

Introduction to the Course

Title: “A Twentyfirst Century Semantic Recollection of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”

Quick Intro about course mechanics

[Put screenshot of website address and picture of website onto ShareScreen.

Maybe also book cover (for mood): *Doestoevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts Into Tears*]

Title of this session: “**Why Read Hegel Now? And How?**”

Will discuss these two points in order:

Part 1: **Why Read Hegel Now?**

Part 2: **How Should We Read Hegel Now?**

Plan for Part 1:

A) **Kant.**

He is, for us philosophers, what the poet Algernon Swinburne said the sea is: “The great, grey, mother of us all.”

2 basic points with subsidiaries:

1. Normativity of intentionality.

Kant and the Normativity of Intentionality

- An axial thought (around which all of his work revolves):
- What distinguishes knowers and agents from merely natural creatures is not their involvement with or manifestation of some special kind of mind-stuff.
- It is that judgments and intentional doings are things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for. They are *commitments* of ours, exercises of our *authority*.
- Responsibility, commitment, authority—these are all **normative** concepts.
- Kant reconceives and redescribes us as creatures who **live and move and have our being** in a *normative* space, a space of commitments and responsibilities.
- Part of what distinguishes *discursive* commitments is that part of what we are responsible for is having *reasons* for our judgments (theoretical commitments) and actions (practical commitments).
- So these are **rational** commitments and responsibilities, in the sense that it is always appropriate to *ask* for the reasons (norms) justifying them—not in the sense that we always have good answers to such demands.

- This lesson about the essentially normative significance of intentional states (belief, desire, intention...) is rediscovered in the middle of the 20th century by **Wittgenstein** (“**teach the children a game**”—determines what counts as fulfilling the request), and by Sellars (who learns it from Kant).

Subsidiary points, downstream from normativity of intentionality:

- i. **Primacy of judgement** (as opposed to concept), as **minimal unit of responsibility**.
- ii. Normative account of representation. The “objective form of judgment”, the “object = X” that one is judging (thinking, talking) *about*. It is understood as what one makes oneself responsible *to* when one becomes responsible *for* a judgeable content by an act of judging. It sets a standard for normative assessment of the *correctness* of the judgement, in a distinctive sense.
- iii. Kant takes **Rousseau’s definition of freedom**—obedience to a law one lays down for oneself (binds oneself by) is freedom—and **turns it into a criterion of demarcation for normative constraint**.

Kant understands freedom, oddly enough, as a kind of *constraint: normative constraint*, constraint by norms.

Norms are (= what one treats—recognizes or acknowledges *as*—as *reasons* for judging or acting).

- What distinguishes constraint by *norms* (responsibility, commitment) from causal constraint or constraint by mere *power* is that it is *self*-constraint.
- Autonomy: *autos* = self + *nomos* = law.
- Only *we* can *normatively* bind ourselves—only bindings we impose are *normative* bindings.
- iv. Result is the BKNS.
 - The **Basic Kantian Normative Status** is
 - the *authority* to *make* oneself *responsible* (commit oneself)
 - by *taking* oneself to be responsible (acknowledging a responsibility).
 - This authority to commit oneself makes one a *person*. It is the *dignity* of Kantian subjects, which others have a duty (obligation, responsibility, commitment) to *respect*.
 - This is the **institution of norms** (normative statuses, paradigmatically responsibility) by normative *attitudes*.
 - That norms are created by human attitudes is a big **Enlightenment** theme

(cf. *social contract theories* of political obligation).

(Note that I trace historical antecedents of Kant's and Hegel's views on normativity in the MISSING CHAPTER of *ST*, made available as supplemental material in Week 6.)

2. Distinction between empirical/practical concepts (including theoretical ones) and **categorial concepts**.

Kant has the idea that in addition to concepts whose principal expressive task is to describe and explain empirical happenings, there are concepts whose principal expressive task is to make explicit the framework of practices and abilities that makes it possible to describe and explain empirical happenings. A paradigm are the alethic modal concepts that articulate subjunctionally robust conditionals.

They articulate the inferential relations among empirical concepts in virtue of which, as Sellars puts the point, they can be used to *describe* and not merely *label* (differentially respond to) what confronts us empirically. The difference is that genuine *descriptions* stand in *explanatory* relations to one another ("becausation"), which exploit subjunctionally robust inferential connections among descriptions.

