



A Spirit of Trust

A Reading
of Hegel's
Phenomenology

ROBERT BRANDOM

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A READING OF HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY*

Robert B. Brandom



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This is for John McDowell, my closest friend and dearest colleague for thirty years, who has loyally suffered along with me through the labyrinthine evolution of this story—even though he thinks I’ve got it wrong, and the peculiar genre of systematic hermeneutic metaconceptual creative nonfiction writing I am practicing here is in any case not his cup of tea.

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Recollection, Representation, and Agency

I. Hegelian vs. Fregean Understandings of Sense and Reference

According to the claim I have been calling “conceptual idealism,” the second-order *relations* between what things objectively are *in* themselves and the experiential *processes* in which they show up as something *for* consciousness are to be understood in the first instance in terms of those subject-constitutive empirical-practical processes: *Erfahrung*, now understood as the cycle of action-and-cognition, culminating in the recollective rational reconstruction of the experience. This thesis is the assertion of an asymmetrical explanatory priority of subjective processes over objective relations, downstream from (added to, built on top of) the symmetrical reciprocal sense-dependence relations discussed under the heading of “objective idealism.” The relations between what things are for consciousness and what they are in themselves are the relations between phenomena and noumena, appearance and reality, as Hegel construes them. In this chapter, I want to explicate the doctrine of conceptual idealism by showing what mutual illumination results from understanding recollection also as underwriting an account of the relations between *sense* and *reference*.

Talk of phenomena, the way things appear to us, what they are *for* us, is talk about the kind of understanding of them we exhibit by applying concepts to them in judgment and action. Frege uses the term “sense” [Sinn] for what we grasp that presents objects and their relations to us—what makes them something *for* us. In virtue of grasping those senses, having Fregean thoughts, we come to stand in *referential* relations to the objects and relations that are thereby presented to us. The *referents* determined by and presented

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to us by those senses are the objective things and relations our thoughts and (so) judgments are *about*. To say that the referents are what we are talking and thinking about, what we are acting on, is to say that it is those things and their relations that set standards for the normative assessment of the truth of our judgments, the material correctness of our inferences, and the success of our actions. Just so, how things are *in* themselves (noumena, reality) determines how they *ought* to be *for* consciousness (phenomena, appearance). Again, our judgments should be subjunctively sensitive to how things really are with what we are making judgments about. If the referents were different, it should be the case that the contents of our judgments would be different. A suitable mapping of Hegel's semantic vocabulary onto a more contemporary neo-Fregean one will enable us to see Hegel as offering a novel, interesting, and potentially valuable expressive account of the relations between the concepts sense and reference. It will also, along the way, vindicate the theoretical appeal, made in Chapter 7 and thereafter, to those apparently un-Hegelian notions in explicating Hegel's views—in the form of the notions of sense-dependence and reference-dependence.

Frege's notions of sense and reference are his theoretical renderings of two semantic dimensions that are familiar already from our ordinary, presystematic ways of talking and thinking about our talking and thinking. For we distinguish *what* we are saying or thinking from what we are talking or thinking *about*. The first dimension concerns the *content expressed* by an utterance, and is paradigmatically conveyed by the use of a "that" clause: "He said that Goethe was most proud of what he was least successful in doing." The second dimension concerns what is thereby *represented* as having certain properties or standing in certain relations, and is paradigmatically conveyed by the use of "of" or "about" phrases: "He was thinking of (or about) Goethe's scientific work on color." The term "intentionality" in contemporary philosophical parlance is often used generically, so as to invoke both species. John Searle, for instance, offers this pretheoretical delineation of the subject matter of his book *Intentionality*: "[I]f a state S is Intentional then there must be an answer to such questions as: What is S about? What is S of? What is it an S that?"¹ A principal task of semantic theories is to say how "that" intentionality and "of" intentionality ought to be understood to be related to one another.

For Frege, words *express* senses, which is what we in the first instance *understand*. The senses of declarative sentences are thoughts: things that can

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be assessed as true or false. To do that job, it must be that by expressing a sense, words *represent* referents: the things one is thereby talking or thinking *about*. The senses *semantically* fix or determine the referents. In virtue of that semantic relation, senses have the *cognitive* significance of being *modes of presentation* of their referents. They are accordingly *representings* of those *represented*s. What the sense expressed by a word refers to, what is represented by it, what it is about, is whatever settles the truth-value of the thoughts expressed by sentences in which that word is used. Judging, taking a thought to be true, is taking things to be as the sense represents them as being. Frege says it is “an advance from thought to truth-value.”

