possible only if a corresponding kind of recognitive community is instituted at the same time. The religious community is established by individuals' reciprocal recognition of each other as serving and worshipping, which is to say as identifying with the norms through sacrifice of merely particular, subjective attitudes and interests of the individuals they would otherwise be. This recognitive relation Hegel calls "trust" [Vertrauen].

Whomsoever I trust, his certainty of himself is for me the certainty of myself; I recognize in him my own being-for-self, know that he acknowledges it and that it is for him purpose and essence. [PG 549]

The second part of this passage puts three requirements for an attitude to count as trust. The trusting one must recognize her own being-for-self, her own self-conception, in the trusted one; the trusting one must correctly take it that that self-conception is acknowledged by the trusted one; and the trusted one must correctly take it that that self-conception is acknowledged by the trusting one also as her own. The first part of the passage says that when those conditions are met, the trusting individual counts as identifying with the trusted individual.

So there is a kind of emergent identification-through-recognition here, according to which identifying with the norms has the effect or significance of identifying with other individuals who also identify their individual selves with the norms. Identifying with (by sacrificing for) the norms, and recognizing other individuals as doing the same, is at once

identifying with the communal side of *Geist*—the recognitive community in whose practices those norms are implicit—and also identifying with the other individuals whom one recognizes as undertaking the same identification. One is not identifying with the norms or the community rather than with the other individuals, but identifying with each by identifying with the other. Put another way, because of the shared renunciation of particularity, the individuals one identifies with by recognizing them as identifying with the community and its norms are not being treated in practice as split into a particular and a universal aspect. This constellation of attitudes foreshadows the final, fully self-conscious form of mutual recognition.

In trust, everyone is identifying with the universal side of individuality—and thereby with others who also do so. The passage quoted earlier continues:

Further, since what is object for me is that in which I recognize myself, I am for myself at the same time in that object in the form of another self-consciousness, i.e. one which has become in that object alienated from its particular individuality, viz. from its natural and contingent existence, but which partly remains therein self-consciousness, partly, in that object, is an essential consciousness. [PG 549]

The community synthesized by reciprocal recognition in the form of trust shows the way to the possibility of an unalienated community of self-conscious individuals. It does not yet constitute such a community, because the particularity of the actual individual self-consciousnesses that actualize the norms by their acts and attitudes (including their recognitive attitudes) is still slighted. Further recognitive progress is required to overcome alienation and move beyond the modern phase in the development of *Geist*. Unalienated *Geist* requires further recognitive structure beyond trust as it is on offer here. But that the recognitive community have the structure of trust in this sense is one essential element of *Sittlichkeit* after the rise of modern subjectivity. What trust brings about is the “unity of abstract essence and self-consciousness,” of the norms believing individuals identify with and those believers. That unity, Hegel claims, is “the absolute Being of Faith”—that is, the distinctive *object* of religious belief.

The absolute Being of faith is essentially not the abstract essence that would exist beyond the consciousness of the believer; on the contrary, it is the Spirit of the [religious] community, the unity of the abstract essence and self-consciousness. It is the

spirit of the community, the unity of the abstract essence in self-consciousness. [PG 549]

On his view, the real object of religious veneration, Spirit, is not a God in the form of a distinct thing that causally creates human beings, but the religious community that believers create by their cognitive identification with it and with each other. That, after all, is the lesson of his reading of the real lesson of the Christian Trinity: God the Father is the sensuously clothed image of the norm-governed community synthesized by reciprocal cognitive attitudes (having the structure of trust) among self-conscious individuals. The spiritual dimension of human life, toward which religious believers properly direct their attention and respect, is what must be added to merely natural animals to make us persons, self-conscious individual selves, agents and knowers, subjects of normative assessment. That is the discursive normativity implicit in the practices of a properly constituted cognitive community of language users.

Even though its achievement of a community exhibiting the cognitive structure of trust is a positive development, Faith, as Hegel describes it, is still an alienated form of self-consciousness. It is alienated in that it does not suitably and self-consciously incorporate the particular element in its practical attitude toward individuality. It is in fact the activity of individuals that produces the community and its implicit norms. Further, the relation of each believing individual to that for which it sacrifices and with which it identifies, the object of its veneration, is mediated by its relations to other recognized and recognizing individuals, via those cognitive attitudes. But Faith insists that it stands in an *immediate* relation to absolute essence, and that the existence and nature of that essence is wholly *independent* of the activities and attitudes of believers. Whereas in fact

[t]hat [the absolute Being of Faith] be the spirit of the community, this requires as a necessary moment the action of the community. It is this spirit only by being produced by consciousness, or rather it does not exist as the spirit of the community without having been produced by this consciousness. [PG 549]

Its norms are actually the product of its practical cognitive attitudes. Modernity is right about that. Faith does not understand itself this way. Hegel has been telling us what the object of Faith is *in itself*, not what it is *for* the kind of self-consciousness in question. He is describing for us

the referent that they pick out (address themselves to) by means of misleading senses (conceptual contents), the noumena behind the phenomena of religious worship and service. In this respect, Enlightenment is right in its criticisms of Faith. It does seriously misunderstand its object, which is not (as Faith thinks), an objective, independent being, but a product of its own thought and practice. (Making a mistake of this kind is what in Marx's anthropological allegory is called "fetishism.")