He calls this new kind of concept he has discovered "pure categories of the Understanding." He takes our grasp of them to be "*a priori*" in the specific sense that there are no particular empirical concepts one needs to know how to use in order to grasp these categorial concepts. In being able to use *any* empirical concepts one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do to apply them.

B) Post-Kantian anti-psychologistic dualism.

Having looked at the Kantian tradition *before* Hegel, I now want to say something about the Neokantian tradition *after* him.

Neo-Kantians:

Founder: Kuno Fischer, in Göttingen (Frege)

Then

Marburg: Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, focused on natural sciences and
Freiburg ("Southwest"): Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, focused on social sciences, and history.

Rickert (Heidegger's Doktorvater) also Doktorvater of Bruno Bauch (Jena: Frege's colleague and Carnap's *Doktorvater*)

Nextgen: Ernst Cassirer. (But C.I. Lewis and Carnap, and thence to Sellars.)

They (like Hegel—though they didn't see that Hegel saw it) did see Kant's normative turn. For, following Fischer, they saw Kant as above all an epistemologist. He taught us to see philosophers as concerned with what knowledge is *as such*. His big move for them is separating the *quid facti* from the *quid juris*, as the “celebrated Mr. Locke,” who produced a “mere physiology of the Understanding” did not. **Kant “depsychologized epistemology”** by seeing it as a normative discipline.

Cavell: then **Frege depsychologized logic**, and **Wittgenstein depsychologized psychology** (philosophy of mind).

This is the tradition I want to place Hegel in.

Beiser argues persuasively that the neoKantians never overcame the *dualism* of norm and fact.

Neokantian tradition oscillated between
naturalistic **reductionism** about discursive normativity and
dualism about norms/facts or causes, ought/is, prescriptions/descriptions, histories/natures.
Def: A **dualism** is what a **distinction** becomes if it is drawn in terms that make the relations
between the distinguished items unintelligible. (Paradigm is Descartes's substance dualism.)

But neokantians *never* saw that in emphasizing normativity, and historicizing (and to some extent naturalizing it) it, they were following Hegel.

They did all appreciate the historicity of concepts.

For the extant reading of Hegel, via the *WL* and the *Encyclopedia*, did not emphasize these elements. They mostly didn't take the *PG* seriously, and saw the other as relegated to Hegel's *Realphilosophie*.

Accordingly, they did not see that, as I want to argue, Hegel had the *answer* to the question of how to emphasize the normativity of conceptual *without* turning Kant's central *distinction* into a *dualism*.

No-one read Hegel as centrally concerned with this issue of normativity and its relation to factuality-actuality (necessity to contingency). For it seemed to them—as it seems to McDowell today—that this concern is absent from the *WL*.

Frege's antipsychologism in *logic* was not seen as extending to the *conceptual* or *discursive* generally. That had to wait for the later LW. Recovering *that* idea is the *big* difference between *TLP* and his later works.

And the first generation of Wittgensteinians (Anscombe, Malcolm, von Wright...) did not see this issue of normativity (and its social, contingent character) as LW's central concern.

So I want to read Hegel as situated in *this* retrospectively constituted tradition—all the way to later Wittgenstein.

Hegel (C).

2 basic points, with subsidiaries:

1. **Social account of normativity.** Normative *statuses* still seen as instituted by *attitudes*, but now in form of **reciprocal recognition** rather than *autonomous self-binding* (the authority to make oneself responsible by taking oneself to be responsible).

Hegel has the idea that norms are **social statuses**.

- Norms, normative statuses, above all, the normative status of being a normative self or subject, a subject who has statuses of authority and responsibility, who can commit oneself, are instituted by **reciprocal recognition**.
- To be a normative subject is to be recognized as such by those one recognizes as such.
- The authority to commit oneself, make oneself responsible, the dignity and autonomy that is the BKNS, depends on its being respected (attributed, recognized) by others.

Self-consciousness as normative self-hood, being a normative subject.

- Self-consciousness is a *social achievement*, a **normative status that is a social status—not something that happens between one's ears**.
- How consciousness presupposes self-consciousness:
Being able to commit oneself (in judgment or intentional action) depends both on **acknowledging** that commitment and on one's commitment **being acknowledged** (=attributed).
One's normative *statuses* are *attitude*-dependent. What one *is* committed to depends on what one **takes** oneself to be committed to.