What we talk and think about, what we refer to, what is represented when we apply concepts in judgment and action, is what things are in themselves, how things really are. The contents of our representings, what we express and grasp, what presents those represented things to us, is what things are *for* us, how they appear. Phenomena are appearances *to* (or *for*) us of the noumena: what things really are, in themselves—that is, apart from any consideration of their relation to us, including how they show up for us. In the *Science of Logic*, the *Wesenslogik* (the “Doctrine of Essence,” which is the second phase of the logic) applies wherever there is a distinction between *Sein* and *Schein*, between reality (being) and appearance. (The third and final phase, the *Begriffslogik*, or “Doctrine of the Concept,” applies when one looks at *developmental sequences* of *Sein*/*Schein* distinctions—which is just where our exposition is heading.) At the metatheoretical level, Hegel presents his account of the relations between phenomena and noumena, things as they are for consciousness and things as they are in themselves, appearance and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, in the form of a *phenomenology*. That is to say that we start with the ways those relations *appear* to us, with the various philosophical and logical idioms we have actually used in our attempts to understand those relations. And the eventually adequate understanding of the *reality*—how things *really* stand between how things are for consciousness and how they are in themselves (a view that comprises at least the nested or layered doctrines of conceptual realism, objective idealism, and conceptual idealism)—is to emerge from consideration of *dynamic* features of the expressive *development* of those appearances (“shapes of consciousness”) as retrospectively and retroactively recollected. One of the most basic principles structuring the reading of Hegel that I have been presenting—the

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strategy of “semantic descent”—is that this feature of Hegel’s methodology for approaching *philosophical* concepts mirrors the view we are ultimately to achieve of the way *ordinary*, ground-level empirical-practical concepts work.

In particular, his account of concept application in judgment and action is *phenomenological*, in virtue of the explanatory asymmetry it accords to the two fundamental semantic dimensions. We are to start with phenomena, with how things are *for* consciousness, with how they *seem* or *appear*, with the contents we grasp and express. The idea that there is some way things *really* are, *in* themselves, the concept of what is represented, what we are thinking and talking *about* by grasping and expressing those contents, is to be understood in terms of features of those contents themselves. The representational dimension of concept use is to be explained in terms of what it is to take or treat conceptual contents *as* representings, what it is for them to be representings *for* or *to* us. Reference is to be explained as an aspect of sense. The way in which the very idea of *noumena* is to be explicated and elaborated from features of the historical trajectory by which phenomena (conceptual contents) develop and are determined is the essence of Hegel’s distinctive version of the semantics of sense and reference. Of course, Frege does not understand his two basic semantic concepts as independent elements that can yield an intelligible theory simply by being formally conjoined or bolted together. On the one hand, senses cognitively present referents to the one who uses expressions of those senses. On the other hand, senses semantically determine the referents. One of the conceptual challenges faced by broadly Fregean semantic theories is explaining what these cognitive and semantic relations consist in, and reconciling them as aspects of *one* relation between senses and referents. One of the features of Hegel’s semantics that seems to me potentially of interest in the contemporary philosophical context is the novel and interesting response to this challenge provided by his recollective phenomenological account of representation. This is explaining *representational relations* in terms of *expressive processes* of making what is implicit ever more explicit.

Of course, Hegel’s understanding of what corresponds to the Fregean notion of *sense* is in crucial ways quite different from Frege’s. To begin with, Hegel is a *holist* about the conceptual contents we grasp in thought and express in speech and action. As we have seen, for Hegel conceptual contents are identified

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and individuated by their place in a network articulated by relations of material incompatibility and (so) material inference (determinate negation and mediation). Grasp of them consists in the capacity to move around in that network according to those relations, acknowledging their normative force in the experiential process of resolving incompatible commitments, both practical and cognitive, extracting inferential consequences of both sorts, and elaborating, pursuing, and adjusting plans in the cycle of action and judgment. The conceptual contents of judgments and intentions (cf. “What the deed is can be said of it”), ways things can explicitly be *for* consciousness, are not intelligible one by one or in a static snapshot—apart from their roles in such relational networks and processes of practically acknowledging error and failure. By contrast, however it might be with Frege himself, many contemporary neo-Fregean theories are thoroughly atomistic about senses.

Another significant difference is that Frege discusses senses exclusively in the context of *theoretical* or *cognitive* activity: paradigmatically, judging. However, as we have seen in Chapter 11, Hegel is at least equally interested in the relations between how things are *for* consciousness and how they are *in* themselves that are instituted by *practical* activity. In that case, what the deed is *for* the agent is a matter of the agent’s *acknowledging* of responsibility by endorsement of *purposes* in virtue of which the deed has specifications under which it is *intentional*. And what the deed is *for* others is a matter of potential audiences’ *attributing* of responsibility for the deed subsequently specifiable in *consequential* terms. That the very same deed (in itself) can be picked out both in terms of what it is *for* the agent and what it is *for* others, both *prospectively* in purpose and *retrospectively* in consequences—that these two senses can pick out the same referent—is the basis of the identity-in-difference that is the process of experience, which in the *Reason* chapter becomes visible as having the structure of a cycle of action-and-cognition. The fact that some consequential specification can be at once an aspect of what the deed is *in* itself *and* what it is *for* others—indeed, *for* the agent herself—points to another important and distinctive feature of Hegel’s construal.