It is just this that Enlightenment rightly declares faith to be, when it says that what is for faith the absolute Being, is a Being of its own consciousness, is its own thought, something that is a creation of consciousness itself. [PG 549]

Faith seeks to ground its cognitive and practical activities in knowledge of facts—that is, to give an objectivist metaphysical grounding for the bindingness of these norms. That meta-attitude is carried over from traditional society: thinking of the norms not as the products of our activity, but as something merely found in the way the world anyway is. Where for the Greeks the norms had been part of the natural world, for Faith they are part of the supernatural world. But that is a specific difference within a general agreement that norms are grounded in ontology and matters of fact, in something about how the world just is antecedently to its having human beings and their practical attitudes in it. Those norms and their bindingness are not understood as products of human attitudes and activity, though they in fact are instituted by people acting according to the pure consciousness of faith. Believers institute these norms by their attitudes, but they do not understand themselves as doing that. Faith has not embraced the fundamental, defining insight of modernity: the attitude-dependence of normative statuses.

Faith and Enlightenment each has both a cognitive, theoretical dimension and a recognitive, practical dimension. Faith is wrong in its cognitive attitudes, misunderstanding its object and its relation to that object. But it succeeds with its recognitive practices, creating a community of trust. Enlightenment is right in its cognitive attitudes, correctly seeing that the normativity both are concerned with is not something independent of our attitudes and activities. But it fails on the recognitive, practical side. Because it creates a community with the reciprocal recognitive structure of trust, Faith acknowledges norms that can have some determinate content; they are contentful norms because a community like that can actually institute, sustain, and

develop determinately contentful conceptual norms. But Enlightenment creates no such community. On the cognitive side, it sees that contentful norms cannot simply be read off of the way the world simply is, independently of the attitudes, activities, practices, and capacities of the creatures who are bound by them. Rationality is a human capacity. But Enlightenment is stuck with a purely formal notion of reason. It can criticize the contents Faith purports to find, but cannot on its own produce replacements.

Enlightenment acknowledges, as Faith does not, that both the binding force and the determinate content of conceptual norms depend on the activity of self-conscious individual knowers and agents. Its disenchanted, objective natural world does not come with a normative structure. The phenomena of authority and responsibility are a human imposition, the product of our attitudes and practices. Enlightenment manifests its alienation by developing its understanding of the norms in a way that is as one-sidedly subjective as Faith's is one-sidedly objective. The ultimately unsatisfactory result is Enlightenment utilitarianism, which construes the normative significance of things as consisting in their usefulness to us.<sup>2</sup> "Utility" here is allegorical for the role things play as objects of practical attitudes. This view radicalizes the insight that conceptual norms are not independent of the activities of self-conscious individuals who apply those concepts in judgment and intention ("The Useful is the object in so far as self-consciousness penetrates it." [PG 581]), by turning it into the view that norms are simply reflections of the particular, contingent purposes of individual self-consciousnesses. In Hegel's terms, the principle of utility identifies what the norms are in themselves with what they are for consciousness.

The term "Utilitarianism" is now usually used to refer to the sort of moral theory given its classical shape by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The term typically used to refer to the extension of that way of thinking from the practical realm to the theoretical realm of theories of meaning and truth is "pragmatism." Hegel sees a trajectory of thought that begins with the

---

<sup>2</sup> "Enlightenment completes the alienation of Spirit in this realm, too, in which that Spirit takes refuge and where it is conscious of an unruffled peace. It upsets the housekeeping of Spirit in the household of Faith by bringing into that household the tools and utensils of this world, a world which that Spirit cannot deny is its own, because its consciousness likewise belongs to it. In this negative activity pure insight at the same time realizes itself, and produces its own object, the unknowable absolute Being and the principle of utility." [PG 486]

extrusion of subjective values from an objective world of facts, and ends with an identification of all properties and facts as purpose relative, an understanding of the truth of claims as conduciveness to the success of the practical enterprises of individuals. “Alienation” is his term for the common practical conception of (attitudes toward) authority and responsibility (“independence” and “dependence”) that underlies, motivates, and necessitates the oscillation between one-sided objectivism and one-sided subjectivism. When that alienated practical conception is made theoretically explicit, he calls it “Verstand.” Hegel’s overall philosophical aim is to give us the metaconceptual tools to get beyond the ways of understanding norms that require us to choose between taking them to be genuinely binding on individual attitudes because objectively there, antecedently to and independently of any such attitudes, on the one hand, and taking them to be mere reflections of those subjective attitudes, on the other. Thinking in terms of the categories of *Vernunft* instead of *Verstand* is to enable us to overcome not only the naïve, dogmatic ontological objectivism about norms of the tradition, but also this sort of utilitarian pragmatism—quite distinct from the sort of pragmatism I have argued Hegel endorsed—with its ironic distancing from the genuineness of the binding force of the norms, which has been the modern culmination of the rise of subjectivism.

