Part Five   **Hegel on the Historicity of Normativity**
Handout for Lecture 16
<p align="center">Modernity, Alienation, and Language</p>

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.

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]

Hegel distinguishes two aspects of the normative structure of the modern world of culture: *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.
Pure consciousness is 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.

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, 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.

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.

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.

"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]

Enlightenment's critique of Faith 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. 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. 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.

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.

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 *re*cognition, and therefore a kind of self-constitution. Generically, it is the identification of the individual self with its universal rather than its particular aspect.

"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]

'Trust' [Vertrauen] is what Hegel calls the form of recognition that is an ideal of Faith: "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. 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 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]

"[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]

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]

"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]

Contentful norms require incorporation of particularity and contingency in the form of necessity (normative force) and universality (conceptual content) through recognitive 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.

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 recognitive dimension of self-consciousness, but has the wrong theoretical cognitive take on the side of consciousness.
Faith is right in what it *does:* to *give* the norms determinate content by building a recognitive *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 recognitive 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.

What is needed is to combine the humanistic *metaphysics* of Enlightenment (with its theoretical cognitive emphasis on the contribution of the activity of individual self-consciousnesses) with the *community of trust* of Faith (with its practical recognitive 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.