A further axial divergence between Fregean and Hegelian construals of sense and reference concerns their categorial heterogeneity or homogeneity. For Frege, senses and referents are different *kinds* of things. Senses are not like the crystals, carrots, cats, and complex numbers that make up the world

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we talk about. Thoughts and other expression-senses occupy a distinct “realm of sense,” a third world of directly graspable or intelligible items to be identified neither with subjective ideas nor with objective occupants of the actual (causal) or logical orders. We are not told a lot about what sort of thing senses are—though they evidently can stand in inferential and incompatibility relations with each other. But Frege is explicit that they are ontologically *sui generis* and that their realm is (largely) disjoint from the realm of reference.²

For Hegel, though, the way things are *for* consciousness can be just the same as the way they are *in* themselves. Noumena are a kind of phenomena. They are categorially *homogeneous*: the same kind of thing. For the basic tenet of Hegel’s conceptual realism is that both are *conceptually* articulated—that is, stand in relations of material incompatibility and material inference. Hegel warns us in the *Introduction* against construing the subjective realm of certainty and the objective realm of truth in ways that excavate an ultimately unbridgeable gulf of intelligibility between them—one that would, in Fregean terms, make unintelligible how senses could be cognitive modes of presentation of objects to subjects and could semantically determine what representeds they are representings of. Hegel’s first move is to come up with a notion of conceptual articulation that applies equally to the world we act in and on and know about, on the one hand, and to our thoughts about it, on the other. Both sorts of things are accordingly the sort of thing that is in the right shape to be grasped or understood—not *immediately*, but the mediation is a matter of material inferential and incompatibility relations to other graspables of just the same sort. (This is the origin of Hegel’s holism.)

The Fregean theory is notoriously closemouthed about just how we are to understand grasping a sense. For the senses expressed by subsentential signs, it is a matter of mastery of the contributions they make to the senses of declarative sentences (Fregean thoughts) in which they occur. And grasp of those sentential senses seems at least to be sufficient for (and may in the end just consist in) mastery of the use of expressions of those thoughts in judgment and inference. (Sellars claims that grasp of a concept just is mastery of the use of a word.) On the Hegelian approach as here adumbrated, grasping conceptually articulated senses (their being *to* a subject ways things can be *for* consciousness) is treating their conceptual relations to other contents in practice as norms governing the proper evolution of experiential

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processes: as providing standards for identifying errors and failures, and constraints on appropriate responses to such identifications. Of course, specific differences can still be acknowledged between acts of thinking and the world thought about, within the genus of the conceptually articulated. Graspings of contents are elements of experiential processes, and the contents grasped are elements of relational structures. Those differences are the raw materials deployed in the subsequent theoretical moves of both hylomorphic conceptual realism and objective idealism. But what is grasped and what is represented are alike understood as conceptually articulated. Indeed, the reciprocal sense-dependence at the metalevel of the concept of an objective world articulated by conceptual relations of material incompatibility and inference, on the one hand, and the concept of subjective activity articulated by conceptual processes of acknowledging and responding to incompatible and consequential commitments in experience, on the other, shows that these are complementary species of a genus—the conceptual—whose identity is unintelligible apart from its differentiation into these two holistically (and processually) related species.

Frege takes a step in the direction of categorial homogeneity of thought and world when he defines “fact” as “a thought that is true,” a formulation Hegel could endorse.³ But Frege does *not* go on, as Hegel does (albeit only as a stage on the way to a construal of the world as having the holistic structure of the infinite Concept), to identify the world represented and referred to in thought as a world of *facts*. For Hegel, the way the world really is can be said (and thought) of it. The world as it is in itself is thinkable (though not, of course, a thinking). As we began to see in the discussion of Hegel’s *Introduction*, distinguishing within the class of conceptual contents between “noumena” and “phenomena,” between “what things are *in* themselves” and “what things are *for* consciousness,” is a way of talking about functional roles conceptually articulated items can be seen to play when thought of in terms of their place in a larger historical-developmental process of experience.

This categorial homogeneity of the way things are in themselves and the ways they can be for consciousness is crucial to Hegel’s *expressive* account of the relations between them. Both are conceptually structured. Indeed, they can have just the same conceptual content. When they do, when what things are for consciousness is (according to a retrospective recollective rational reconstruction of a course of experience) what they are in themselves, these

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are two forms of that one content. What they are in themselves is what they are *implicitly*. (“An sich” means not only “in itself” but “implicitly”—and Miller translates it both ways.) What they are *explicitly* is what they are for consciousness. The recollective phase of each episode of experience rationally reconstructs it as the becoming more explicit for consciousness of how things implicitly were all along. How things are in themselves is the reality that, on Hegel’s rendering, is *implicit* in its appearances. Those ways things can be for consciousness are exhibited as *appearances* of that reality precisely by being recollectively assembled into an expressively progressive trajectory, in which what was implicit is gradually made more explicit. By understanding the representational dimension of conceptual content in terms of what knowers and agents do in recollectively rationally reconstructing their experience, Hegel is offering an *expressive* account of representation.

Another significant point of difference between Hegel’s and Frege’s versions of the sense/reference distinction—besides the issue of semantic holism vs. atomism concerning senses, inclusion vs. exclusion of the practical role of senses in intentional agency, and the categorial homogeneity vs. heterogeneity of senses and referents, with its consequences for how one can think about what grasp of senses consists in—concerns the *determinateness* of senses. Fregean senses are required to determine classes of referents whose boundaries are *sharp*, *fixed*, and *complete*. To say they are *sharp* is to say that it is impossible for any possible object to fall *partially* in the class determined by the sense (excluded middle), or both to fall in it and to fall outside it (non-contradiction). To say that the referents are *fixed* is to say that the boundaries of the class of referents determined by the sense do not change. (Which sense a given sign expresses may change, if the use of the sign changes, but the senses themselves do not change.) To say that the boundaries of the class of referents is *complete* is to say that the sense determines a *partition* of the possible candidates: *every* particular is classified by the sense either as falling under the concept it determines, or as not falling under it (excluded middle). This is Fregean determinateness, or determinateness in the Fregean sense.