2. **Historical move: Normative creatures don't have natures, they have histories.** This is because their normative *statuses* are instituted by their normative *attitudes*. What they are *in* themselves (statuses) depends essentially on what they are *for* themselves. So they are *essentially self-conscious*: their attitudes are part of what they really are.

Essentially self-conscious creatures are ones such that what they are *for* themselves, their *attitudes*, are an essential element of what they are *in* themselves, their *statuses*.

So they can *change* what they are *in* themselves (how they really are) by changing what they are *for* themselves (how they appear).

- They are accordingly subject to a distinctive kind of cascading **developmental** process:
- Changing what they are *for* themselves (practical self-consciousness) changes what they are *in* themselves.

- Awareness of that change (theoretical self-consciousness) changes what they are for themselves, their **attitudes**.
- Which changes what they are in themselves: their **statuses**.
- Note that at no point do these two—what they are for themselves and what they are in themselves—coincide.
Self-consciousness is not Cartesian transparency.
The residual opacity, the difference and distance between attitudes and statuses, drives the process of development.

As a result (to repeat):

Essentially self-conscious creatures do not have *natures*, they have *histories*.

- To know *what* they are, you must rehearse how they got to be that way.
- This is the difference between what is studied by **Naturwissenschaften** and what is studied by **Geisteswissenschaften**.

i. *Geisteswissenschaften* are accordingly different from *Naturwissenschaften*. The study of things that can talk is different from the study of things that cannot.
Texts are understood by a different method and in a different sense than things.
We'll talk about this more in Part 2, on specifically **hermeneutic** understanding.

ii. Rehearsing such a process of development is a distinctive kind of self-consciousness and (self-)understanding: **recollection** (Erinnerung).

- Recollective rationality, the process of retrospective rational reconstruction **turns a past into a history**.
- It **makes what happens into something done**, by both making and finding a governing norm.
- It is the form of Reason's march through History.

iii. **Normativity itself has a history**, because our understanding of it does and it essentially depends on the practical attitudes that constitute that understanding.
The biggest thing that ever happened in human history is the **gigantic, rolling sea-change from traditional forms of life to distinctively modern ones**.
All the Enlightenment philosophers, from Descartes to Kant, were developing the modern understanding. But only Hegel saw modernity whole, saw the scientific and philosophical intellectual movements, the social and political institutional changes, the economic changes, the changes in literature and art and religion as part of *one* occurrence. He was the first to take the advent of modernity as a topic of study. In doing so he invented the principal topic that would define the new 19th century science of sociology, and formed and transformed the *Geisteswissenschaften* generally.

The fundamental intellectual division that lies behind the outdated distinction within philosophy between Continental and analytic schools turns on this one point: **do you take the advent of modernity to be a basic *philosophical issue, concern, or problem, or not?*** Kierkegaard and Marx and Nietzsche do. Husserl and Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida do. Frege and Russell, Carnap and Quine do not. For them at most the rise of modern science matters, not its deep connection to political liberalism, economic capitalism, and the literary rise of the novel.

[Course BREAK]

Plan for Part 2:

Part Two: How may we read Hegel now?

This is a question of *hermeneutics* the study of the interpretation of texts.

Rorty once said he that he often found himself addressing analytic audiences who, he came to realize, when he mentioned hermeneutics thought he was referring to a German philosopher whose **first name is Hermann**, and whose last name they didn't quite catch.

Hermeneutics started out as a subdiscipline of theology, concerned with the interpretation of the Bible.

Spinoza and Kant (in *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*) in the Enlightenment, and then Romantics, starting with Herder and are central for Hegel's contemporaries on the more literature side, all three Schlegels.

Schleiermacher in the first half of the 19th century and Dilthey in the second half.

Gadamer's 1960 *Wahrheit und Methode*, (*Truth and Method*) is *locus classicus*, retrospectively defining the hermeneutic tradition in philosophy and bringing it a decisive step forward.

We have to worry about this methodological issue—the nature of and norms appropriate to the interpretation of texts generally, and of philosophical texts in particular—because this course is not just about Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

The course not only *consists of* a reading or interpretation of that text, that of my book *A Spirit of Trust*, it is also, inevitably, *about* that reading. This course has *two* basic texts.

And my philosophical hermeneutic practice is both unusual and controversial.

Further, I am unusually theoretically explicit about the rationale for my hermeneutic practices.

As we will see, the way I read historical texts is deeply rooted in and informed by both **my reading of Hegel in terms of recollective rationality** and by **my inferentialist understanding of linguistic meaning**, in the philosophy of language.