Hegel thinks the practical stakes riding on this enterprise are high. When pure consciousness in the form of Enlightenment is the self-understanding of actual consciousness in the institutional form of State Power (the practical cognitive expression and actualization of a theoretical cognitive view), the result is the Terror, whose epitome is the final bloodthirsty death throes of the French Revolution.

Consciousness has found its Notion in Utility . . . from this inner revolution there emerges the actual revolution of the actual world, the new shape of consciousness, absolute freedom. [PG 582]

Norms that are products of subjective attitudes are practically understood as unable to constrain those attitudes. A purely formal notion of reason offers no determinate content. The state is understood on the model of a particular individual self-consciousness—distinguished only in that the will of that consciousness (the “will of the people”), its commitments, are taken as binding on every individual. Thus individuals are obliged to identify with and sacrifice themselves for that

will. But this sort of purely formal recognition relation—each citizen recognizing himself in the will or all, the common will—cannot in fact institute a determinately contentful common will. That would require that the particular subjective commitments of the individuals have some sort of authority over the universal, the common will. The result, he thinks, must be a content-vacuum, which can be filled only by the subjective attitudes and inclinations of some despotic individual—in much the same way as in the realm of abstract legal personhood. Absolute Terror is what happens when the authority of individual self-consciousness to institute norms is conceived and practiced as unconstrained by correlative responsibility—as a matter of independence without correlative dependence.

Contentful norms require incorporation of particularity and contingency in the form of necessity (normative force) and universality (conceptual content) through cognitive relations of reciprocal authority and responsibility articulated not only *socially*, but also *historically*, in the form of constraint by a recollected *tradition*. Understanding that there are no norms wholly independent of the attitudes and practices of individual self-consciousnesses is modern; understanding that authority of attitudes over statuses on the model of unconstrained, pure independence (asymmetrical recognition) rather than freedom is alienated. Any such conception is bound to oscillate between seeing the norms as not constraining attitudes because they are contentless, and seeing them as not constraining attitudes because their content is arbitrary, contingent, and particular, hence irrational, derived from the contingent attitudes, interests, and inclinations of some particular subject. The charge of contentlessness was Hegel's objection at the end of the *Reason* section to the "honest consciousness," which pursues its contraction strategy for construing agency on the model of Mastery by taking responsibility only for what it *tries* to do, its *will*, narrowly construed, rather than its actual doing. And we will see the same objection made to the conscientious consciousness, which analogously identifies duty with what it sincerely takes to be duty (norm with attitude) in the discussion of *Moralität* near the end of *Spirit*.

Faith and Enlightenment are each one-sided appreciations of the true nature of norms in relation to attitudes. Faith is on the right track on the practical cognitive dimension of self-consciousness, but has the wrong theoretical cognitive take on the side of consciousness. Faith is

Commented [JD9]: AU: change to italics?

Commented [JD10R9]: Yes.

right in what it *does*: to *give* the norms determinate content by building a cognitive *community*. It builds a *community of trust*, which can *develop* and *sustain* determinately contentful norms. It is right to see that its relation to the norms should be one of *acknowledgment* and *service*. It is wrong to think that private conceptions and concerns must or even can be totally sacrificed to make that possible. Faith is wrong to take over the traditional immediate conception of its relation to the norms: to reify, ontologize, and in a sense naturalize them by objectifying them. It does not recognize itself in those norms it identifies with, in that it does not see them as its own product. Neither its community nor its individual activities are seen as *essential* or as *authoritative* with respect to those norms. Enlightenment is right that the norms depend for both their force and their content on the attitudes and practices of the very individuals who become more than merely particular, natural beings by being acculturated—that is, by being constrained by those norms. It is wrong to think that all we contribute is the *form*. And it is wrong in the practical cognitive consequences of its insight into our authority over the norms. It is right in its criticism of Faith's metaphysics, but wrong to think that undercuts its form of life. On the cognitive side of constituting communities and self-conscious individuals, the contrast between the Terror and the community of trust could not be more stark. The division of legitimating pure consciousness into complementary competing practically institutionalized rivals, one of whom can be successful on the cognitive side only at the cost of failure on the recognitive side, and the other of whom can be successful on the recognitive side only at the cost of failure on the cognitive side, is a structure distinctive of modern alienation.

What is needed to overcome it is to combine the humanistic *metaphysics* of Enlightenment (with its cognitive theoretical emphasis on the contribution of the activity of individual self-consciousnesses) with the *community of trust* of Faith (with its recognitive practical emphasis on the contribution of the activity of individual self-consciousnesses through acknowledgment of, service to, and identification-through-sacrifice with the norms). The recipe for moving to the third, postmodern phase in the development of *Geist* is to bring together the cognitive and recognitive successes of Enlightenment and Faith. The key to doing that is appreciating the role *recollection* plays in both cognition and recognition. When cognitive activity takes the form of forgiving recollection, it institutes semantic representational relations between knowing subjects and the objects known. When recognitive activity takes the form of

forgiving recollection, it institutes communities with the normative structure of trust. In short, recollection as forgiveness forges the conceptual link between unalienated cognition and unalienated recognition.