I claimed earlier that Hegel attributes to Kant commitment to conceptual contents being determinate in this sense, and that he is motivated by the thought that Kant has been uncritical about the transcendental conditions of the possibility (indeed, intelligibility) of concepts being determinate in this sense. However fair such a criticism may be to Kant, it is surely one that

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could with justice be directed at Frege on Hegel's behalf. Frege says very little about how it is that thinkers have access to senses that are determinate in his very strong sense. How is it that there are such things, and how is it that we can grasp one and that there is a fact of the matter as to whether we are grasping that one rather than a closely related one? He does, of course, go to considerable trouble to develop formal languages that are perspicuous in just this sense: that the senses of their expressions are perfectly determinate, and graspable by mastering the rules for using those expressions. But natural languages, including those in which the work of the sciences (including mathematics) is conducted, he does *not* take to be perspicuous. Because he also seems to think that nothing that is not fully determinate can count as a sense at all, Frege leaves us with a dilemma: either sentences in non-*Begriffsschrift* languages do not express thoughts at all, or (more plausibly) each expresses indifferently a whole swarm or cloud of them, which we cannot tell apart (and hence with which we cannot reason carefully—that is, unequivocally).

Hegel does think that an intelligible story can be told according to which what we do, paradigmatically our use of linguistic expressions, gives us access to conceptual contents that are determinate in the Fregean sense. Every retrospective recollective rational reconstruction of a course of experience does just that. But the way things are presented within a recollection is only half the story. The collapse of each such story in the face of the next episode of experience, triggered by the inevitable acknowledgment of commitments incompatible by one's own conceptual lights is the other half. At the very center of the metatheoretical paradigm shift Hegel is recommending, from understanding concept use by means of the metacategories of *Verstand* to understanding it by means of the metacategories of *Vernunft*, is the new conception of conceptual determinateness that he crafts to replace the Enlightenment one that Kant implicitly appeals to and that Frege makes explicit.

That conception centers on the experiential process—the cycle of action-and-cognition—of *determining* conceptual contents. It is the process by which one sense is found to be implicitly defective by its own standards, and is replaced by another. The emergence of that defect, local failure or error, is the acknowledgment that that way things are for consciousness implicitly involves materially incompatible commitments. The standards applied are internal because each way things can be for consciousness is a constellation of

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possible practical and doxastic commitments articulated by relations of material incompatibility and consequence: a time slice of what Hegel calls “the Concept.” Sequences of such senses, ways things can be for consciousness, can be assessed as *progressive* along two dimensions. From one perspective, they are progressive insofar as each experiential episode incorporates a little bit more of how things are in themselves—what is really incompatible with or a consequence of what—into how they are for consciousness, and into the acknowledged incompatibilities and consequences (the concepts) that articulate those practical and doxastic commitments. This is putting what shows up immediately (paradigmatically, in noninferential perception) in mediated, conceptual form. Seen from this prospective point of view, the experiential cycle of action-and-cognition is a process of development of senses by progressive *determination* of conceptual contents. From another perspective, developmental sequences of senses are progressive insofar as they are the unfolding into explicitness of the commitments and conceptual articulations that were all along implicit in the earliest ways things were for consciousness. Seen from this retrospective recollective point of view, the experiential cycle of action-and-cognition is a process of development of senses by progressive *expression* of conceptual contents.

Just as truth as Hegel understands it is not a state but a process (“a vast, Bacchanalian revel”), so, too, is determinateness. Indeed, they are aspects of the *same* process. To understand this conception, we must understand the sort of historical process by which ways things are for consciousness, and so the conceptual contents that articulate them, develop on the one hand by becoming more determinate and on the other by becoming more explicit, and why and how these two sorts of development are two sides of one coin, necessarily complementary aspects of one sort of process. Seeing how the processes by which senses develop institute relations of reference—how the notion of what things are *in* themselves can be made sense of in terms of its functional role in the processes by which one way things are *for* consciousness develops by giving rise to another, more adequate one—is then the working out of Hegel’s phenomenological semantic program of explaining noumena (and our relations to them) in terms of the phenomena that are their explicit expressions for consciousness. It requires explaining how the processes by which conceptual contents develop can be understood as underwriting both the claim that sense semantically determines referent

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and the claim that senses cognitively present referents to the acting-knowing subject. Doing that will also vindicate the thesis of conceptual idealism, by showing how the referential *relations* between how things are on the subjective side of what things are *for* consciousness, and how they are on the objective side of what things are *in* themselves, are to be made intelligible in terms of the more explanatorily fundamental recollective *processes* by which individual subjects, conceptual contents, and the Concept are both determined and expressed. Relations between representeds and representings are explained in terms of the explicit expression of what is implicit. This notion of expression is in turn explained in terms of what knowers and agents *do* in recollection: the kind of retrospective rational reconstruction of a course of experience as an expressive progression in which what is implicit is made more and more explicit. Explaining *representation* in terms of *expression*, and *expression* in terms of *recollection* is a pragmatist semantic strategy.