To point to this theoretical self-consciousness is not to say that I am right. But the issue of whether or not I am, and why, is itself a substantial philosophical issue—one that readers of *A Spirit of Trust* are already debating in print.

One place to start in thinking about it is an orienting story that used to be (and for all I know, still is) told to prospective graduate students in our department, to clue them in to substantial differences between the way various faculty members approached the Mighty Dead. Referring to my colleague, the distinguished Kant scholar and practical philosopher Steve Engstrom, they

said that **the Engstrom is a unit of hermeneutic distance**, defined as the *least* possible distance between a text and a reading at which the reading counts as *an interpretation* of that text. **The Brandom is another unit of hermeneutic distance**, defined as the *greatest* possible distance between a text and a reading at which the reading counts as *an interpretation* of that text. This wouldn't be a joke if there weren't a lot of truth to it.

There is a genuine danger here. Adopting a term from rhetoric, hermeneutic theorists talk about **catachresis**: doing *violence* to the text one is addressing, by reading it in a way that does not respect its fundamental integrity as the text it is.

And there is such a thing as textual **ventriloquism**, when the author's lips move, but the only voice one hears is that of the interpreter.

(I actually have sometimes used a Hegel puppet as a prop in my lectures. Maybe you will get to see it at some point.)

Almost no-one holds that there are not bad hermeneutic practices.

But characterizing them is not as straightforward as one might think.

Harold Bloom: *Map of Misreading*, on “strong” readings.

Bloom: **Every sufficiently strong reading is a misreading.**

Me: **Every reading is a rewriting.**

Q: What are the rules of doing this? What are the aims with which one does it? What norms govern assessments of the success of this enterprise?

Me: each subsequent reading has *two* texts: the “original” and one’s own (and others’) previous rewritings of it.

One is at the least synthesizing those.

Don’t underestimate how many different things can legitimately be done with and to a text.

Jasper Johns’ characterization of his artistic practice:

“Take an object. Do something to it. Look at the results. Do something else to it. Look again. Repeat until you either get something interesting or remarkable, or give up and start over with a different object.”

So things are not so simple as suggested by the metaphor of *distance* between text and interpretation—as though the relations between them could be boiled down to a single dimension. It does make sense, I suppose, to say “I aim to keep my reading of this passage to within 2, or at most 3 Engstroms of the text,” or (defensively) “Look, I’m only venturing a half-Brandom away from the text.” But if we ask how many Engstroms it takes to get a full Brandom away, the metaphor breaks down. These units are not really measuring the same thing.

There is a **Lockean picture** of the nature of communication in the background here. It thinks of meaning as a kind of gemstone in the mind of the communicator, fixed and complete in its faceted shape, color, density, and other properties. Communication succeeds when the text or utterance in which it is encoded is *decoded* by the reader or hearer to produce an exact duplicate in the audience's mind. The difference between the original and the duplicate is the "hermeneutic distance" by which goodness of understanding ("grasp of meaning") is measured.

But this is a terrible picture of meaning and the communication and understanding of meaning. (It depends on what Quine called "the Myth of the Museum" concerning meaning.)

One way to begin to see its flaws is to think about Jorge Luis Borges's story about **Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote***. In the story, Menard labors for years and finally produces a novel that is word-for-word identical to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. But everyone is astonished at just how different Menard's 20th century book is from Cervantes's 17th century original. The sentences Menard writes now have completely different meanings from those written in 1605, even though the words are the same.

(When in the 18th century, the poet Mark Akenside describes Creation with the line "The great Creator **raised his plastic arm**," he did not mean by those words what they mean now.)

Tradition and context alter the meanings expressed by words and sentences.

One of the pieces I put on the website for today is a short "Untimely Review" of the *Phenomenology* that I wrote a while ago for the journal *Topoi*. The conceit of their series of "untimely reviews" is that one is to review a great work of philosophy as though it had just been published, by some otherwise unknown philosopher. The point is not only to give us fresh eyes on the text being recontextualized (and to poke fun at the conventions of contemporary academic publishing and reviewing), but to emphasize how different some of the familiar philosophical claims of the Mighty Dead would be if they were made today.

In his famous essay "**Tradition and the Individual Talent**" T.S. Eliot (who, it might be worth recalling, finished his Ph.D. dissertation in philosophy at Harvard in 1916) wrote:

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.

So far, I've made two claims.