II. Retrospective and Prospective Perspectives on the Development of Conceptual Contents

What is one talking or thinking about when one talks or thinks about what one is talking or thinking *about*? Less darkly put, what explanatory function must some conception perform in order thereby to count as a conception of what one is talking or thinking about, what is represented, what one is referring to? The answer Hegel takes over from Kant is that it is a *normative* function. The objects of thought are normative for thought in the sense that they provide a standard for assessments of the *correctness* of judgments and deeds, distinguishing truth from error and success from failure. What is represented accordingly exercises a distinctive kind of *authority* over representings, which count as representings of it just in virtue of their *responsibility* to it, which consists in being liable to assessments according to the standard of correctness it provides. It is because representation is a normative conception that the semantic and epistemological investigations Hegel conducts in the *Consciousness* chapters lead us to the consideration of the nature of normativity in the *Self-Consciousness* chapters. This is the narrative path that leads from cognition to recognition.

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Hegel then gives the question a further, pragmatist, turn, by asking: What must one *do* in order thereby to be taking it that one's cognitive and practical commitments answer to such a standard? To ask that is to ask what one must do in order to be taking them to *be* cognitive and practical commitments. For answering for their truth or success to something objective (something that is independent of the individual's attitudes of cognitive or practical commitment) is an essential feature of cognition and agency. That is why they can be understood as taking-true and making-true, respectively. Thus it is an integral feature of conceptual contents (the contents of judgments and intentions) that they are directed at objects, in the sense of answering to them for their success. "That"-intentionality is unintelligible apart from "of"-intentionality. But what is it that the subject must *do* with the contents it manipulates or takes up attitudes toward in order thereby to be taking or treating them *as* representing, as having the representational dimension that is an essential aspect of their being *conceptual* contents?

Hegel's answer is that it can be understood to begin with in terms of what one is doing in taking them to have conceptual contents at all: namely, taking them to stand to one another in relations of material incompatibility and consequence. That is, taking it that commitments to some contents *preclude* or *exclude* commitments to some others, and *include* commitments to still others. Doing that, we have seen, is practically taking it that acknowledging one commitment obliges one to *do* various further things: to *change* one's commitments when one finds oneself with incompatible ones, and to acknowledge commitment to consequential ones. The cash value of taking it that there is a standard distinguishing cognitive and practical success or correctness from failure or incorrectness is *acting* differently in response to those assessments. *What* one does to distinguish those cases is respond to the error or failure that consists in undertaking incompatible commitments by *revising* one's commitments: withdrawing or adding some, or adjusting the conceptual content one takes some of them to have—which is to say the material incompatibility and consequence relations one takes them to stand in. This is the deep connection between determinate negation as characterizing *relations* of exclusive difference and determinate negation as a principle and motor of *activity*, change, and disruption. The connection between them is normative: incompatibilities make those who acknowledge them responsible for doing something.

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In taking it that acknowledging the *incompatibility* of one's commitments obliges one to *change* them, one is taking how things are *for* one to answer to a standard of how they are *in* themselves. That *is* taking them to be *about* something, to be appearances of a reality, phenomena presenting some noumena, senses presenting referents, in short, ways things are *for* a subject, rather than *merely* states *of* a subject. The incompatibility can be between two cognitive commitments, between two practical commitments, or between a practical commitment regarding how things are to be and a cognitive commitment regarding how things in fact turned out to be. It is the way one acknowledges obligations to *change* one's commitments in the face of incompatibilities of these sorts that drives the experiential cycle of action-and-cognition. Being so driven—practically acknowledging that responsibility—is taking one's conceptual contents to be representings answering for their correctness to representeds.

This is the shape of a story about *referential purport* in general: what it is for a conceptual content (a sense) so much as to seem to be, or be put forward as, to function practically for the subject as being, *about* or *representing* how things objectively are. Here “how things objectively are,” or are “in themselves,” means “always already are anyway,” in the sense that how they are *in* themselves swings free of how they are *for* the subject. That sort of attitude-independence is presupposed by their functioning as a normative standard for assessment of appearances, a standard that what things are for the subject may or may not satisfy. Functioning as a representing is playing the role of being subject to assessments as correct or incorrect depending on how things are with the things it thereby counts as being *about* or *representing*.

The next question is then: How is it settled what those things are—what one is *actually* referring to, representing, talking or thinking about? How, on this picture, does sense semantically determine reference, so that the referents count as what is cognitively presented to the manipulator of those senses (the one who undertakes those commitments, including commitments as to what is incompatible with what and what follows from what)?