- Meanings should not be modeled on self-contained, determinate, defined objects and their properties, and

- there is not a single dimension of something like “resemblance” along which we can measure the relations between the meaning in the text and in an interpretation. Hermeneutic space is not in this sense a metric space.

If that is how we should *not* think about it, how *should* we think about it?

We are interested in the concepts, and with doing conceptual things to them.

Q: But how do we understand concepts?

A: As inferential roles (or at least as *determining* inferential roles).

I've suggested that *context* might be important for meaning. I have (with malice aforethought) been invoking *historical* context, the *tradition* in which a text is situated. More on that later. But that line of thought offers a clue here: the meaning expressed by a sentence or a whole text comprising many such sentences is a *holistic* property of the text: a property that depends on the context in which it is situated.

This should remind us of a holism claim famous in the history of the philosophy of language:

Quine's argument in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.”

Boiled down, we can think of it as going like this:

- 1) The meaning of a sentence must at least determine its inferential role.

This is the role it plays as a premise or conclusion in reasoning, a matter of what it is a reason or evidence for or against and what is a reason or evidence for or against it.

- 2) But what follows from a claim (claimable) depends on what other claims are used as auxiliary hypotheses or collateral premises. (Quine calls this “**the Duhem point.**”).

He concludes:

- 3) So we can only consider the meaning expressed by a sentence in the context of other claims to which we are committed, which provide the inferential-evidential *context* in which its consequences are extracted and its antecedents elaborated. (Quine says that the smallest unit of meaning should accordingly be understood to be *theories* rather than *sentences*.)

I think this general idea is correct. It is the basis for what I call “inferentialist” approaches to meaning. (Both Quine's and Sellars's criticisms of empiricism (in *TDE* and *EPM*) turn on rejecting its *semantic atomism*, focusing on the role played by empirical claims in reasoning.)

Particularly in the case of philosophical claims and theories, what we are principally interested in, what counts as understanding them, is what reasons can be given for or against them, and what consequences they have.

Applying the contextualist, “Duhem point” to the hermeneutic enterprise of interpreting texts then counsels that we must consider the meaning of a text *relationally*, in a *context* of other claims that can be used as auxiliary hypotheses or collateral premises in extracting its consequences and considering the rational credentials for its claims.

The question then becomes: What should we use as a context? Where do we get such a context?

And the key thing to realize, I think, is that once we see that the role a text (and its component claims) plays in reasoning is relational, and so context-relative, we see that there is no reason in general to privilege some unique context as providing *the* meaning. Different contexts provide different *perspectives* on *the* meaning, which should be thought of as something like the *function* that takes us from contexts to consequences. *Every* argument provides a perspective on that function, and so articulates an aspect of its meaning.

This is not to say that all contexts are equally interesting or important. But all do provide perspectives on *the* relational, context-relative inferential significance of the text.

What contexts are particularly important?

If we look again to the philosophy of language for help in thinking about hermeneutics (my project in HPTM), we see that analogous issues arise for understanding indirect discourse in ascriptions of propositional attitudes. If I want to attribute a claim to another, I might use direct discourse and quote them, “directly”:

“John said “A rational wolf would be able to let his mind roam over possibilities of behavior other than what comes naturally to wolves.”

But if I don’t quote directly if I say something of the form “John said *that*...” then the sentence that follows the ‘*that*’ should mean in my mouth what the original meant in his mouth. If he says “I am hungry,” I should say “John said that *he* is hungry.”

This is ***de dicto* belief ascription**.

“Henry Adams said *that* the inventor of the lightning rod could not have been a Philadelphian.” But there is also the ***de re***: “Henry Adams said *of* Ben Franklin that he could not have been a Philadelphian.”

In paraphrasing *de dicto*, one uses only collateral premises that the original utterer would have endorsed.

In paraphrasing *de re*, one uses collateral premises that the interpreter endorses, but the original author might not.

The prevailing norms in intellectual history are *de dicto*.

These are called “contextualist” and contrasted with the traditional (pre 1960s) “presentist” norms.

Following Quentin Skinner (Cambridge), critique of “presentism” has been at center of the methodology of intellectual history.

But it is legitimate to read works not only in the light of what they made of their predecessors, but in the light of what happens afterwards, which compels rereadings and reassessments, in the light of questions they did not, and in some cases could not ask.

Link to Dave Marshall's piece and the piece by Kevin Harrelson.