For Frege, *truth* is what connects sense to reference. That is why judging (= taking-true, and we could add, though Frege does not, acting = making-true) can be thought of as an “advance from thought to truth-value,” i.e., from sense to referent. Put otherwise, one can specify the *sense* of a judgment

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in an ascription *de dicto*, using just a “that” clause: “Late in his life, Kant believed *that* his treacherous servant abused Kant’s trust in him.” But if one wants to assess the *truth* of that judgment, taking into account the possibility that the conceptual role (sense) ascribed may be defective, one must specify it *de re*, i.e., with respect to what (or who) is actually being talked about: “Late in his life, Kant believed *of* his faithful and long-suffering servant Lampe that he abused Kant’s trust in him.” The idea that one’s commitments express how things are *for* one (that they are appearances of a reality, the way what things implicitly are becomes explicit for one) is the idea that in addition to the *de dicto* specification of their sense or content (how it is for the one whose commitments they are) there are also *de re* specifications, of how things that are that way *for* one are *in* themselves. The preceding *de re* specification would be the one relevant to truth-and-success assessments for someone who believes that the one Kant referred to late in his life as his “treacherous servant” was in fact his faithful and long-suffering servant Lampe. The sense Kant would have used only speaker-referred to the one the ascriber takes it is semantically referred to by (the sense expressed by) “Kant’s faithful and long-suffering servant Lampe.”

In Hegel’s picture, the role played here by concern for *truth* is played instead by concern for *correct inferences*, for what a sense or content *really follows* from and is *really incompatible* with what. The referents determine the correct inferences and incompatibilities—that is, the correct *sense*. That is why the truth *process* (the “Bacchanalian revel” of conceptual development) is the process of getting not only better (more successful) cognitive and practical commitments, but doing that *by* getting better inferential and incompatibility commitments to articulate them. The notion of what things are *in* themselves is the notion of how what things are *for* us *ought* to be. Hegelian referents are expressively ideal senses. Error and failure are the results of *mistaken* senses, endorsements of conceptual contents that implicitly involve mistakes concerning what follows from and is incompatible with what. What one must do to be treating some objects and not others as what we are talking about or referring to is to treat one sense (a particular role articulated by a particular constellation of material incompatibility and inferential relations) as implicitly *guiding*, *governing*, and *controlling* the process by which explicating senses evolve and develop under the sequential impacts of experiences of error and failure. Those experiential episodes must be

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seen as nudging the conceptual contents one endorses and deploys in the direction of the *correct* incompatibility and inferential relations (the ones that reflect how things are in themselves), in response to finding oneself with commitments acquired by following the norms one currently endorses (how things are for one) that are nonetheless incompatible by one's own current lights.

On this account, then, the way things are *in* themselves must be a way things *could* be *for* consciousness—the implicit form of a content that can be made explicit. For it is the way things *should* be for consciousness. The way things are in themselves is intelligible as guiding, governing, and controlling the process by which how things are for consciousness develops only if it is already in conceptual shape: already articulated by relations of material incompatibility and (therefore) inference. The systematic reason for Hegel's conceptual realism is accordingly this understanding of the normative character of the reference or aboutness relations that constitute “of”-intentionality. Hegelian referents are a privileged kind of sense. Those referents are practically graspable or intelligible, in that one can reason in response to experience *according* to those relations. One can acknowledge those incompatibility and consequence relations and not others as authoritative for one's commitments, by using them to structure one's experience: how one acquires consequential commitments, what one treats as incompatible and hence requiring adjustment of commitments, and how one responds to the experience of incompatible commitments. This is privileging one conceptually articulated constellation of senses over another.

What is the nature of this privilege or authority? Transposed into the practical key underwritten by Hegel's understanding of norms, this is to ask what subjects must *do* to be acknowledging the privilege or authority of how things are in themselves over how they are for consciousness. What is taking or treating one conceptual content as providing the norm for others? The first point is that how things are *for* a subject is just how the subject takes them to be *in* themselves. That is just what it is for reality to *appear* that way to the subject. The distinction between *de dicto* specifications of conceptual content and *de re* ones arises in the first instance when one assesses the commitments of *others*. (Compare: what the deed is for the agent, and what it is for others, descriptions in terms of an endorsed purpose and in terms of achieved consequences.) But that fundamentally *social* difference of perspec-

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tive can also be achieved *diachronically*, when one subject / agent looks *back* over her *prior* commitments.

So what establishes the relation between sense and referent is treating one's *current* commitments as setting a normative standard that now governs (and implicitly already all along did govern) one's *previous* commitments. What one must *do* in order thereby to be taking it in practice that one is talking or thinking *about* some way things are *in* themselves is to perform a recollection [Erinnerung] of the experiential process that yielded that result. This is a rational reconstruction of the development of the conceptual contents one currently endorses. It is telling a certain kind of retrospective story about it: a story that exhibits it as the culmination of an *expressively progressive* trajectory selected from one's actual experiential past. That is one in which the way things are *in* themselves—as one currently takes that to be—is presented as having been all along *implicit* in each of the ways things were *for* oneself, with each included transformation in response to the acknowledgment of incompatible commitments getting one closer to the actual conceptual contents. One treats one's currently endorsed conceptions and commitments as presenting the reality behind prior appearances, as having been such a guiding, governing, and controlling norm for how things showed up *for* consciousness. One does that by sorting experiential episodes into those that did and those that did not reveal aspects of what eventually (so far) turned out to be the truth. One rehearses a story about how what was implicit became gradually explicit. This is providing an *expressive genealogy* vindicating the current view: exhibiting how, given that things are as they are now taken to be, one came to *find out* that that is how they are. The responsibility for this distinctive sort of expressive *epistemic* vindication is baked deep into Hegel's *semantic* account of representation.