Note that it is not entirely straightforward how to apply *de dicto* rules in reading historical texts. The rule is to use only collateral premises the speaker/author would endorse.

But is it safe even to use other claims made in a single long work?

What about earlier or later works of the same author?

Foucault on the “death of the author” as no longer according unique normative privilege to “discourse segmented according to signatures.” The work or a portion of a work, or texts produced by multiple authors (Foucault worked on 19th century Parisian police reports, for instance). There are crucial semantic issues that arise just in segmenting discourse into units whose “meanings” can be assessed. The “author” is “dead” is a dramatic way of saying that Gricean idea that the “meaning” of the text starts off full-blown in the head of the author, in his or her beliefs and intentions, and that our job is to recover that meaning, obscured by the veil of a text that must convey it, presupposes a Myth of the Museum about these crystalline, determinate “meanings.” This is the Lockean, transportation model of meaning. We know better.

I have claimed that one understands a claim, grasps its meaning, only insofar as one associates with it an inferential role: only insofar as one knows what follows from it (if it is true), and what would be evidence for or against its being true.

And I have claimed (Quine’s “Duhem point”) that what follows from or is evidence for a claim depends on what *other* claims one combines with it, as a context of collateral premises or auxiliary hypotheses. It depends, in other words, on what *else* one takes to be true.

One might seek to avoid this relativity to context by considering only what follows from and is evidence for a claim *no matter what* else is true. The trouble with this idea is that most material implications are defeasible—hardly *anything* follows or is evidence for a claim no matter what auxiliary hypotheses one conjoins it with.

I have further claimed that as a consequence of these basic semantic claims about the meanings and inferential roles, that *every* context of collateral commitments provides a *legitimate* perspective on the meaning. For each provides an argument, so to speak, for the semantic function associated with a sentence that, supplied with a context, computes an inferential role, in the sense of a set of consequences, and a determination of what would be a reason for or against the claimable in that context. Some of these contexts might be of more pragmatic interest than others (for instance, the *de dicto* readings that result from conjoining other claims the author actually makes or would have endorsed), but each is *semantically* a legitimate aspect of *the* meaning.

But it might seem that this last, irenic perspectivalist claim is going too far. **Surely there is a privileged context in which to extract consequences and determine evidence for and against a claimable, namely the context of true auxiliary hypotheses.** What do I care what would follow from a claim *if* pigs could fly or the frog were on the log, if in fact pigs can’t fly

and the frog is *not* on the log? What *really* follows from and provides reasons for or against a claim is determined by the *actual* context, how things *really* are, what else is *in fact* true. This is the idea of ***de re* interpretation**. To find out what an author is *really* committed to by her claims, whatever *she* might think follows from or is evidence for or against them, combine the claim exclusively with *true* collateral premises.

This is how to tell what what the author *said* really *means* (*de re*), which need not be what they *meant* to be saying (which is *de dicto*).

If I know, but Henry Adams does not, that Ben Franklin invented the lightning rod, then I can *correctly* report the content of the claim he expressed by saying “The inventor of the lightning rod was a Bostonian,” by saying “Henry Adams claimed *of* Ben Franklin that *he* was a Bostonian.”

And this is the rationale for *de re* readings of the texts of the Mighty Philosophical Dead. If Frege taught us a *correct* lesson about the distinction between sense and reference, then a *de re* reading of Kant’s or Hegel’s views about conceptual content might legitimately discuss their views *of* or *about* sense and reference, even if *they* did not know that that is what they were talking about—just as Henry Adams, in my example, did not know that he was talking about Ben Franklin when he used the term “the inventor of the lightning rod.”

In these terms it was legitimate for **Russell to query Plato**’s use of the terms ‘part’ and ‘whole’ and to ask in the light of the set-theoretic distinction, whether sometimes he was talking about the *subset* relation and sometimes the *element of*. And we could ask whether in fact he meant neither but should be understood in terms of the *mereological* regimentation of the part/whole relation.

In these more precise terms, informed by inferentialist semantic theory, **what Quentin Skinner excoriates as “presentism”** and invidiously contrasts with “**contextualist**” readings of the Mighty Dead are just *de re* rather than *de dicto* readings. And I have just sketched considerations that would privilege *de re* over *de dicto* readings, as better renderings of what the contents of the claims the author made *actually are*, as opposed to the content the author might mistakenly have thought they had.

But in fact, both are entirely legitimate perspectives on *the* meaning. Neither is a “looser” or “tighter” reading. Neither is “closer to the real meaning,” or catachretic. Both kinds of reading have strict standards, and can be done better or worse.

The key thing is just to be clear and explicit about which rules one is operating under, which game one is playing, which sort of reading one is offering.

In *A Spirit of Trust* (and elsewhere in my writings) I make it clear that I am offering a *de re* reading of Hegel’s text. I am reading it in terms of what I take it we have learned about semantic issues since he worried about holistic, broadly inferential relations of mediation and determinate negation among conceptually articulated items.

What I call “**interpretation *de traditione***” is another alternative, and uses collateral premises drawn from a tradition encompassing the author or text in question. But it allows using

later figures as well as *earlier* ones. (Think of the Eliot quote.) And traditions are a matter of influences going forward, but also of affinities discerned looking backwards.

Pieces of writing like that can transform the tradition going forward, and reshape it retrospectively, retroactively, recollectively.

Hegel, writing the PG in the first generation of modern intellectual historians (who were thinking explicitly, theoretically, and thematically, *inter alia*, about the story the Enlightenment told about its relation to its past: from Herder to the Schlegels) is the poet and prophet of recollective hermeneutics. And that is the story of his I tell in *ST*.

What kind of reading of Hegel?

Punchline: **a Hegelian reading of Hegel.**

I am to read him the way he read his predecessors, particularly Kant.

When he says that he is a true Kantian, that includes thinking not only that Kant has been misunderstood, but that *Kant* misunderstood his own best wisdom.

(Aim: “To understand previous philosophers **better than they understood themselves.**”

Eliot: “‘We know so much more than the dead.’ Precisely, and they are what we know.”)

Purge Kant of pre-Kantian remnants, formulate what he said better, and correct him where he doesn’t follow out his own best ideas.

Hegel not only *practices* a distinctive kind of hermeneutics, he is *a*, perhaps *the* most important *theorist* of what he is doing in reading his predecessors.

A recollective reading of Hegel.

So: a rational reconstruction of how we got here, pointing to a way forward from here.

At the core of my reading of Hegel will be his invention (he would say, “discovery”, and his story about why he is entitled to say that is central to his account of interpretation) of the notion. This is applying Hegel’s own methodology (and way of reading earlier philosophers) to his own texts.

A sobering thought: **By the time Hegel was my age, he’d been dead for ten years.**

He had left Berlin for several months because of a cholera epidemic there. He returned when he was told, incorrectly, that it was over.

Conclusion of Week 1:

Overall plan of the course:

1. Will not be even-handed between *ST* and *PG*: focus will be more on *ST*.

Bregel:

When I was in the middle of the extended, 18 lecture, Humboldt lectures in Leipzig, a graduate student came to my friend and host Professor Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, in some distress. He said “I find Brandom’s lectures fascinating, but I have been studying Hegel for some years now, and have often cannot make any connection between what I thought Hegel was saying and what Brandom says about him.” Pirmin replied: “Think of it this way. You are hearing the views of the deep and important philosopher *Bregel*. Your job is to understand that philosopher, and what he has to teach you about the ground-level philosophical topics he is addressing. When you have a good grip on Bregel’s views, then, and only then, as a secondary undertaking, you can begin to think about how Bregel’s views are related to the two other deep and important philosophers, Hegel and Brandom.”

Add Carl Sachs’s “**Fregel**.”

So the course is most fundamentally about a *reading* of Hegel. Hegel will be in view, we will read large parts of his text.

But the *principal* text is the Bregelian *reading* of that text.

2. For *PG*:

- Which translation? A: Michael Inwood or Miller. (Will use Miller paragraph numbering, which Inwood includes.)
- Which other works? Hyppolite (*Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*), Pinkard (*Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*), Kojève (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*).
- On Hegel’s life: Pinkard (*Hegel: A Biography*)

3. Availability of my book, through Dan.

Rehearse the various resources available for my views:

- *A Spirit of Trust*
- Humboldt lectures: text,
- Humboldt lectures: video, and
- Humboldt lectures: (maximally concentrated) handouts.
- 2017 seminar materials, including audio of seminar sessions.

4. For fun (but more than that): ***Sartor Resartus***.

(Thomas Carlyle, 1836. So, only 6 years after Hegel's death, only 30 after *PG*.)

The philosophy of clothes, and how “clothes make the man,” as an account of us as *essentially* social beings: as becoming who we are only as recognized as such.