The actual experiential process that produced the current constellation of commitments is no doubt replete with what show up from that retrospective vantage point as wrong turns, blind alleys, and retrograde steps. These are experiential episodes—applications of concepts in judgment and intention that obliged the subject subsequently to acknowledge incompatible commitments—that did not, from that perspective, turn out to have revealed aspects of how things really are. They were not expressively progressive. That is, the revisions with which the subject responded to error or failure took one further away from, rather than nearer to, the truth. In order to have a picture, suppose

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that at each stage each concept (universal) is assigned a pair of sets of possible particulars serving as its extension and an antiextension, and incompatibility and inferential relations to other such concepts. Then a revision that puts in the extension a possible particular that does not, according to the currently endorsed standard, belong there, because the universal does not in fact characterize that particular (or dually for the antiextension), will count as expressively retrograde. Likewise, if the response to the acknowledgment of incompatible commitments (taking two universals one treats as incompatible to characterize the same possible particular) is to stop treating the two universals as incompatible, where one now takes it that they really *are* incompatible, that will be an expressively retrograde step. And similarly for revisions of endorsed material consequence relations.

An *Erinnerung* rationally reconstructs the experiential past into an expressive genealogy in the form of a Whiggish history. It ignores expressively retrograde episodes of experience and instead traces out a trajectory of expressively progressive improvements in how things were for us that culminates in the way we currently take them to be in themselves. In this way it shows how we found out what we take ourselves now to know. It does that by exhibiting a cumulative, monotonic process of revelation—of the implicit becoming gradually explicit. This is the recollective expressive form of triumphalist textbook histories of science and mathematics, of reconstructions of the development of the concepts of common law, and of Hegel's own histories of philosophy, art, and religion. Such stories exhibit at each stage the generic sort of retrospective *necessity* characteristic of both the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. Each step is necessary, not in the prospective sense that things could not have happened otherwise—the wrong turns that clutter up the messy actual past omitted from the reconstructed history show otherwise—but in the retrospective expressive sense that if they had *not* happened, some aspect of what the story claims was all along implicit would not have become explicit. It is in this sense that there can be *expressive dependencies*: one feature could not have become explicit unless another already had. So, for instance, though it was in no sense inevitable that we should ever have had either insight, we could not in principle have understood the significance for our knowledge of what is made explicit by the use of modal vocabulary to state laws relating theoretical (nonobservable) universals unless we had already understood the significance of at least sense (observable) univer-

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sals in articulating our knowledge—that is, understood why knowledge could not in principle be wholly immediate. (Chapters 4–7 rehearsed Hegel’s phenomenological *Erinnerung* of this aspect of our theoretical self-consciousness in the *Consciousness* section of the *Phenomenology*.)

So what one must *do* in order thereby to be taking it that one is talking or thinking *about* something is to perform a suitable *Erinnerung* of the development of one’s views. For constructing that sort of expressively progressive genealogy is exhibiting the sequential experiential transformations of what things are for one as governed, guided, and controlled by how things all along were in themselves. Distinguishing in this way between expressively progressive transformations and those alterations in how one applies those very same concepts that were not expressively progressive is treating *all* the prior applications of those concepts as subject to assessment according to the normative standard set by how things have been revealed (so far) really to be: the actual objective facts and intentions, and the material incompatibilities and consequential relations that really articulated their properties and relations. This is treating them all as appearances of that one reality, all phenomena presenting one noumenal situation. That is to say that performing such an *Erinnerung* is treating all the senses as *cognitively presenting* the referent, in that they actually *produce* knowledge of it as the culmination of the reconstructed trajectory through the actual course of development. And those same senses *semantically determine* the referent in that they are exhibited as having been all along imperfect and incomplete *expressions* of it, in that that referent, the way things are in themselves, sets the norm that distinguishes expressively progressive from expressively retrogressive experiential steps: the difference between more and less revelatory appearances.

On this Hegelian account, the link between sense and reference is in the first instance an *expressive* one: the senses express the reference, making (some aspects of) it explicit. It is a relation established *retrospectively*, by collectively turning a past into a history, an expressive genealogy. And it is in terms of this retrospectively discerned expressive relation that the *representational* dimension of concept use is explained. Recollections retrospectively reconstruct experiential processes into expressively progressive traditions. And expressive reconstruction is *rational* reconstruction. For this is the process that explains how senses can be revelatory of referents. And it is the referents that determine what is *really* rational: what is really incompatible

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with what, what really follows from what, and in general, how one *ought* to apply concepts and draw inferences from those applications. So determining the referent that a reconstructed series of senses reveal is determining what is rational: how one ought to reason. This is a distinctively *expressive* kind of rationality. On the one hand, one *finds out* in this way (according to that recollection) what is rational. On the other hand, one *makes* the experiential process have been rational—in the sense of expressively progressive, gradually revelatory of the rational—by performing such an *Erinnerung*. For Hegel, we always understand what is implicit in terms of the process by which it is made explicit: the process of expressing it. His account of the cumulative progressive *expression* by which how things are in themselves implicitly normatively governs their appearances for consciousness is in terms of what one does in retrospective *recollection* of a course of experience. And he explains the representational dimension of conceptual content by appeal to the process of recollection, which exhibits experience as a process that at once expresses and determines conceptual contents.

So it is the retrospectively discerned reconstruction of a tradition that is *expressively rational* that ties together senses and referents, representings and what they represent. Whereas for Frege it was a truth *relation* (making true) that connects them, for Hegel it is this recollected truth *process*—experience recollected *as* a truth process (that is, as progressively and cumulatively *expressing* the real more fully and truly)—that secures the semantic and cognitive relations between senses and their referents. This structure is what supports the *asymmetrical* sense-dependence relation asserted by the thesis of conceptual idealism. Each revision of concepts-and-commitments in response to the experience of error or failure (the acknowledgment of the incompatibility of one's commitments, given one's current understanding of the concepts one is applying in judgment and intention) is the implicit acknowledgment by the subject of the existence of a standard for the normative assessment of those concepts-and-commitments: some way things are in themselves to which the ways they are for consciousness is answerable. And that is to say that a *realist* commitment is implicit in practically acknowledging the representational dimension of concept use. As Hegel often tells us, following Kant, his idealism is his way (he claims, the *only* ultimately satisfactory way) of making realism intelligible.

From the perspective of any such retrospective reconstruction of some course of experience, the reference is constant. It is what ties the whole pro-

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cess together into a unity, grouping a whole sequence of senses together as representings of the same represented way the world is. On Hegel's account of representation in terms of expression, this means explicit expressions of the same implicit content. The senses that (according to the recollective reconstruction) elaborate, express, and culminate in that invariant, implicitly governing content unifying those senses, by contrast, are various and variable, differing in the extent to which and the ways in which they make that implicit content explicit. They are the moment of disparity of form of expressing of the identical content expressed. Up until the very end (the current, temporary culmination), according to each recollection the senses, the ways things are for consciousness, are never quite right, never fully adequate expressions of their content, still subject to error and failure when they are applied to novel particulars. But the way things are in themselves, reality, persists unchanged and unmoved by the flux of its appearances. This constellation of sense and referents, of relations instituted by processes, is the basic semantic structure of identity-in-difference constitutive of consciousness. It is instituted by recollection.

We are now in a better position to understand what it means to say that for Hegel, determinateness, like truth, is in the whole process, not in the relations at any one stage between subjectively endorsed conceptual contents (concepts_{subj} = senses) and objectively correct conceptual contents (concepts_{obj} = referents), which will always eventually be discovered to have involved a disparity. We must reconstrue the concept determinate, so as to think of it in the first instance as a feature of the whole process of *determining* conceptual contents, and only derivatively of the snapshot stages of that process, rather than the other way around.

We must distinguish determinate_{Verstand} from determinate_{Vernunft}. The metaconcept of concepts that are determinate_{Verstand} is the idea of a universal that settles, for every particular, whether or not the particular falls under the universal, independently of any consideration of the process of *determining* the boundaries of that universal. This is the Kantian-Fregean idea that Hegel thinks is incoherent on its own. For there can be no satisfactory account of how we come to have access to and be able to deploy such concepts. There are no determinate_{Verstand} concepts that really (never mind finally or fully) articulate the world—outside of a recollective story. Each recollection discerns such concepts, but it is doomed to be found inadequate and in need of replacement by the next experiential episode.

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Concepts that are determinate_{Vernunft} articulate the world only via the *process* of refining them—a process that in principle has no end point. It is the *process* that is the truth. Thinking that it must have an endpoint, on pain of leaving an unconceptualizable residue, is looking for determinateness_{Verstand}. Determinate_{Verstand} is what you get if you take *one* of the perspectives—the retrospective, Whiggish one—and understand the relation between the whole process, *including* the prospective shift to a *new* Whiggish story, on the model of how things look from *within* just one of those stories. This is one-sidedly mistaking one *aspect* of the process, one perspective on it, for the whole thing. The only way to ask whether one *concept-slice* is correct or not is to ask about whether the *content* of the concept it is a temporal slice of is correct or not. That is to ask about the whole unfolding (becoming-more-explicit) *process*. Compare: Asking whether an intention is satisfied is asking about the content of the whole action that it is a perspective on. We have seen that Hegel's initial take on conceptual contents makes him an *inferential* (incompatibility) *holist*, and that his recognitive picture of normativity makes him a *social holist*. We can now see that he is also a *temporal* or *historical holist* about the contents of concepts. This is the resolution of the Hegelian antinomy that while no particular *temporal slice* content (a *Verstand* content) is correct, or could be correct, still the whole developing/becoming-more-explicit concept (a *Vernunft* content) *is* (always already) correct. But it is not correct in the way *Verstand* contents would be. And *no temporal slice* of it is or could be correct in that way either.

III. Intentional Agency as a Model for the Development of Senses

The home language game of Frege's distinction between sense and reference is empirical, cognitive, or theoretical discourse. I have accordingly phrased in terms appropriate to that aspect of experience much of my compare-and-contrast discussion of how Hegel's account of the development by expression and determination of conceptual contents can be mapped onto Frege's two-pronged semantic theory. But by the time we have reached the discussion of *Reason*, we know that the process Hegel calls "Erfahrung" in general has the structure of a Test-Operate-Test-Exit cycle of action *and* cognition. In the

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